



*To Know Christ . . .  
and to Make Him Known*

Wilmington, North Carolina  
Dr. Mark E. Gaskins, *Senior Pastor*  
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### **Knowing God's Nature, Doing God's Will Isaiah 48:12-22**

A few weeks ago, before Hurricane Florence upset everything, we began a journey through the themes of Henry Blackaby and Claude King's Bible study entitled *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*.<sup>1</sup> It's a most helpful study for both individual disciples and congregations that helps us focus on living out our relationship with God in all that we are and do.

We began our journey with a sermon based on Moses' experience in Exodus 33, focusing on the theme of *knowing God*—specifically how we get to know Him more deeply through our experiences with Him.

Today we're thinking about the relationship between *knowing God's nature* and *doing God's will*.

Our biblical text is Isaiah 48:12-22. Listen to the word of the Lord through His prophet!  
*Read text . . .*

Did you hear about the guy who's getting ready to have surgery, and he asks his surgeon, "Doc, will I be able to play the piano after I have this surgery?"

His doctor answers, "Oh, yes. That shouldn't be any problem."

And the man says, "That's great! I've never been able to play before!"

Have you ever wanted to *do* something, I mean *really* do something, but you couldn't? Maybe it was because you didn't have the talent or the ability, or you never had the time or opportunity to acquire the skill.

I know I'd love to be a good golfer, but I'm not. I don't even get to play much anymore. But when I do, sometimes I hit some good shots, and once in a long while I'll hit a really good shot. But most of the time I play "military golf"—you know, left, right, left, right . . . I like to think that if I could just play often enough, I'd become more consistent and my score would improve. Right now my consistency consists of being consistently bad. But with some time and effort, who knows?

#### ***How do we do God's will?***

Have you ever wanted to *do God's will*, but felt like you couldn't? Maybe it was because you didn't think you could do what you believed God was asking you to do. Or maybe it was because you couldn't figure out what you believed He was asking you to do.

How do we *know* God's will? How do we *do* God's will? Is there some magic formula that

helps us figure it all out? Is there some kind of holy dice we can roll to get an answer?

Or does it have to do with something much simpler, something that is at the same time incredibly profound? Does it start with God's will? Or does it start *with God*?

### ***What does God say about Himself?***

The Scripture text we're looking at this morning starts with *God*. Here, *through His prophet, the LORD described who He is and how He would accomplish His purpose for Israel.*

The message here was directed to the exiles in Babylon. It was about who the LORD God is and how He would deliver them. Look at how God describes Himself. He is . . .

- The One who has called Israel (48:12a),
- The First and the Last (48:12b),
- The Creator and Lord of the universe (48:13),
- The One who works through humans to accomplish His purpose (48:14-15),
- The One who enables humans to accomplish His purpose (48:15-16),
- The Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel (48:17a)
- The LORD their God, who teaches them what is best for them, who directs them in the way they should go (48:17b),
- The One who gives peace, righteousness, and provision to those who trust and obey Him (48:18-19), and
- The One who, on the basis of who He is and what He is like, commands and guides His people (48:20-22).

### ***Knowing God's nature, doing His will***

What does this self-description of God mean for us as we think about knowing His nature and doing His will?

Doesn't it show us that *understanding God's nature helps to motivate and enable us to do God's will*?

From this text and others, we can see five aspects of God's nature and their implications for doing His will.

Here's the first: *God is sovereign; He has the right to make demands on us.*

It's amazing sometimes—we'll acknowledge that a head of state or a body of leaders has authority over the people of a nation, but we don't want to acknowledge God's authority over us humans!

But as the Creator and Lord of the universe, God has authority over its inhabitants! He has the right to make demands on us as His creatures.

Think about it. He is sovereign as *Creator*. He's the One who created the universe and set the worlds and the stars in place. *Everything* owes its existence to Him!

He is sovereign as *Lord*. He rules the universe, so He makes the rules! No one can rival Him.

He is sovereign as *Redeemer*. Even though we rebelled against Him, He was determined to save a people for Himself out of this world, and indeed to redeem the creation itself in new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells (Romans 8:18-25; 2 Peter 3:8-13; Revelation 21:1-5). So He sent His Son Jesus Christ, giving Him so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life! That's His doing!

And He is sovereign as *Judge*. In history and at the end of history, He is judge. Within history, He moves in human affairs to bring about justice and redemption. And at the end of

history, as He brings this world to an end and creates new heavens and a new earth, He will judge the living and the dead. His judgment will be final; there is no higher court to which anyone can appeal!

No matter what area of existence you want to talk about, God is sovereign. And because He's sovereign, He has the right to make demands on us. Now as Creator, God has given us humans the power of choice and we can refuse His demands. But understand that when we do, we place ourselves under His sovereignty as Judge. And the consequences of that are most severe.

The second aspect of God's nature that we can see is this: *God is holy and righteous; though sometimes different from ours, His ways are always right.*

Proverbs 14:12 counsels us: **There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.**<sup>2</sup> In Isaiah 55:8-9, the LORD says:

**"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
Nor are your ways My ways, says the LORD.  
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways,  
And my thoughts than your thoughts."**

We can always trust God's ways as He teaches and directs us, for His ways will always be right!

What about the third aspect? It's really very simple, yet so profound: *God is love; His will is always best.*<sup>3</sup>

God is love, and He loves us in such a way that He sent His only Son to live, die, and rise again for us (we heard about this love in our other Scripture lessons this morning from 1 John 4:7-16 and John 3:16-21). In this love He teaches us what is best, and directs us in the way we should go, if we'll just listen to Him (Isaiah 48:17).

We sometimes think that God gives us His laws and commandments to restrict us and control us. The fact is that they're designed for our greatest fulfillment! Just as we put certain things "off-limits" to our children, or don't allow them to do them until they're mature enough to do them responsibly, so it is with God's commands and will!

As Deuteronomy 10:12-13 reminds us, God's commands are for our own good, for He purposes and desires what's best for us. Following His will empowers us to live life to its fullest!

The fourth aspect of God's nature that has significance here goes hand-in-hand with the third one: *God is all-knowing; His directions are always right.*<sup>4</sup>

Which would you rather have if you were traveling in unfamiliar territory—a map, or a guide who knows the area like the back of his hand?

The 20<sup>th</sup> century Methodist missionary and theologian E. Stanley Jones is credited with a story about a missionary who gets lost in a jungle. He finally comes upon a village in the midst of the trees, and asks one of the residents to lead him out. The villager agrees, and walks ahead of the missionary, clearing a way through the dense growth with a machete.

After an hour or so of this, the missionary asks, "Are you sure we're going the right way? Isn't there a path somewhere?"

The villager smiles and says, "Friend, I *am* the path."<sup>5</sup>

That sounds a little bit like Jesus in John 14:6, doesn't it? **"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."**

Since God knows everything, and nothing is a surprise to Him, He knows how to direct us! He sees all the dangers and hazards, all the pitfalls and detours. We can trust Him as our guide! Indeed, Jesus is our way!

And the fifth aspect of God's nature that's important in relationship to doing His will is this: *God is all-powerful; He can enable us to do His will.*<sup>6</sup>

Do you remember the story of Gideon in Judges 6-8? God called him to free Israel from the oppression of the Midianites. Gideon assembled an army of 32,000 men. Then God directed him to narrow them down to 300, so it would be clear that God was giving the victory.

Or what about the story of the twelve disciples in Matthew 10, where Jesus gave them power over disease and demons so they could carry out His mission?

Whenever He calls us to do something, no matter how well-equipped or ill-equipped we seem to be, the God who is all-powerful can enable us to do His will. And He will when we trust Him!

### ***Putting it all together***

So how does it all fit together? *Understanding God's nature helps to motivate and enable us to do God's will.*

When we understand that He is sovereign, we become willing to bow to His rightful claims.

When we understand that He is holy and righteous, we're willing to follow His right ways.

When we grasp that He is love, we're willing to obey His will, convinced that it's always best.

When we know He knows all, we trust His direction.

And when we fathom that He is all-powerful, we depend on Him to enable us to do what He asks us to do.

We come to understand that what we need to be concerned with is *our relationship with God*—a loving relationship where we submit ourselves to our heavenly Father who guides us in His ways and enables us to do His will. In that kind of relationship, our *doing* arises out of our *being*. We *obey* God because we're His children.

When we're in that kind of relationship, then as Blackaby puts it, the question is not "What is God's will for my life?" but rather, "What is God's will," and how do I need to adjust my life so I can do it?<sup>7</sup>

Most of the time, God shows us His will a step at the time, as He did with Abraham. He doesn't usually show us the whole picture up front. We know that our final destination is eternity with Him. But He shows us the way there as we follow close to Jesus, who is our way.

Are you following Him?

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<sup>1</sup> In this sermon series, I am relying heavily on Blackaby's ideas as presented in Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Scripture taken from the New King James Version.

<sup>3</sup> Blackaby and King, 11-14.

<sup>4</sup> Blackaby and King, 14-16.

<sup>5</sup> Cited from Carolyn Arends, "Theology in Aisle 7," *Christianity Today* 52:9 (September 2008), 84.

<sup>6</sup> Blackaby and King, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Blackaby and King, 18.