

# **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

Part 6: "Deliver Us From Evil"

*Matthew 6:9-13*

By Pastor David A. Ritchie

Sunday, February 14, 2021 (Epiphany Season)

## **Scripture Reading**

*"Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil'" (Mt. 6:9-13).*

*Father, your word has spoken, where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom (2 Cor. 3:17). So, Lord, I pray for your Spirit to move upon our hearts today. Thank you that through the accomplishment of Jesus, you have defeated the powers of sin, Satan, and death that we may know true liberty. May we experience and celebrate that truth today. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Liberator, we pray. Amen.*

## **Introduction**

The people of God are a *delivered people* – a people who have been set free from bondage and tyranny.

In fact, this theme of deliverance has always been a central aspect of what it means to be a part of God's people. Once, the nation of Israel was a nation of slaves, serving under the brutal power of King Pharaoh of Egypt. But Israel cried out to God. God heard their prayers and delivered them.

Thanks to Charlton Heston and Hollywood, many people are familiar with the story of Moses, the first Passover, and the dividing of the Red Sea. What most modern readers are not familiar with, however, is how ancient Jewish people would have immediately understood the Exodus event as a story of spiritual war.

In ancient Egyptian religion, there was a wide array of gods and goddesses. There was a god named Hapi who was associated with the Nile River. There was a god named Amon-Ra who was associated with the sun. And for a while now, biblical scholars have noticed that the famous Ten Plagues of Exodus are all associated with aspects of nature that were all connected to the gods and goddesses of Egyptian religion. When God turns the Nile River into blood, he is declaring his power over the false god Hapi. When he blocks out the sun with a plague of darkness, he is displaying his power over Amon-Ra.

Read against this backdrop, *the plagues were a systematic humiliation of the Egyptian pantheon of false gods, as well as a display of the sovereign power of God the Lord.* In other words, God wasn't just delivering his people from physical or political tyranny – he was delivering them from spiritual tyranny as well.

Fast forward to the time of Jesus's ministry. Yet again, the people of God are under the dominion of a brutal empire. Yet again, they are crying out for deliverance from oppression and the restoration of a kingdom. It is in this moment that Jesus comes into the world.

Jesus comes to deliver his people, but he does not offer a political salvation. He comes to bring forth a kingdom, but that kingdom will not come in the form of a kingdom of man. He has come to take care of our greatest threat, which is a spiritual threat. He has come to bring an eternal kingdom.

In this way, Jesus has come as a true and better Moses, who is leading a true and better Exodus, not only for the people of Israel, but for people of all nations who believe in him. Jesus has come to show us that outside of faith in him, we are all under the dominion of evil and darkness. But through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, we have been set free.

With this in mind, today we will be looking at the final phrase of the Lord's Prayer: *"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Mt 6:13).*

In teaching us to pray this way, Jesus is reminding us that what we need more than anything else is not to be delivered from the terrorists, the globalists, the secularists, or those of the dreaded "other party." Our greatest need is to be delivered from the powers of sin, Satan, and death. Our greatest need is to be delivered from evil.

## **Exposition**

Moreover, I want to contend that this final phrase of the Lord's Prayer isn't just a petition – it is a *promise*. Jesus is showing his disciples that God has done and is doing something about the problem of evil. In particular, I want to show how, through Jesus, God has given us the hope of freedom from *1.) The Personal Problem of Evil, 2.) The Spiritual Problem of Evil, and 3.) The Cosmic Problem of Evil.*

### **1.) The Personal Problem of Evil.**

Now, depending on how you read the Lord's Prayer, you might think that the phrase "lead us not into temptation" would suggest that God tempts us toward sin.<sup>1</sup> That is not at all what it is saying. Rather, this is a prayer that God would lead us away from the temptation toward sin that arises within us. This thought is very clearly taught in the New Testament book of James: *"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death" (James 1:13-15).*

Last week, we talked about how (despite what our cultural worldview would teach us) we are not naturally good guys. We like to think of most people – especially ourselves – as nice and decent people, and that only weirdoes like Hitler and people who join ISIS are evil. However, the Bible confronts us with the uncomfortable truth that every one of us is born with a deep love of self that exceeds all other loves called sin. Sin means we are bent towards believing our desires are ultimate and non-negotiable. And because of this tendency toward self-love, people who view themselves as nice and decent people can do horrifically evil things. *Desire conceives sin. Sin brings forth death.*

Sin is our biggest problem. It causes brokenness in our world and alienation from God. But the good news is that God wants to forgive us from our sin, and even more – he wants to set us free from sin.

---

<sup>1</sup> R.C. Sproul, *The Prayer of the Lord* (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2009), 87-88.

Now we cannot expect that we will not experience temptation. Nor can we expect to defeat temptation toward sin by ourselves. To paraphrase Jesus, our spirit is often willing to resist temptation, but our flesh – our own strength – is weak (cf. Mt 26:11).

But by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can know that God has given us the means to overcome it. Martin Luther once said that you can't keep birds from flying into the barn, but you can prevent them from building a nest.<sup>2</sup> I believe that one of the ways we prevent temptation from building a nest in our minds is to pray against temptation according to the Lord's Prayer.

“Lead us not into temptation” is a prayer that trains our hearts to renounce the deceiving power of evil. It is a prayer that supplies us the wisdom to see that the end of sin is death. It is a prayer that pulls us into partnership with the Holy Spirit, as he sanctifies us and remakes us into the image of Christ. It is a prayer asking God to protect us from ourselves.

So here is a sample prayer that you may want to incorporate into your prayer life: *“Heavenly Father, give me the wisdom to see that the end of sin is death. Give me the strength to say ‘no’ to sin and ‘yes’ to freedom from sin. May your Holy Spirit conform me to the image of Christ your Son.”*

This is a prayer God wants us to pray. And I believe it is a prayer God wants to answer.

## **2.) The Spiritual Problem of Evil.**

The ancient theologian Augustine wrote that “lead us not into temptation” is a prayer that addresses the problem of evil within, whereas “deliver us from evil” is a prayer that addresses the problem of evil without.<sup>3</sup> In the Bible this spiritual evil is not an abstract idea, but rather a personal evil force known as the Devil.

Now, if we are honest with ourselves. The idea of Satan and demons seems a bit silly to us. Our culture is bent towards believing in exclusive materialism and naturalism. We believe what we can see and test, and we are inherently biased against anything supernatural – especially something like the notion of an evil spirit.

But nevertheless, the Lord's Prayer is teaching us to acknowledge such a reality. Daniel B. Wallace, who is one of the leading scholars in New Testament Greek in the world, has shown how grammatically, the phrase “deliver us from evil” is best translated as “deliver us from *the evil one*.”<sup>4</sup>

But even if you struggle to believe in such a reality, I would venture to bet that you have most likely experienced it. In the Bible, Satan and demons are sources of external temptation to sin. This is when we want to do what is right, but we feel a gravitational pull toward something that we know is wrong and harmful. Satan and demons are also a source of accusation, meaning that after we succumb to temptation, we are often overwhelmed with a sense of condemnation and self-hatred. Satan and demons cause bitterness, division, discouragement. They also attempt to do anything and everything to distract God's people from what is right and true. This is why it seems like whenever you try to pray, read, your Bible, or go to church, all hell breaks loose. It feels that way because that is what is happening!

---

<sup>2</sup> J.I. Packer, *Praying the Lord's Prayer* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 88.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York: Dutton, 2014), 117.

<sup>4</sup> William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993, 2003), 63.

But by teaching us to pray “deliver us from evil,” Jesus is teaching that prayer is an essential component in our fight against our spiritual enemies. This is made all the clearer in Ephesians 6, which is probably the most important and practical passage in the New Testament on spiritual warfare. In this passage, Paul the Apostle teaches us to acknowledge spiritual evil, how to guard ourselves against spiritual evil by putting on the armor of God, and finally how exactly we are to put on the armor of God: *“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints”* (Ephesians 6:10-18).

The thing I want you to see from this passage today is that prayer is the means by which we equip the armor of God. It is the method by which we engage spiritual warfare. Prayer is how we participate in and appropriate the victory that Christ has already won for us on the cross.

In praying the Lord’s Prayer, we are asking the Lord to help us fight evil in us and evil outside of us. Here is how the Heidelberg Catechism teaches us to pray the Lord’s Prayer: *“By ourselves we are too weak to hold our own even for a moment. And our sworn enemies – the devil, the world, and our own flesh – never stop attacking us. And so, Lord, uphold us and make us strong with the strength of your Holy Spirit, so that we may not go down to defeat in this spiritual struggle, but may firmly resist our enemies until we finally win the complete victory.”*<sup>5</sup>

### **3.) The Cosmic Problem of Evil.**

But it may well be worth asking if God is good, why does evil exist in the first place. This is an understandable question. And there are several unhelpful ways we can respond to it.<sup>6</sup> We can ignore evil. We can obsess over evil to the point that it paralyzes us. We can condemn ourselves for our own evil. We can become self-righteous against evil in other people. Or we can get mad at God and blame him for evil. But all of these responses ignore the real issue.

Evil comes from our sin, not from God. Suffering comes from the fracturing of God’s good creation that we let in, not God. But rather than destroying his creation or allowing sin to destroy it, the Bible tells us that God has initiated a plan of rescue that will one day result in the redemption of all things.

That leads us to the significance of what Jesus is teaching us to pray for in praying, “deliver us from evil.” *Jesus not only wants us to acknowledge the power of evil, he wants us to acknowledge what he has done about it.*<sup>7</sup> God is doing something about the problem of evil. Through Christ, he has done something about evil, at an unfathomable cost to himself.

Think about how profound this is for a moment: in teaching us to pray, “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,” Jesus gave a prayer to his disciples that *he* would be denied. He was the one

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*. “The Heidelberg Catechism” (1563). Question 127. (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 1988), 76.

<sup>6</sup> N.T. Wright, *The Lord and His Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 51-52.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

who was led into temptation. He is the one who was *not* delivered from evil. Yet, we can pray to be delivered from evil precisely because Jesus has met evil on the cross and defeated it in his resurrection.

In the brilliant book *The Reason for God*, Pastor Timothy Keller writes a chapter entitled “How can a good God allow suffering?” In that chapter, he writes these powerful words: “Christianity alone among the world religions claims that God became uniquely and fully human in Jesus Christ and therefore knows firsthand despair, rejection, loneliness, poverty, bereavement, torture, and imprisonment. On the cross he went beyond even the worst human suffering and experienced cosmic rejection and pain that exceeds ours as infinitely as his knowledge and power exceed ours. In his death, God suffers in love, identifying with the abandoned and godforsaken. Why did he do it? The Bible says that Jesus came on a rescue mission for creation. He had to pay for our sins so that someday he can end evil and suffering without ending us.”<sup>8</sup>

Every time we pray, we are to acknowledge this truth: *Evil is real. Evil is powerful. But because of Jesus, evil is doomed.*

Redeemer Christian Church, may we believe this good news. May we live in light of this good news. May we confidently pray in light of this good news. And may we rest in this good news.

Amen.

---

#### Discussion Starters for Gospel Communities:

- 1) *In Jesus’s lifetime, the Jewish people wanted to be delivered from the power of Rome. What are the things we want to be delivered from today? What is Jesus’s offering to deliver us from?*
- 2) *In what way is the petition “lead us not into temptation” a prayer for our own sanctification?*
- 3) *The petition “deliver us from evil” can probably be best translated “deliver us from the evil one.” How is prayer presented as a form of spiritual warfare elsewhere in the Bible? What are the practical implications of this idea?*
- 4) *In what sense is the prayer “deliver us from evil” a prayer for Christ’s final return? Why should we desire his return to come?*

---

<sup>8</sup> Keller, Timothy. *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*. (New York: Dutton, 2008), 30.