

The Baptismal Prayer 1: Deliver Us From The Power Of Evil

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[0 : 00] Our God and Father, help us to turn to your word and from your word to find light, to find healing, to find forgiveness, to find renewed relationships.

But most of all, to find that by your grace and in Jesus Christ, we stand in your presence.

Amen. This is the first of a series of four sermons that I'm going to do.

And my colleagues have been somewhat doubtful about the choice I make. Not that they are in any way disrespectful. It's just that they look the other way and cough.

And I, so I'm a bit anxious about them. What I'm doing is I'm going to look at four prayers in the prayer book.

[1 : 15] And they are the prayers that we, the congregation, make for that person who stands before us seeking, that adult person standing before us and seeking baptism.

And these four prayers are found in your prayer book on page 536. And I'd like you to read the first of them with me.

And then, after we've read it, I would like a profound silence to follow while you dialogue with yourself on the subject of, well, what on earth does that mean?

So, read it and then we'll be quiet for a moment. Oh, Lord of hosts, before the might of whose presence the armies of evil are put to flight, deliver thy servants from the power of Satan.

And now just be quiet for a moment. There was a time, more than 10 years ago, when I underwent heart surgery.

[3 : 09] And I'm given to understand that while I was flat on my back, others were down on their knees in that chapel praying for me.

And I'm very grateful to them. So, perhaps if they hadn't prayed so hard, life would have been simpler. However, I tell you that because when somebody is going through the trauma of some event, major event in our lives like that, it's easy to pray for them.

If a marriage is breaking down, we can pray. If someone contracts a major disease, we can pray. If somebody is in danger of losing their job, we know how to pray.

If somebody has lost their wallet, we know how to pray. If somebody doesn't know where the next meal is coming from, we know how to pray.

We find it easy to pray for the people in Yugoslavia, the people in the Union of South Africa.

[4 : 31] We find it easy to pray for athletes in competition in the Olympic Games. All those things are sort of major events around which it's not hard to formulate prayer.

Now, for me, thinking about that, and the reason I use that personal illustration is that I have probably been in far greater danger because I have been consumed with jealousy, but I don't tell anybody to pray about that, because I have been depressed out of my mind, but I don't ask anybody to pray about that, because I have been tempted beyond my endurance, I certainly don't ask anybody to pray about that.

I sort of risk it on my own. And so it's hard to know how to pray for one another unless we are in crisis of some kind.

Now, the advantage of this prayer that you've just looked at is that it describes to you the perpetual crisis in which all of us live the whole of our lives.

And so it is not inappropriate at any time to pray in this way for anyone. To pray as this prayer prays, O Lord of hosts, before the might of whose presence the armies of evil are put to flight, deliver thy servant from the power of Satan.

[6 : 25] Well, Satan is very effective. And if you look through the New Testament, you can find out some things about how Satan works.

Very early on in the New Testament, one of the ways Satan works is to take the word of God, which is preached, and snatch it away before it takes root in somebody's lives.

And so most of you have encountered Satan on that level many times of a Sunday morning, I'm sure. I don't say that by way of recrimination, just that's what happens.

We know that Satan is able to take the form of an angel of light so that he can arouse the passionate loyalty of people who say, this is the way, this is what we must do, this is what we must follow.

And what are we following? Satan, who has appeared to us as an angel of light. Paul encountered Satan when he wrote to the Thessalonians.

[8 : 02] And he said, I have desired to see you face to face, but Satan has hindered us. In Revelation, it says that some churches could be described as a gathering together, which is what our word means, what an ecclesiastical community is.

It's a gathering together, and the Hebrew word for it is synagogue, and it says that some churches are quite simply a synagogue of Satan, that he's in control there.

Satan has such raw power at times, that in Pergamum, when the letter is written to the church in Pergamum, in the book of the Revelation, it says of that church, I know that you dwell where Satan's throne is, where his power is unchallenged.

Probably many of you have been to that place where you have seen the raw, unchallenged power of Satan. He says that you remember that it was Satan who met Christ in the wilderness, and it was Satan who tempted Jesus to do a very good thing in turning stones into bread.

He tempted Jesus to do a very appropriate thing in assuming authority over all the nations of the earth.

[10 : 09] He wanted Jesus to do a very miraculous thing. All those things are powerfully attractive, and they're presented to us by a powerfully attractive person, disguised as an angel of light.

And so, you get Satan at work in the relationship between husband and wife, and Paul warns them not to refuse one another except by agreement for perhaps a season of prayer because Satan could tempt you through lack of self-control so that Satan infiltrates his way into the intimacy of a relationship between a husband and wife.

Satan works in churches to put one person off against another so that there is misunderstanding. And sometimes that misunderstanding is not acknowledged, and the whole structure of the church is threatened by it. And Paul says of that, we're not ignorant of Satan's design.

Paul warns young widows to be careful because they can stray after Satan.

[11 : 53] It's a very real temptation. So, Paul sees people totally dominated by Satan.

That's why I read to you at the beginning the story of the strong man in Luke 11 who keeps his goods in peace, and that's one of the most powerful pictures in the New Testament of the work and activity of Satan.

The people who have unquestioningly committed themselves to the power of Satan are generally at peace. They have made peace with their world through surrender to Satan.

And that peace can only be disturbed if there is someone stronger who comes and challenges the power of that strong man.

And, of course, the person who can challenge the strength of Satan is Jesus Christ alone. Well, Satan is called in the book of Revelation, which was read as a lesson for us this morning.

[13 : 18] He's called the great dragon, the ancient serpent, the devil, the Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.

lies and deception are the basis on which he works. And we line up with him simply by accepting those lies and being subject to those deceptions from one whom we regard as an angel of light.

When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he said he referred to the coming of the lawless one and that this lawless one would come by the activity of Satan.

And when he came, it would be marked by power and pretended signs and wonders. So powerfully attractive.

So you see that kingdom over which Satan has control, the dominion of darkness.

[14 : 33] And it's referred to all through Scripture. Now, some people, I mean, one of the ways we tend to think about evil is to think of it as a dominion of darkness.

And, uh, we can make the assumption, though I would say that we are deceived, but you don't have to make that assumption yet.

We can make the assumption that the power of darkness is the only power there is, and if you can get along with it and get a measure of peace out of compromise with the powers of darkness and deception and the lie, then that's the best life you can expect, and you ought to go along with it.

And, uh, it's not easy to fall into that. It's not hard to fall into that kind of compromise with our lives. There is, uh, secondly, though, something other than that.

And that is, over against that, tremendously attractive, tremendously powerful reality with which we are, with which it appears that we are bound to compromise simply because we are deceived and the lie is easier, and, uh, and, uh, there is a measure of peace when you don't fight it but go along with it.

[15 : 58] Over against that, you see that, uh, there is a kind of powerful humanism which can say, we are in control.

There is no such thing as evil. And the only evil there is we can overcome by science, by research, by technology, by improved methods, by improved education.

We can overcome all the power of evil. And that's what our responsibility is. And there's no good having mealy-mouthed creatures going around telling us about the power of Satan because all they do is break our nerve in the challenge that we've taken on ourselves of overcoming the power of evil.

Well, I can understand that and I, I can, uh, see that there is something attractive about that. But whether that is just part of the deception is a great question.

You know, I mean, we can have tremendous research projects. We can provide aid for third world countries. We can provide technology.

[17 : 16] We can do medical research. We can fly people across the face of the globe in magnificent machines. We can create great cities.

We can do a tremendous number of things. And maybe by the sum total of all that activity, we will ultimately overcome the power of evil and we will create the brave new world.

That's not hard for us to imagine because it appeals to our pride and because, uh, well, because, uh, we think maybe we can do it and maybe that's what our commitment should be and we double our effort in order to try and accomplish that and overcome the power of evil.

You know, Johnson and Kennedy both promised that we would overcome poverty back in the 60s. I wonder what they would have thought if they could have seen the 90s.

Well, it's that kind of optimism that is prevalent in our world. And the man who believes in that is not going to present himself here for baptism because all that is, is defecting from the energy and the effort that is required to create the kind of world that we deserve as people and that we have the ability to put together.

[18 : 51] So, come back, if you will, to this prayer it says, O Lord of hosts, before the might of whose power the armies of evil are, the might of whose presence the armies of evil are put to flight.

And this is a, this is a totally different kind of approach. And that is that the struggle ultimately is not a struggle between man and, man and evil and man seeking to overcome it in his own wit, wisdom, and strength, but that ultimately man is just a pawn between the enormous power of evil and the armies and the Lord himself, the Lord of hosts, before the might of whose presence.

You see, there's the Lord in the might of his presence and then there's the armies of evil. And we are looked upon as pawns in that.

We are either taken over and engulfed by the armies of evil. And most of us are aware of the blind power of evil that is at work on every level of our world.

I mean, it's in, in, it's there. We don't call it evil because we think it's part of man's struggle for betterment, but it's profoundly strong and it must be driven by some source.

[20 : 37] Like, when I read this week about the attempts the UN might make to interfere in the situation in, in Yugoslavia and that they might bring arms and munitions and soldiers and power and authority to bear on that situation to try and bring relief to the refugees and food to the hungry to try and sort out that mess by a show of force which would include, no doubt, planes and tanks and soldiers and automatic rifles and they would go in and they would solve it and they would be the power of good.

But remember that it's the same kind of people with the same blood coursing in their veins and the same families that surround them who are arming themselves with automatic rifles, who are shooting one another, who are bombing one another, who are torturing and starving one another. They're the same kind of human beings. And because these human beings are better armed and can gain control over these human beings, that doesn't resolve the struggle.

Something much more profound and much more basic has to happen in the encounter between the armies of evil and the might of God's presence.

So you see how the prayer is divided up. Look at it. O Lord of hosts, before the might of whose presence, O Lord of hosts, simply means the invisible powers of God that are there at his command to do his will and to do his bidding.

[22 : 34] And he is the Lord God of Sabaoth, the God who has this power and who has this authority. And so that you have that which is evident to us in the presence of God and that which is evident to us in the world in which we live.

And then we start to pray. And we say, Lord God of hosts, before the might of whose presence the armies of evil are put to flight, that's the battle that's going on.

And when I am caught in temptation or jealousy or despondency or anxiety or fearfulness, when I am in that situation, I am caught between the power of his presence and the armies of evil.

And a struggle is going on in me. And I need somebody to pray for me. And you need somebody to pray for you because that's where you live your life.

And you don't have the ability in yourself to overcome the armies of evil. You can't walk out empty-handed and bare-headed and face the armies of evil.

[24 : 00] You simply can't do it. you will fall prey to the lie, you will be taken in by the deception, you will be locked up into that system, and you won't even challenge the authority of it.

And when you do challenge the authority of it, what do you do? You say, I wish by my own volition to be baptized into the faith of Jesus Christ.

I wish to live my life in the presence of God. I wish to come into the light of his presence.

That's what Isaiah did. He came into the presence of God. What Jonah did is he fled from the presence of God. What Cain did was to flee from the presence of God.

But when you want to come into the presence of God, the way in is through baptism, through confession of faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, that you may be a member of Christ, an inheritor of the kingdom, a child of God.

[25 : 19] That you come into that, and that you want, in a sense, you want to be caught up with the victory, the inevitable victory, which emerges from the Lord of hosts, before the might of whose presence the armies of evil are ultimately put to flight, and that you yourself want to be delivered from the power of Satan.

And as you confess that faith by baptism, so the other Christians around who are already engaged in that battle pray for you.

that you might not be the tyrannized subject of the armies of evil, but that you might live your life in the presence of God, the Lord God of hosts, before the might of whose presence the armies of evil are put to flight.

need. Now, that may sound way too dramatic for you, and you may belong to our culture, which thinks we can't afford to believe in the devil and we can't afford to believe in God, because when we do, we take the responsibility away from ourselves to live our lives in our own way.

but I, I think we're denying the underlying reality and vastly overestimating who we are as persons and not recognizing the tension that exists between the power of the presence of God and the armies of evil.

[27 : 00] And in our, in our arrogance, we think we can cope with the armies of evil. I used to be a boy soldier during the war.

I was a little young, but we used to dress up and go out in tanks on the weekend and play around.

And, uh, my greatest recollection, we went on maneuvers in places like Sunnybrook Park, and, uh, the thing that really impressed me was that as a private soldier, I had no idea what was going on.

I was just doing what I was told, and I never understood why or what the purpose of it all was, and I presume the officers did, though I've come to question that.

I, uh, but it's, uh, I think that may be an example of the way we live our lives, sort of as private soldiers who don't even know what the war's about.

happened. When Scott Pett wrote his book about the war in Vietnam, he said 90% of the American soldiers over there had no idea what that war was all about, but they were over there risking their lives without knowing what the issue was, and I think what we need to pray for is that we will know what the battle is all about, and we'll know whose side we're on, and what the goals are, and that's why we must learn to pray for one another, not just in terms of the immediate crises that might overcome us in our marriages, in our personal health, in our jobs, in our family relationships, or anything like that, but we must learn to pray for one another as we are directed here.

[28 : 51] O Lord of hosts, before the might of whose presence the armies of evil are put to flight, deliver thy servant from the power of Satan. We say that all the time when we say, deliver us from evil in the Lord's prayer.

We're saying the same thing and longing for the same thing. And so, the central reality of my life and yours, I want to say, is that you are engaged in this battle between standing in the presence of God and knowing his power and living among the armies of evil and knowing their power and looking for those who will pray for you as you pray for them in the words of this prayer.

I'm stuck now, I don't know where to go. I have to leave it with you to work it out in your life and in mine, but I would appreciate your prayers.

If you're going to pray for me, pray like this, you know, Lord of hosts, before the might of whose presence the armies of evil are put to flight, deliver thy servant from the power of evil, from the power of Satan.

I'd like you to pray for me that way and that's the way I'd like to pray for you. If you were to pray for me that way, you'd be praying for the issues that really affect me, not that I would survive this or overcome that or find a parking place downtown, none of those things for which we might pray, but that we might standing in the presence of God overcome the armies of evil and be delivered from the power of Satan.

[31 : 01] Amen.