

"Deliver Us"

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, church. We are returning once more to the Sermon on the Mount, and specifically to the Lord's Prayer in Matthew chapter 6.

So why don't we pray as we come again to God's Word. Father, as we come again to this prayer that Jesus taught us, help us to not just learn what it means, but help us to take it into our lives and make this prayer our own.

And in our prayerful communion with you, we ask that your kingdom would come and your will would be done in our lives, in our church, and in our world, on earth as in heaven.

Father, we pray this in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen. All right, well, today we're wrapping up our series on the Lord's Prayer by looking at the sixth and last petition that Jesus gives us in verse 13, which says, Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Now, if you notice in the ESV foot... in the ESV anyway, there's a footnote that says, sometimes we include with this prayer, because yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

[1 : 16] Amen. We're not going to talk about that, but I think maybe Matt and I, we haven't talked about this, but I think we'll write a pastor letter that'll go out in the newsletter kind of talking about that last part. So we won't discuss that this morning.

We'll talk about the newsletter. So there's your plug to sign up for the newsletter and read it this week. But we're going to look at this last petition, Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Now, when you spend time meditating on the Lord's Prayer and begin praying it for yourself, you realize pretty quickly that the first half of the prayer is focused on God, right?

God's name and God's kingdom and God's will. And then the second half you find is focused on our needs. And the needs expressed in the Lord's Prayer are really our most important and essential needs.

Two weeks ago, we looked at our need for provision. Give us this day our daily bread. And last week, we looked at our need for pardon. Forgive us our debts. And this week, we come to our need for spiritual protection and for power.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Now, I think this last petition is a little like smelling salts. If we've grown sleepy or complacent in our spiritual life, this last petition comes and it comes to wake us up.

[2 : 40] It jolts us out of our spiritual stupor. Why? Because this last petition is about spiritual battle. It's about the nitty-gritty of living life in the real world.

Now, what do we know about the world? The world that we're in, it's a beautiful world, right? It's a world that's loved by God and being redeemed by God. Yes, but in this age, it is also a fallen world, a world that's full of spiritual dangers.

J.I. Packer, the great British theologian commenting on this verse, uses a powerful image. He says, you know, if we fail to see this reality, if we ignore or pretend that life is not a spiritual struggle, then he says, you're like a person walking blindfolded and with ears plugged in the middle of a city street with traffic coming both ways.

So with this last petition here, Jesus wants us to take the blindfold off and be ready for the spiritual battle. But it's not just, it's not just awareness that Jesus wants us to have.

He's also telling us the key for living in the midst of that battle. And the key is prayer. It's one thing to know you're in a struggle, right?

[4 : 00] It's another thing to know how to navigate it. You see, as living as part of God's kingdom, living as part of God's kingdom with Jesus as your king, that is the greatest adventure any life could ever have.

God's kingdom has dawned and is making all things new. The church is an outpost of that kingdom. It's an advanced foretaste of what's to come. As we live in mercy, in truth, in forgiveness, in righteousness, as we embrace Jesus as our king, as we announce him with joy as who he truly is, the world's rightful Lord, this is the great adventure that we're in.

But like any great journey, this one, above all, will have trials, will have dangers, will even have enemies. So what do we do?

How do we proceed? Well, there are two halves to this petition. So in our time this morning, we're just going to consider it in two simple points, just looking at the first half and then the second half. And in the first half, we see that we need to pray for God to lead us away from temptation. So what is temptation? Well, the Greek word can actually mean either a trial or a test, or it can mean what we normally mean by it, a temptation.

[5 : 19] That is, that experience of an inner tug, an inner pull, to disobey God and God's word. Listen to how the book of James describes the dynamic of temptation in that second sense, which I think is what Jesus means here.

James chapter 1 verses 14 and 15 says this. James says, each person is tempted when he's lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin. And sin, when it's fully grown, brings forth death. So temptation, James says, is when we're lured or enticed by our own desire.

Now we have to be clear, desire, of course, isn't in itself a bad thing. God created us as humans to have hearts that are passionate and are full of desire.

He wants us to hunger and thirst for righteousness. He made us to seek and desire his kingdom and his glory. And as those who know the new birth of the Holy Spirit, we know what it's like to have those desires for God.

[6 : 31] But notice that James says here, temptation is when we're lured and enticed by what he says our own desire. That is a desire that's centered on self and not on God.

A desire that's blind to God's glory or to God's good law. A desire that kind of wants to throw those things off and rather than please God, it just wants to satisfy ourselves. And if you've been a Christian for any length of time, you know exactly what James is describing.

Even though our sins have been forgiven once and for all, past, present, and future through the atoning death of Christ, even though we've been given new life and new hearts and eternal hope through his resurrection from the dead, every Christian still battles with remaining sin in their hearts.

The power of sin is still prevalent and it will be throughout our earthly lives. Okay, so what's the answer? The stakes are high, right? I mean, consider again this process that James describes. First, there's the temptation, but then the temptation conceives and gives birth to sin and then sin becomes fully grown and brings forth death. At first, it's just a lingering thought or a desire.

[7 : 46] Then those thoughts or desires give birth to concrete words and actions. Then those actions become habits and deeply ingrained patterns of life. That's the process that James is describing, right?

I mean, no one ever wakes up one day and just says out of the blue, you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to defraud people of millions of dollars today through fraudulent business practices. I just decided. It's a process that gets you there. No one just wakes up one day and says I'm going to be unfaithful to my spouse or I'm going to get trapped in alcohol and drug addiction or I'm going to be judgmental and unforgiving.

That's not where it starts. It starts in the seemingly small place, in that small flash of self-centered desire that we call temptation. So what do we do?

Well, Jesus tells us to pray, lead us not into temptation. Now notice that this first half of this prayer that Jesus gives us, it's preemptive.

[8 : 53] It's a prayer that is prayed when you're not necessarily feeling the tug and pull of selfish desire in the moment. It's preemptive. It's a prayer that's prayed when you aren't in the heat of battle.

This is the prayer of wisdom. It's prayed at the beginning of the day when you realize with clear eyes that your fallen nature, what the Bible calls the flesh, will at times want to turn towards temptation. It will want to give space to the pool or lure of pleasing ourselves. This is the prayer that says, Father, I'm not as strong as I think I am. And my greatest desire is to please You and live in the joy of following Your ways and Your words.

Your words to me are life. Your laws are paths of increasing gladness. You have made me for Yourself. You made me for infinite joy in You. But I know that remaining sin in me will want to turn away.

It will want to drink from broken cisterns that can't hold water. So, Father, today, lead me not into temptation.

[10:03] Guide my steps. Guide my thoughts. Guide my day. Keep me far from the lure of self-centeredness. I've been told that one of the paths that leads to the top of Mount Katahdin in Maine, which is the end of the Appalachian Trail, I've been told that one of the paths that leads to the top of that mountain has one stretch that gets extremely narrow called the Knife Edge Trail.

And it can be as narrow as about four feet in some places. And some of the drop-offs in some places are as far as like 2,000 feet down. Now, if you were waking up on the morning of that hike and you were at base camp or wherever, your site, if you were waking up on the morning of that hike, before you got started and you thought to say a little prayer, what do you think it would be? Father, keep me on the path, right? Don't let me stumble. Let my steps be steady and sturdy and let me reach the summit. Brothers and sisters, there is a path we are on in the Christian life that leads to the most glorious peak of all.

But there will be stretches of the trail where the drop-offs are steep and the danger will be great. And in order to get to where God wants to take us, it will at times be a very narrow path.

So we must pray every day, Father, lead me not into temptation today. And friends, here's the good news.

[11:54] God has not left us alone on this journey. He has given us the Holy Spirit to dwell within us, to be our comfort, our guide, our counselor.

God's own presence, the third person of the Trinity, the promise of the Father, sent from heaven by the ascended Jesus himself, the one who descended at Pentecost in wind and in fire, the Holy Spirit, Almighty God, he is with us.

This prayer that Jesus instructs us to pray, lead us not into temptation, is a prayer that we might keep in step with the Holy Spirit, that we might be led by Him and His Word, that we might let Him reorder and redirect our desires to all that is pleasing to God.

John Stott made this same observation about this part of the Lord's Prayer. As he kind of meditates on this section of the prayer, he notes that there's perhaps a deep Trinitarian pattern or logic to these last three petitions of the Lord's Prayer.

He writes in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, he says, it's through the Father's creation and providence that we receive our daily bread. It is through the Son's atoning death that we may be forgiven.

[13:22] And it's through the Spirit's indwelling power that we're rescued from the evil one, that we're led not into temptation. So this prayer, Lead Us, is a prayer for God the Holy Spirit to do His work in us and to give us great confidence and great courage that we're not traversing the knife's edge alone.

We have a guide who is sure and He can be trusted and He's given us His Word to guide us every step of the way. So friends, this is a prayer that we must pray every day.

Lead us not into temptation. Holy Spirit, cause my heart to turn to You, to heed Your leading, to delight in what pleases You. Keep me far from grieving You, Holy Spirit.

Keep me far from temptation today. And let me take up those means of grace whereby Your work increases in my life. Let me meditate on Your words.

Let me confess my sins. Let me share my life with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Let me receive their help.

[14:37] Many of you can testify that it's been through, brothers and sisters, that you've found increasing freedom over sin. Let me rejoice in Your goodness today, Spirit. Let me use my gifts to serve You and my neighbor.

forever. So we pray this prayer every day. We know we aren't strong enough to go through the battle alone. And God gives us ample help through His Holy Spirit.

But you know, there will be days, even days when it seems like we've prayed this prayer, even days when we feel like we've felt the Holy Spirit's deep assurance, days when we're delighting in God's goodness.

There will be days, even like that, when suddenly temptation comes. We'll find ourselves in the midst of trial. And it doesn't mean that God is unfaithful because God is able to use those moments as times of strengthening, times of growth.

But for these moments in the battle, we need the second half of this petition of the Lord's Prayer. J.I. Packer again wrote, you know, when you're not conscious of temptation, pray, lead us not into temptation.

[15 : 53] When you are conscious of it, pray, deliver us from evil. So this is the second point that we'll consider. In the midst of temptation and trial, we pray, God, deliver us from evil.

Notice how Jesus doesn't mince words here. He's very clear that there is such a thing as evil. In fact, the word evil could be translated the evil one, meaning Satan.

Either way, no matter how we render the verse, Jesus is quite unapologetic that evil is real, that it exists in us as sinners, in a world that's fallen, and in the spiritual realm.

As Christians, we will encounter that evil. And it won't just be kind of out there. It will also be in here. You know, you can't escape the fallenness of the world, right?

You can go to the most remote location, surround yourself with only people who think and act exactly the same as you, try to build a community utterly away from the evil in the world, and you will find that it doesn't work because evil is at work in us just as strongly.

[17 : 06] So the answer isn't to try to just run away. Now, of course, we should certainly flee temptation, right? But if we're walking the path of Jesus' kingdom, if we're living into our vocation as His followers to be salt and light in the midst of the world, if we're bearing witness to Christ in all of creation, then we will encounter evil.

We will come face to face with not just the brokenness and corruption outside of us, but also inside of us. So what do we do? Well, we pray, Father, deliver us from evil.

Come to our rescue. Now, you might be thinking, wait, like, that's it? Right?

In the face of evil, we just sort of pray, deliver us from evil, right? I mean, it kind of sounds a bit like underpowered, doesn't it? I mean, talk about, like, bringing a squirt gun into a forest fire, right? Like, we're just going to stand in the face of evil in us, outside of us, and just shoot up a little prayer. What good is a little prayer going to do in the face of the deep brokenness of the world? And yes, you know, on the one hand, praying this prayer isn't a kind of magic mantra that instantly makes things better.

[18 : 23] That's not what real prayer is. Real prayer isn't about just sort of saying the right thing at the right time so you can produce a desired outcome. It's not magic. So what is prayer?

Prayer is communication with God. The triune God has revealed Himself as a speaking God. And this God has given to us humans the gift of language. Not just that we humans might communicate and commune with each other, but also that we might communicate and commune with God Himself.

God has given us this medium whereby we can, in our creaturely way, commune intelligently, actually, wholly with our Creator.

So this prayer in the face of evil, deliver us, is not just some sort of vague intention pushed out into a cold universe, right?

[19 : 28] Hoping that the universe will maybe right itself. No. We are praying to the only one who fully understands the battle that we are in.

You see, friends, evil is so much greater than you or I could understand or experience. Like, we see our own little trials and temptations, or perhaps we see the brokenness and suffering of one part of creation, and at times it's very great.

But the total impact of sin and evil, not just its personal dimension or its communal dimension, but also its cosmic dimension, there's only one who sees and understands the full scope of what sin and evil really are and really mean and really cost.

You see, the one who teaches us this prayer is the one who actually entered into the battle with sin and evil in that total scale. He can tell us to pray to His heavenly Father, deliver us from the evil one, because His mission was to come and to win this decisive battle.

Jesus Christ was the only one who went forth into battle with sin and evil in its total cosmic scale. And the cross and the empty grave are the battlefields of that greater warfare.

[21 : 01] You see, at the cross, sin and evil did its worst. It unleashed its full assault on God in the person of His Son. And in what seemed to be utter defeat at the cross, the greatest victory was

won, because sin was exhausted there, and evil was decisively broken there.

And the grave was emptied. Christ rose victorious over evil and sin and death. And when we pray, deliver us from evil, we aren't praying a wish or a hope, but a certain reality.

Because Jesus Christ took on flesh, God came in human flesh, and conquered sin and Satan and the grave for us and for our freedom so that the tyranny of the evil one could be broken.

Friends, evil is ultimately a defeated foe. Satan is a conquered rebel. Now, we look at the world and we look at our own hearts and we see that the enemies still rage.

The battle skirmishes still go on, but their time is short. They still raise their fist against the crucified and risen King, but His victory is sure. deliver us from evil.

[22 : 22] Now, we might pray this prayer in the face of a personal struggle with sin or temptation. We might pray this prayer in the face of broader patterns of unrighteousness and injustice in the world.

We might pray this prayer in the face of spiritual conflict with Satan's work of lies and deception. Whatever it might be, we pray with confidence that Jesus Christ has triumphed.

From the moment we cry, deliver us, God's rescue operation begins to apply itself and carry on its good work.

help will be on the way to cope and respond with whatever form of evil threatens us. And His promise is sure.

One day, death will be no more. One day, Jesus will return in glory and every enemy will be put under His feet. The tyranny of evil will be vanquished once and for all from God's good creation.

[23 : 24] And God will be all in all. So when we pray, deliver us from the evil one, we're praying that prayer in the midst of deep gospel hope that the cause is not lost but it is a certain victory.

And one day, the earth will be full of God's glory like the waters cover the sea. Let's pray together. Jesus, Jesus, Lord, King, Redeemer, we look to You and we admit that apart from You we would be helpless in the fight.

We are weak. We are prone to wander. We love ourselves and our own pleasures more than You. We turn a blind eye to evil, even delighting in it.

We are sinners and we deserve nothing from You but condemnation. But You have conquered. On our behalf, You died and You rose again.

And now for all who experience Your gifts of repentance and faith, You freely forgive our sins and give us new hearts. thank You for this indescribable grace that flows from Your mercy and Your love for us.

[24 : 59] And so, would we take up each day this prayer and pray, lead us not into temptation. Help us to live lives that are wholly pleasing to You.

Give us a taste for holiness that is unshakable. Help us to love more and more the joy of obedience.

And would we also pray, deliver us from evil, trusting that Your victory is complete and that Your kingdom is advancing and the gates of hell cannot stand against us.

Deliver us, Lord. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.