

The School of Prayer
Part 9 – Deliver Us
Matthew 6:9-13

Jacob Zvolanek ~ March 3, 2024 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church



⁹“Pray then in this way:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.**

¹⁰ **Your kingdom come.**

**Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.**

¹¹ **Give us this day our daily bread.**

¹² **And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

¹³ **And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.**

Matthew 6:9-13 (NRSV)



I’ve heard it said that the main question religion attempts to answer is “Why?”

Why do we exist? Why were we created? What does this all mean?

I don’t know about you but I can become so frustrated when I don’t understand the reason for something, when I don’t understand the purpose of things. I think more often than not, the “why” is the reason behind our frustrations and anger... we either don’t understand the purpose of something or we simply disagree with the why.

I feel like I always have a story about my daughter when I’m up here, but the analogies are too good! I’m risking overusing it, but they’re good!

I love the season we’re in... She’s two and a half and she is soaking up information and learning so quickly! She takes phrases and funny remarks and applies them to her own situations and conversations. It’s the best!

“Oh my goodness...” “Daddy you’re a silly boy...” or “you know, it happens sometimes... happens to the best of us.”

The biggest thing I’ve noticed in this season is working with her through her frustrations and her emotions when she doesn’t understand something, especially the reasons why. I think our main focus is for her to know that even when she is upset and doesn’t understand, she can tell us... we don’t want her to shut down, but to open up... to keep the conversation going.

And I think this is so true with us and God... what do we do when one of our biggest questions for religion, for God, is not answered... or at least, the answer is not fully known, not satisfying, or hasn’t happened yet?

God, why is there evil in this world, why do you allow such suffering and injustice? Why is there an evil one? How will this be turned around?

As we finish our series today on the Lord’s Prayer, we’re looking at “deliver us, rescue us from the evil one... deliver us from evil”

And the main point is this:

When it comes to evil, when it comes to the reality that there is a very real enemy we face – Jesus teaches us that we should pray. We should pray for deliverance; we should come to God. We should fight and overcome through prayer.

Even in our anger, frustration, disagreement, our pain and sadness... we should keep talking with God.

We should pray.

But this isn’t always my response, unfortunately. And understandably, it isn’t for many people.

Thinking through and processing the evil, suffering, and injustice in our world can be tremendously overwhelming. Thinking through why it exists, how it could exist... it’s complex.

TYPICAL RESPONSES TO EVIL

In his book, *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis writes, “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.”

And I think this is true. It’s a common default for us, for people, to swing from one extreme to the other.

When it comes to our belief in evil or the evil one, there’s a tendency to put our heads in the sand. We simply choose not to believe. Some choose not to believe in God, others might believe in God but refuse to acknowledge the reality of evil or an evil one.

The rationale goes something like this: If God allows evil and suffering to continue because he can’t stop it, then he might be good, but he’s not all-powerful.

On the other hand, if God allows evil and suffering to continue because he could stop it and yet won’t stop it, then he might be all-powerful, but he’s not good.

So, what is it?

DISBELIEF

So, because of the tension here many choose not to believe in God. But this is tough, it’s hard – for me this is not enough to not believe in God.

What happens when you follow this logic is that if there is no God, then there are no moral absolutes. There’s no standard of righteousness that transcends time and context, everything is relative and subjective; it’s hard to substantiate why something is right or wrong, apart from it just making you feel profoundly sad or angry.

MLK Jr. said, “The only way to know whether a human law is unjust is if there is divine law.” If there is no God, no higher divine law, how can we justify any historical event as wrong or evil, other than just saying, “I feel like it’s wrong”?

The following argument, then, for why things happen would be natural selection: the strong survive, adapt, and evolve. It’s fair game. Violence could easily be the natural way of things, and the only way to disagree is to say that we “personally do not like it.”

Our world is constantly confronted with deep darkness, brokenness, and injustice that is so hard to even process. It is painfully overwhelming.

And for believers... to disbelieve in a literal enemy, is not only contrary to what the Bible teaches, but it leaves us at a great disadvantage. By not understanding the true reality that we face, we are ignorant and uninformed about the battle and tactics of the enemy.

For example, in the Parable of the Sower in Mark 4, Matthew 13, and Luke 8, we see that the seed is sown, the word is shared, but the enemy comes to steal that seed. The devil, Satan, or the evil one comes to snatch away the word of God that has been sown in the human heart.

It should not be a surprise to us, therefore, that when we see breakthrough in our lives, when God speaks and moves, that we might encounter situations and adversity that challenge that very truth God is desiring to impart in us.

It has been said that the evil one has no new cards to play; in fact, he overplays his cards. So, when I find myself in a place where I am tempted to question what God is doing in my life, to question the very seed I just received, the truth revealed to me, it’s almost like confirmation: we can count it as a chance to rejoice as the book of James says. Breakthrough is here and, of course, the enemy would try to stop it. This is an opportunity for God to birth something new inside me. To refine my vision and renew my heart.

That fact that I’m experiencing adversity, in this particular area is almost confirmation I’m on the right track. I say almost because I don’t think it’s always the case. But it is important to recognize patterns and purpose.

God can take what the enemy meant to harm us, and use it for good -- to mobilize us, to press in and fight, meditate, pray, and journal, to remember the breakthrough and adversity I saw.

EXCESSIVE BELIEF

Now, on the other hand, the other tendency is to feel an excessive, unhealthy amount of belief. In this case, one sees Satan at work everywhere, and everything as a work of evil. Unfortunately, this can also be a potential response we succumb to.

I don’t think much more needs to be said on this one other than to look at what Hollywood produces. Look at culture. There is a fascination with fear and the supernatural.

SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

In his commentary on the Lord's Prayer, N. T. Wright poses a third response to evil the "self-righteous" option. In this case, we respond to evil by acknowledging its existence, but only "out there" and not inside of our own hearts. We locate evil in events and circumstances and people outside of ourselves: "Thank God that's not me." We see evil and darkness as out there, in them, the other, and we must fight it.

But as Wright shares further, "What if self-righteous battles are themselves another manifestation of evil?"

Tim Keller once said, "If God wiped out all sources of evil in the world, we would no longer be here; the evil is inside us."

In Mark 7:21-23, the Pharisees criticize Jesus' disciples, claiming that they don't follow the traditions of the law and are therefore defiled and unclean. In reply, Jesus boldly declares, "it is from within, out of the heart of man, that come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

See, the gospel confronts us. We must take a look at ourselves first, recognizing we need deliverance.

So, by Jesus teaching us to pray "deliver us from the evil one," He eliminates all three of these options and gives us a model response.

God intends for us to not only recognize that evil exists around us and within us, but also that evil must be confronted. God intends for us to engage this awareness prayerfully, anchored in the reality of the cross and resurrection – Jesus' victory over the evil one, sin, and death.

JESUS

Jesus' very life, death, resurrection, and return is God confronting evil and faithfully delivering us.

Jeff mentioned last week, when Jesus prayed this part of the prayer, the answer was no – so that, when we pray this prayer, the answer could be yes!

See in the desert, Jesus fully submitted himself to be tested and was also tempted by the evil one. In the garden with great pain and sorrow he prayed, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

And on Calvary, Jesus was not rescued from the evil one but confronted him directly by taking upon himself evil, sin, and death. Jesus experienced the full range of evil, pain, suffering, rejection, and isolation so that we could find love, mercy, forgiveness, grace, acceptance, and life!

Hebrews 2:14-15 says that, "Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying."

Jesus leads us in praying this not only because we should bring our questions, frustrations, and anger to God – and talk with him – but especially because he intends on answering; he desires to deliver us! This has always been God's plan... to deliver us, personally, himself.

FIERY FURNACE

In Daniel 3 when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to bow down in worship to idols, they are thrown into the fiery furnace, a furnace so hot that it killed the soldiers who were throwing them in – that's a sermon for another day!

So what happens in this story here? These three men are confronted with sin, evil, and death – given over to death – but praise God they are not consumed by it! The text says that the guards shouted and said, "Look, I see four men... didn't we throw in only three men?!" The men in the furnace were unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looked like a god!

The foundation of our faith is that our God confronts sin, evil, and death directly – by enduring it himself and by overcoming it.

And so how does he rescue us? What does this look like?

We continue to see the effects of the evil one; seeing evil and darkness tear apart our world. Does God deliver us by guaranteeing our exit from this world into heaven? Does God just give us a nice compensation package? Like, "Here's a ticket to the afterlife to escape evil and suffering. Thanks for passing by, thanks for believing!"

This is a misconception and an untrue explanation of what Jesus has accomplished. The reality of Jesus' victory is that God plans to restore life as we know it, the earth as we know it. We believe that it will be

renewed and restored... not destroyed and recreated, there's a difference.

Restoration

It's like one of those home remodel shows, where a team goes into someone's house that has been broken down and run down for years... stuck with the same look, the same smell, the same issues. And then they gut it, they might remove a wall or two and put in some new ones. They paint it, give it new furniture, and even new landscaping.

They restore the beauty of the original design! This is God's plan. And just because it is not fully seen or realized yet, does not mean it's not in motion. Just because we do not fully see God's plan to eradicate evil and suffering does not mean it does not exist or is not already in motion.

Deliverance, redemption, and restoration means that evil does not get the final say. Though we will see and encounter evil, pain, and suffering – we won't be consumed by it, just like we saw in Daniel 3.

This is not the end of the story for us.

It's not the end of the story for your mom, dad, brother, sister, son, daughter. It's not the end of the story for our world.

The wars we see in the world, in Ukraine, Russia, the Middle East, the evil and wickedness in our own country, wherever...

Though it rages and there is inexpressible suffering, we can nonetheless stand and proclaim in faith that evil does not get the final say and that is not the end of the story.

God we don't understand why this is happening and why you haven't stopped it yet. But I refuse to stop talking with you! In faith, we pray that you would bring justice and healing. We pray, "deliver us!"

And as I've mentioned, we pray not only for the Lord to rescue us from the evil one, from suffering, and darkness, but to also deliver us from the evil within us. In Romans 7:18-20, Paul writes, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me."

I don't know about you, but I struggle... I struggle! God search my heart, show me the things that you need to remove. Renew me, bring healing to those areas! Some of the best, kindest, and most compassionate people I know struggle. We all struggle. Why do we do the things we do?

This evil is a system of being. It's within us, in the deepest parts of our heart.

We can easily see throughout the Old Testament that Israel was miraculously delivered and rescued from Egypt... but Egypt was still in their hearts. Their system of thinking and acting was operating from a place of slavery, bondage, scarcity, and fear.

God offers us deliverance through Jesus, but we sometimes prefer the comfort and familiarity of our bondage and pain.

It's crazy to think, both now in modern times and throughout history, the church has produced some incredible men and women of God, saints, and people that led groundbreaking change, liberation, and cultural revolutions.

But from within the church have also come criminals, pedophiles, abuse, hypocrisy, great pain and suffering.

So, we must pray, "God rescue us from the evil one! Rescue us from evil, from ourselves!" We need God's continual deliverance and renewal. We're meant to live in continual dependence on God, loving us, accepting us, providing for us, sustaining us. We're meant to live life from a place of deep trust and intimacy with God.

As I've shared many times, one of my favorite quotes from Tim Keller tells us that "The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope."

CLOSE

Even when we don't understand the why, we don't understand how God could allow such evil, pain, and suffering, and we don't understand what purpose it could possibly serve, my prayer for us would be that we wouldn't allow the tension and anger to drive us away from God, but instead to draw us to him.

In Jesus' greatest moments of anguish, knowing why he was here and what he had to do – he relentlessly pursued God in prayer, sweating blood, He depended on His

Father as he looked directly at evil one and death, and took sin upon himself for us.

And so he also teaches us to pray in this way, and within this prayer is the implicit, beautiful promise that if we seek deliverance, we will find it!

God rescue us... deliver us. Keep me, my family, and our world from the evil one, from evil! We trust that you have conquered evil through the cross and resurrection, and will indeed bring justice and restore our world.

If you're in the middle of a furnace right now, know that God is with you in the midst of it... and desires to see you through it.

Amen.

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The Next Step

A resource for Life Groups
and/or personal application

1. Read the passage from Matthew 6:9-13 again. In the past when you have prayed, "rescue us from the evil one," what has stood out to you? How do you see it now?
2. Of the three typical responses to evil/the evil one shared in the sermon – disbelief (head in the sand), excessive (unhealthy) belief, or self-righteousness (evil is "out there") – which, if any, do you relate to? Why?

3. How has the reality of evil and suffering affected your faith?

4. As you look back over your life, can you identify a time when you believe God delivered/rescued you from the evil one, or evil? If so, how has that shaped your prayer life?

5. Why is it vital to recognize that it is not just evil "out there," but also within us, from which we must be rescued? How might that affect our understanding of evil in this world?

6. What does it mean to you that when Jesus asked his Father to be delivered, his Father said, "no," that He was not rescued from the evil one?

7. What does it mean that Jesus both teaches us to pray this prayer and fulfills this prayer? How can this lead us into deeper confidence, trust, and hope in God?

Table to Table

Questions for kids and adults to answer together

What do you think Jesus is trying to teach us by telling us to pray, "deliver us from evil"? What does it mean for us that God has answered this prayer for us and will continue to answer it? As a family, think of some specific ways you can ask God to "deliver us from evil," and then pray those requests to God together.