

Introduction

This morning we return to our study of Jesus' Prayer Guide. It is not meant as a form of words merely to be repeated. Yet memorizing it and repeating it is highly valuable. The right use of what many call "the Lord's Prayer" is as a guide to inform and structure the prayer lives of Christ's people.

[Read Text Matthew 6:9-13 and Pray]

I hope you have been blessed by our study of the prayer taught by the Lord. I encourage you to take a careful look at how you pray. What Jesus teaches us here is quite different from what I hear from many. What we have seen in the pattern Jesus gives us is that it first and foremost revolves around God. And when it moves to us, the focus is on daily needs and sin. Last time we looked at the importance of seeking forgiveness. And this morning we will look at the importance of prayer concerning temptation and deliverance from evil. Several points need to be made and the first is this...

I. God Does Not Tempt.

I was reading Psalm 119:130 this week. It says, "The UNFOLDING of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple." The Bible is a concentrated book. It requires unfolding. It is packed tightly. Sometimes we have to examine the Scriptures extra carefully to make sure we are not arriving at a mistaken notion. That is the case this morning as we consider this double petition which is the sixth and final one in Jesus' prayer guide.

Jesus instructs us to pray that Our Father not lead us into temptation. So from the start we need to be clear that what Jesus instructs here does not insinuate that God is a tempter. The scriptures unequivocally declare that he is not. James warns in chapter 1 of his letter (verses 13-15): "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 one is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it is conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."

Evil does not entice God. And God does not entice people to evil. God will put people to the test as he did with Abraham. In fact every command he gives us puts us to the test. Will we obey? But temptation regarding evil is the enticement not to obey God. This is the great skill of Satan, crafty and cunning being that he is. He brought his trade into the garden of Eden and the result was the fall of man. And Satan brought his craft into the wilderness when the Spirit drove Jesus there to be tempted. It was the attempt of the devil to disqualify Jesus as a savior for sinners. And though he succeeded in the garden, he was unable to draw Jesus into sin in the wilderness. And so Jesus went to the cross as a lamb spotless and without blemish. He shed his precious blood and ransomed those who believe God and trust in Jesus.

But God does not entice to sin.

II. God Does Exercise Providence Over Our Temptations.

God does not tempt, but God does govern all circumstances in the world. And his government over all circumstances includes those in which we face temptation, enticement to sin.

It was no surprise to God when Satan appeared to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden to tempt them to disobey God. In the book of Job we even see God drawing the attention of Satan to his servant Job. Satan was before the Lord and the Lord said to him, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" When Satan claimed that the only reason Job loved the Lord was because of the good he did for him, the Lord gave Job over to the devil to be tested. But the Lord set boundaries. The devil was subject to the sovereignty of God. Another example of God's sovereignty over our temptations appears in the gospel according to Luke. Just before Jesus was arrested, he was telling the disciples they would fall away from him that night. Oh, but Peter protested, "Not me, Lord!" Jesus said to him, "Simon, Simon, behold Satan demanded that he might sift you as wheat." He told him then that the rooster would not crow until he had denied three times that he knew Jesus. Satan demanded to sift Peter. And God said, "yes." And Peter denied Jesus just as he had said.

There is another piece of evidence in God's book that all our temptations are experienced under his sovereign control and permission. It comes in an assurance of which Paul reminds the Corinthian church. Perhaps you have memorized 1 Corinthians 10:13. "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

God does not tempt, but he does control how, how much, and to what extent human beings are tempted.

III. God Delivers His Children from Evil.

"And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

A. The second part of this double petition is a cry for deliverance. DELIVER us from evil. Deliverance is a major theme of the Bible. The great example of deliverance is the exodus. It is God setting his people free and bringing them out of Egypt. He is the deliverer of his people.

Psalm 91 is a precious psalm of encouragement. It starts out this way. Verses 1-2 say, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, 'My Refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust.'" Why does the psalm writer explode with such an affirmation of God as his refuge and fortress? Verse 3 explains, "For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence." Yes, he is a deliverer. He sets you free from the snare, the trap. He removes you out from under what threatens you and delivers you to a place of safety and protection. The Lord is a mighty deliverer.

Paul puts it this way to the Colossians (1:13). "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

B. God delivers. Whom does he deliver? His children! Jesus says pray this way: Deliver US from evil. There is a plurality. We are family and we pray for one another in terms of temptation and in terms of deliverance. Jesus is really pointing out to us how important prayer is for the body. We approach

God as OUR Father and we pray for OUR daily bread, OUR forgiveness, and OUR leading, and OUR deliverance.

C. When we come to the word evil, there is a bit of disunity among the brethren as to what is meant. Some scholars and interpreters say that evil in general is definitely in view. Others, most notably to me R. C. Sproul, argue linguistically that "the evil one" is what is in view. I am going to out myself in a third camp. My camp is the camp of "it doesn't matter that much which is specifically in view, because either way you look at it all evil is in view by association. If Jesus is referring to the evil one, then he is also referring to all the evil which he accomplishes as well as the evil he has accomplished both within us and outside us. If Jesus was referring to evil in general then he is certainly referring to the evil one who is party to all this general evil.

Think then of the evil of which Jesus is speaking. The devil is evil. Ephesians 6:16 urges us to "take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of THE EVIL ONE." The things we should hate are evil. Romans 12:9 tells us to "Abhor what is evil." All sin is evil. About his sin David said, "Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." The world is evil. Paul says in Galatians 1:4 that Jesus "gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age." The devil is evil. All sin is evil. The world is evil. And moreover, our fleshly nature is evil. Jesus said in Matthew 12:35, "the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil." A. W. Pink rightly says, "the advantages that the devil gains over us are by means of the flesh and the world, for they are his agents. Thus, this is a prayer for deliverance from all our spiritual enemies" (The Beattitudes and the Lord's Prayer, 124).

Deliverance from evil can be present tense. Believers in Christ are delivered from the sentence of evil when we are justified by faith. Christ followers are delivered from the power of evil by the working of the Spirit. We are being delivered from the presence of evil in our lives.

But ultimately this deliverance in its fulness and completeness is future. With anticipation God's children look forward to the day when we will be with the Lord. And just as the Israelites left Egypt for the land of promise,

we who belong to Jesus will exit this world and enter heaven, the land where evil is absent. Final full deliverance. It is the wonderful and glorious work of God. God delivers his children from evil.

IV. Jesus Directs Us to Pray Accordingly.

A. The facts are clear from the scriptures. God does not tempt, but God is sovereign over our temptations, and God delivers His children from evil. These facts are important to Jesus. His kingdom revolves around them. Jesus himself prayed in this manner for those who would believe in him. The well known 17th chapter of John consists of Jesus prayer for the ones the Father gave him out of the world. Jesus is asking the father to keep them in His name, and he clarifies his request, "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one." (The Greek wording is the same here as in the final petition of the Lord's prayer. Jesus is praying for us the same thing he teaches us to pray. And it underscores how instrumental it must be that we also pray this way.

B. We cannot overestimate the importance of praying in regards to temptation and deliverance from evil. We can underestimate it. In fact we probably do. When you pray, how often to you ask God to lead you not into temptation but to deliver you from evil? How does that compare to prayers for daily bread and health? Most of the requests I hear people bringing up for prayer are not for protection from temptation but for healing. We want God to fix our bodies and fix our problems, but how conscious are we of the need for fixing our sinful desires and sinful patterns of living, of being delivered from that which is hostility to Him?

It is clearly an aspect of prayer to which we need to give much more attention. On the night he was betrayed, Jesus warned his disciples they would all abandon him. Peter most loudly objected. Then when Jesus went to the garden to pray, he warned his disciples to "watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation," but instead they slept. And later that night the disciples abandoned him and Peter denied him.

Paul warned the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 10:12), "Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." If you do not engage in prayer about temptation and evil, you are practically suggesting that you think you stand.

Prayer in this way by the very act is a declaration that you do not think you stand, that you are vulnerable and you do need help against the whiles of the flesh, the world, and the devil.

C. So then how do we pray this way? What is it to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"?

1. Let's start with the first of the two petitions, "Lead us not into temptation." Here is a prayer we are taught to pray that we can expect that God will not always answer affirmingly. I say that because there is plenty of evidence that under the providence of God, his people are tempted. Again, we note Adam and Eve who were tempted into the very garden God planted for them. And there is Joseph who by God's providence found himself in Egypt in the house of Potiphar under the eye of Potiphar's wife. That wife sought to seduce Joseph. He did not give in, but he was tempted day after day. It was God who directed the attention of the devil to his righteous servant Job. And Jesus himself was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tempted by the devil. There are temptations that in the providence of God and while being led by God are common to man.

So for what are we to pray? God never let me be tempted? I don't think so. Because the fact is that even when we are following God's leading there are times we are going to face temptation. However, praying "lead us not into temptation" acknowledges God's sovereignty over our temptations. He never tempts, but he does regulate the extent to which we are tempted. With this understanding we are asking God to limit our exposure to temptation. We are asking him to protect us from that which could draw us away from him, to lead us in such a way that the temptations we face are minimized, not maximized.

We know we are going to face temptations, and we know God provides a way of escape with every one of them, but we also know ourselves. And what we know of ourselves is that we are vulnerable. We are prone to wander. We are prone to fall. We are prone to think we stand. We should never boastfully call for temptations to be brought on us. We need God to shield us lest we are overcome. Matthew 24:22 speaks to this saying, "if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for

the sake of the elect those days will be cut short." Difficult days cut short so that the elect themselves would not fall away. This is why God's children pray, "lead us not into temptation."

And then praying that God not lead us into temptation calls for due diligence on our part. It calls for us to put legs on those prayers. We must be alert to situations in which temptations might arise and keep ourselves away from them. We must make no provision for the flesh. We might have to say no to things that are good in order to keep ourselves away from things that might tempt us to do evil. We train our eyes to look in other directions. We devote ourselves being on the alert and being watchful. Peter's words were, "be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour." We do this by prayer. Remember Paul's exhortation to the Ephesians? "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." He tells the Colossians to "continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it." All these instances illustrate the instruction of Jesus to pray to our Father, "Lead us not into temptation." As surely as you think of prayer, you should think of watchfulness, alertness, being vigilant against temptation and sin of every kind. Humble yourself before the Lord and he will sustain you.

2. The second of these petitions is, "but deliver us from evil." This petition asks the Father to keep evil from being the ultimate victor over us, but that he make us ultimate victors over it, including the flesh, the world, and the devil himself. A. W. Pink writes, "To be kept from the evil of sin is a far greater mercy than to be kept from the trouble of temptation." Our ultimate enemy is evil—evil in our hearts, our evil deeds, evil in the world, and evil personified in the devil.

To pray, "deliver us from evil" is to ask God to be victorious over it for us. We are delivered from evil as we in the power of the Spirit put to death what is sinful in us and replace it with what is righteous and holy. We are delivered from it when by grace we endure Satan's attacks. We are delivered from evil when it cannot overturn the purposes of God for our ultimate good. We are delivered from evil when we yield to temptation but are not totally overcome by the sin, when we repent and are restored. And

finally, we will be completely delivered from evil when Christ comes and takes us home to heaven. God's children should pray every day that Our Father will deliver us from evil in these ways. And we should give thanks every day for how he has already delivered us.

Conclusion

I close with this. Deliverance from evil is possible only because of Jesus. He conquered death. He has vanquished the devil. Hebrews 2:14 says, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery." He who never sinned became sin for those given him by God. By his stripes these are healed.

Listen, deliverance is not automatic. It comes only to those who come after Christ who deny themselves, turn from their sins, and trust in Him. No doubt someone in this room this morning needs this very deliverance and salvation that only comes through faith in Christ. I urge to turn to him right now.