

## INTRODUCTION

Our Scripture reading is taken once again from **The Gospel of Matthew chapter 6 and verses 9-13. Matthew 6** beginning in **verse 9**. Let us now hear God's Word. **(READ)**

## THE BRIDGE

This morning we're concluding our series of studies on **The Lord's Prayer**, coming now to the final petition...**Our Father in Heaven, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, or from the evil one.**

Now in pondering this petition, I want us to focus on three things in particular. **First**, I want us to focus on **some questions concerning this petition**. **Second**, I want us to focus on **the actual "what" of this petition**. And then **lastly**, I want us to focus on **the "how" of praying this petition**.

## SOME QUESTIONS CONCERNING THIS PETITION

So **first** then...**Some Questions Concerning This Final Petition**. And there are **three** of them.

The **first** is this...**what is evil?** And with that question comes other questions, such as...where does evil itself come from? Why does evil's presence seem to prevail? And why does God allow evil to exist in the first place? These are massive questions, but here's the thing...these sorts of questions have no ready answer. As a matter of fact, all attempts to find a rational explanation for the existence of evil, especially in light of the existence of an all-good and all-powerful God, have proven unconvincing and unhelpful. So what then can be said?

Well **the first thing** is this...**evil is real** and **it's powerful**. Evil is serious, and therefore it's not something we can ignore or make light of. Evil is a real force in the world, one that's bent entirely on destruction...on destroying and devouring all that God created and declared good from the beginning. Evil is against God and his good creational purposes.

And yet at the same time, and this is **the second thing** we can say...**evil is not all there is**. In other words, evil is real and powerful, but it's not all-powerful. It's not equal with God and therefore it's no match for his power, for God has and will overcome all evil. Yes, evil's against God, but it's on par with God, and that's why we can be confident, if we have eyes that see and hearts that believe, that evil's days are numbered. Because God is good, evil can't and won't last forever.

And then **the third thing** we can say about evil is...**that it's personal**. Evil's a force in the world, but it's not an impersonal force. And that's why I think it's better to translate the end of this petition as...**deliver us from the evil one**, for evil has a first face and it's the face of satan. For from the Scriptures, we're told that satan stands behind all evil in the world. He's the first personal being made by God who rebelled, who set his face against God, which itself is the essence of evil. Satan's also the one who tempted our first parents in the garden to do the same. Satan is the evil one and his agenda is nothing less than the annihilation of God's good creation. And that's why his chief weapon is death. But he's not the only one who's evil, for by nature we too are evil. For when Adam and Eve gave into satan's temptation and chose to go their way to the exclusion of God, they, and we with them, became evil. In rejecting the good God, we submitted to evil and, in turn, we became evil people who do evil things. For by nature we possess hearts that are defiled by evil and it's from our hearts that we desire and do evil.

That's why Jesus said in **Mark chapter 7** that...**For from within, out of the heart of humanity, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.**

Evil has been unleashed in our hearts and in the world as result of a personal choice, of a personal decision to fall away from God. For from the beginning, humanity chose to live apart from God. They did the very thing described in **Jeremiah 2** in that...**they forsook the LORD, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.** Evil is the rejection of him who is the source of life, and in that rejection humanity became evil. And this evil comes out in haughtiness, hatred, self-centeredness, self-preservation at all costs. It comes out and leads to division, despair, destruction and ultimately death, and no matter what humanity tries, we can't undo evil...the evil without nor the evil within. And that's why in the face of evil what we don't need are rational explanations for the existence of evil. No! What we need is a personal response from a personal God who doesn't give us an explanation for evil, but who himself resists and rules over evil and who promises to overcome all evil personally and finally. For no evil can undo God's good and eternal purposes.

And that leads us to our **second big question...what's deliverance?** And by this I mean God's ultimate deliverance, which is a deliverance *from* as well as a deliverance *unto*. For you see, in this petition Jesus is teaching us to pray that God would deliver us from the full effects of evil, that he'd rescue us and protect us from evil's destruction, from satan's evil and from our own evil as well. And in praying that we'd be delivered *from* evil, we're also praying that we'd be delivered *unto* all that God desires for us. And what is God's ultimate desire and purpose for us? Well it's to make us truly human. For from the beginning, God's purpose was to fashion humans into beings who beautifully bear God's good image in the world. Now who is the true Image of God? Well, it's God's Eternal Son. The Son is the Eternal Image of the Father who himself, in time, became an image, became a human being in order to deliver human beings, to deliver us *from evil* and *unto redemption*...the redemption of being everything God desired us to be from eternity. God has no greater purpose for you than to make you like his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to make you into a man or woman who finds their ultimate identity and meaning and value not in yourself, but in Christ, the one in who's image you were made. For God sent Jesus to give himself on the cross in order to deliver us from evil so that in him we might become a new creation, a new humanity...a true and beautiful humanity filled with goodness and glory, a humanity that truly loves...who loves God and loves neighbor. Making us into the human beings he always desired is God's ultimate deliverance.

And then finally, **the third big question...what's temptation?** Well, what's interesting about the Greek word 'temptation' is that it can be translated as either 'temptation' or as 'trial'. Now how are we to understand this?

Well, we're to understand it as teaching us that the same circumstance or situation can be both a trial and a temptation. Let me give you an example. Think about the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Was this tree a trial or a temptation? Well, it was both. For God told Adam not to eat of that tree as trial, so that through Adam's refraining from this particular tree he and his wife might grow in their love and loyalty to God, so that they might grow more and more in the likeness of God as they remained faithful to God. From God's perspective, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was a trial for their good and growth. But at the same time, satan used this same tree as a temptation, for through it he tempted Adam and Eve to doubt that God had really given them all that they needed.

And my friends, what was true in regard to that tree, remains true for the various circumstances and situations that we face on a daily basis. For God's purpose is to bring us trials for our good while Satan's purpose is use those very trials as temptations. We could put it this way...the very thing Satan uses to break us, God uses to make us...to make us into the people he's always desired.

### THE WHAT OF THIS PETITION

So there are the questions and with them in our minds, we come now to **our second focus** which is...**The "What" of this Petition**. In other words, what are we asking for when we pray...**Our Father in Heaven, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil?**

And in addressing this we need to first acknowledge the reality that the Christian Life is not a life of serenity, but of struggle. And the reason for this is because we belong to Jesus and we're called to become like Jesus in a still broken world, in a world that's bent on evil and death. The only way to become like Jesus is through struggle...through our struggle with evil, with Satan's evil as well as our own. **One writer** put it like this...**Words like "evil" and "temptation" and "deliverance" are words of crisis. They remind us that to pray this prayer means to be thrust into the middle of a cosmic struggle. At this point, the temperature rises within the Lord's Prayer. Things are not right in the world. Things are not yet right with us. It's as if something, someone has organized (everything) against God. And so you begin to pray this prayer faithfully, attempting to align your life to God and the next thing you know, you are under assault, for the Christian Life is warfare.**

It's not a breeze. It's a battle, a battle with temptation and evil. For think of Jesus' life, how his life was one of seamless temptation and struggle. It was a life lived amidst evil in all its varied forms, beginning with King Herod's violent desire to kill him as a baby and ending with the agony of his violent death on the accursed cross. Throughout his ministry, Jesus was tempted by the evil one to believe that his Father didn't love him, that his Father wouldn't provide for him, and that his Father wouldn't rescue him. Throughout the entirety of his life, Jesus was misunderstood, ridiculed, abandoned, and rejected. And as a result, he lived a life of sorrow, struggle and suffering. But throughout it all he remained faithful and he remained faithful for us, for us whose lives had been submitted to and overcome by evil. And in the end and for our sake, Jesus allowed evil to do its worst to him as he hung on the cross, not for his own evil, but for ours. And in so doing he overcame evil, for through his willing and sacrificial death he stripped the evil one of his power... his power of accusation and his power of death. On the cross, Jesus took on evil's darkness in order to defeat the darkness by shining the light of God's forgiving and restoring love. And we know he defeated it because he was delivered from the evil of death itself, for he was raised and with his resurrection has come forgiveness and life and victory. Jesus was led into the trial and the temptation of the cross in order to deliver us from evil and so that we could now pray in and with him...**Our Father, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.** But what does this look like?

Well, it looks like praying such things as...Father, keep us from giving into the evil powers that rage against your kingdom. Father, help us to recognize evil for the evil that it is. Although it masquerades as life and freedom and power, help us to see that evil only desires your dishonor and our destruction. Father, give us strength to put off indwelling sin. Father, equip us to fight against the evil of thinking we're superior to others. Deliver us from violence, greed, lust, indifference, self-righteousness, and deception. Praying this prayer means asking the Father not to lead us into temptation in such a way that the temptation overcomes us, so that we end up doubting or betraying or forsaking God's love. It means praying that we'll more and more cease to look to other things for our ultimate satisfaction whether it be food or money or sex or the promise that if we had just a little more, then life would be better.

Praying this petition means praying those words of **Romans chapter 12** that we'd no longer be conformed to this evil age, but that we'd be transformed through the renewal of our minds, which comes by God's Spirit and God's Word. And most of all, it means praying that God would deliver us so as to make us like his Son who loved us and gave himself up for us, so that the life we now live we might live by faith in Jesus. That's the "what" of this petition.

### THE HOW OF THIS PETITION

But then **finally**, what about...**The "How" of this Petition**. In other words, how can we get to the point of praying this petition faithfully? Well, let me give you **four ways**.

**First**, if we're going to pray this petition faithfully we must utilize...**the how of Scripture**. Simply put, we must know God's word. His word must dwell in our hearts. Think of how the Psalmist put in **Psalms 119 and verses 9-11** when he writes...**How can a young man keep his way pure? (Answer) By guarding it according to your Word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments. I have stored up your Word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.**

God's Word is our defense against temptation and it's through his word and by his Spirit that God delivers us from evil. And here we follow the example of Jesus himself who when he was tempted in the wilderness fought back not with worldly weapons, but with the weapon of God's Word. He quoted God's Word, not only to the devil who tempted him, but to his own heart. For without God's Word we're helpless in the face of temptation, but with it we're guarded and protected. Do you know God's Word? Are you hiding it in your heart? Are you taking it up day after day that you might be able to stand against the schemes of the evil one? For a wordless Christian, if there is such a thing, will always be an overcome Christian who doesn't rely on Christ or reflect Christ.

**Secondly**, if we're going to pray this petition faithfully we must utilize...**the how of awareness**. And by this I mean...we must know our own hearts as well as those areas where we're prone to leave the God we love. Therefore, to pray this prayer honestly means not putting yourself heedlessly or willfully in the way of temptation. For example, if you struggle with lust you may need to commit to not looking at the internet when you're alone. If you struggle with your use of money you may need to sit down and commit yourself to a budget, to a budget that enables you to steward your money wisely. You see, we're all personally prone to the temptation of particular sins. Are you aware of those sins, of that evil in your heart? And in that awareness are you vigilant so as not place ourselves in situations where we know that we're likely to fail. So for Christ's sake, be aware. Keep watch on your heart, and when you fail, confess your sins to God.

**Third**, if we're going to pray this pray faithfully we must utilize **the how of helpers**, of Christian friends who can encourage us to stand firm in the face of temptation, friends who can ask us tough questions and who'll lovingly rebuke us when we fail. Friends who'll lovingly encourage us to continue to look to Jesus as our all in all.

And then **lastly**, if we're going to pray this prayer faithfully we must utilize **the promise of God**. And the particular promise I'm thinking of comes from **1 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 13**, which says...**No temptation has overtaken you that isn't common to man. God is faithful, and he won't let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation, he'll also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.**

My friends, we're weak, but God is strong. We're wayward, but God is constant. We fail, but our God is faithful and he's promised to deliver us...to deliver *from* evil so as to deliver us *unto* our ultimate destination of being like Jesus and being with Jesus in a restored creation where evil itself will be no more.

Therefore, in the midst of present evil, look to God your faithful helper and loving Father. Cry out to him as you pray day after day...**Father, don't let me be overcome with temptation, but deliver me from evil, so that my life will rely on and reflect your goodness.** Let us pray...

*Father, bless us, and preserve us from all evil, and keep us in the good life of your Son. Amen.*