

And Lead Us Not Into Temptation, But Deliver Us From Evil

Matthew 6:9b-13

(Jesus said) “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.

We hear from Luther in the Catechisms about temptation: “And lead us not into temptation. What is this? Answer: It is true that God tempts no one, but we ask in this prayer that God would preserve and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us or mislead us into false disbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice, and that, although we may be attacked by them, we may finally prevail and gain the victory.¹ Temptation is of three kinds: of the flesh, of the world, and of the devil. We live in the flesh and carry the old creature around our necks. It works and lures us daily into all kinds of evil that clings to us. For the world drives us to anger and impatience. There is nothing but hatred, envy, enmity, violence and injustice, vengeance, cursing, reviling, slander, arrogance, pride, fondness for luxury, honor, fame and power. No one is willing to be the least, but everyone wants to sit on top and be seen by all. Then comes the devil. His purpose is to tear us away from faith, hope, and love; by causing us to scorn and despise the Word and works of God. God gives us power and strength to resist, even though the attack is not removed or ended.”² Luther also speaks in the Catechism about evil: “But deliver us from evil. What is this? Answer: We ask in this prayer, as in a summary, that our Father in heaven may deliver us from all kinds of evil – affecting the body and soul, property or reputation – and at last, when our final hour comes, may grant us a blessed end and take us by grace from this valley of tears to himself in heaven.³ In the Greek, this petition reads, ‘Deliver or preserve us from the Evil One, or the Wicked One.’ Therefore, there is nothing for us to do on earth but to pray without ceasing against this archenemy.”⁴ There is a difference between the version in Matthew and the version in Luke. In both, we have the half petition, “And do not bring us to the time of trial.” But it is only in Matthew’s version that adds the second half, “But deliver from the evil one.” This part of the petition is missing in Luke. This would be consistent with Matthew’s Gospel. An over-arching theme in the Gospel of Matthew is the constant cosmic battle between God, God’s Kingdom and God’s people –vs- the evil one. The Gospel of Matthew was one of the first good-vs-evil match-ups. And so it is consistent with Matthew’s Gospel that Jesus would add into the prayer, a petition that we should be delivered from the evil one.

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION – This is a prayer of deliverance. This is a prayer where we admit the places we are tempted. This is a prayer where we take ownership of the evils which we refuse to leave behind. This is a prayer of confession. We have asked for forgiveness. Now

¹ Small Catechism

² Large Catechism

³ Small Catechism

⁴ Large Catechism

we need to confess the things we need to be forgiven.⁵ Why do we feel the need to pray this petition? If we believe in Jesus, then everything will be good, and safe, and easy, right? Why do we feel the need to pray this petition, because we know that God will send us into places of temptation? We hear in James 1:13, “No one, when tempted, should say, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one.” But it doesn’t say that God won’t send us to places that we may be tempted. In fact, God promises to do that very thing. In actuality, it will be central to where we go in our mission. In the Gospels, we see the story of Jesus’ baptism. And in all the Gospels, the very next scene is Jesus in the wilderness. But how does Jesus get there? Well, it says that the Holy Spirit drives him there, immediately drives him there. God places Jesus in a place where Jesus may be tempted. Jesus is tempted, by the evil one, not by God. Jesus is constantly telling his followers that the same will happen to them. And that includes us. As soon as the water hits our heads, we are expected to go to places where temptation may occur, to proclaim the good news, to heal the sick, to offer forgiveness, to cast out demons. We would like to believe that we could come to a sanitized sanctuary from a tempting world, and that a sanitized God would tell us how easy things are going to be, if we would just stay here. That’s what we want when we pray this prayer. But the truth of the matter is, Jesus gives us the petition so that we can go out into the tempting world, not stay in a sanitized safe place. A broken ugly world that is so tempting to us. We pray that God will give us the strength to withstand our inner desires to enjoy the temptation that we admit we cannot overcome on our own. We are expected, no, commanded to go into the tempting world to confront the evil one face-to-face. To stay safe, to think sanitized safety is where ministry occurs, is giving in to the temptation of fear.⁶ Alexander MacLaren has an interesting thought: “Temptation has two parts in it – the circumstances which lead to sin, and the desire which is addressed by them. There must be tinder as well as a spark, if there is to be a flame. Fire falling on water or bare rock will kindle nothing. God sends the one, we make the other.” The thought being that we contribute, by giving in, by sparking the tinder, by joining evil. This petition calls us to look at ourselves. We are tempted all the time. To say that we are above temptation is to lie to ourselves. To say that we don’t give into temptation is to lie to ourselves. To say that we don’t enjoy giving in to temptation is to lie to ourselves. This part of the petition is our confession to God, that we have a track record of giving into the enemy. That we are powerless on our own. And we ask God to forgive us for the times we have given in, and to give us strength to resist the next time, because now we know better.

BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL – Words like “save”, “trial”, and “deliver” 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 in the prayer, we see that things are not right in the world. It is as if things are organizing against God. When we pray this prayer faithfully, we are admitting that we see that there are cosmic consequences for every thought, word, deed, and emotion; spoken or not spoken, done or not done, expressed or not expressed, in our minds or not. We find that we may be on the wrong side of the line, we are working for the enemy. Praying this prayer faithfully means that we desire to align our life to God’s will and God’s Kingdom. We are saying we want to turn our lives over to do the right thing. And then the next thing you know, we are under attack. And we are pretty sure we will waver. We need to relinquish the parts of our lives that become the avenues of approach for the enemy: power, control, society, the economy, racial

⁵ Mulholland, pages 109-127

⁶ Seilhammer, pages 54-61

prejudice, social prejudice, gender prejudice, the media, culture. Satan masquerades as an angel of light and resists being unmasked. Do we take our masks off? Do we really remove them from our faces? When we pray for deliverance from evil, we acknowledge that we do not have the resources, on our own, to resist evil. And so this is a communal prayer: deliver US, save Us. We gain strength with the community, which should enable us to stand free from the powers of the enemy. We are part of a community that is called to take care of each other. Because, as Benjamin Franklin stated in the Continental Congress just before signing the Declaration of Independence in 1776; "We must, indeed, all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately."⁷ I believe this prayer calls us to realize that we are constantly on the wrong side of the line. We draw line: God = good, evil = bad. And we place everything in categories. In every instance, we always place ourselves on the Good Side of the line. I believe this petition of this prayer is our realization that we are actually on the bad side of the line. We have fallen to temptation, even in the church. And we should stop, because we are actually doing the work of evil, even in the church. We continue to add brokenness to the kingdom. And we can't blame anyone but ourselves, not even the devil. I always remember Flip Wilson and his character Geraldine, "The devil made me do it." The devil can't MAKE you do anything. God gives you free will. We have freewill. The choice is ours. If God can't MAKE you do something, the devil can't make you either. We are constantly choosing to NOT: NOT worship God and only God, NOT hallow God's name as the only name, NOT do the work of the Kingdom, NOT follow commandments, NOT do God's will, NOT share, NOT ask or accept forgiveness, NOT forgive, NOT stand against temptation. We get to this point in the prayer, look back, and realize we are NOT doing so good. And so we pray, "OK God, I can't do this alone. Don't let the enemy use us anymore." And then we open our eyes and realize we are not alone in enemy territory. This petition is not a personal mantra for self-protection. It is a recognition of our tendency to march lockstep with others, into sins with great social and global implications. When we fail to emphasize our corporate need for deliverance, we make the closing petition of this prayer into a selfish request. Let's just look at one example. 1 Timothy 6:10 says, "The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains." But isn't that the American Dream? Don't we march lockstep into the temptations and evil that persists in lifting up that dream? Whether we are rich or poor, that is the ideal, and we close our eyes and participate, instead of being counter-cultural and renouncing the ways of the world. Look at how we behave around Christmas. Black Friday, and all those good Christians in line for hours, buying things we don't need because it might be cheaper than usual. We fight, kick, scratch and claw to get more than someone else. We spend significantly more on ourselves in that month alone, than we do for the church, or the kingdom combined for the whole year. We need to be delivered, and many times, it really is from ourselves. In the 12-Step programs, one stands up and announces, "My name is _____, and I am a _____." You name and claim the broken behavior for yourself. The first step is claiming that you are powerless over what controls you. This is what we are doing in this prayer. We claim we are powerless over temptation and evil. And there is only one way we can be saved.⁸

What is holding us back from fulfilling God's Will? This petition reminds us that there are and will always be obstacles to our discerning and fulfilling God's Will. We are reminded to increase our trust in God, strengthen our faith in God's plan and purpose in our lives. We ask to be

⁷ Willimon/Hauerwas, pages 79-85

⁸ Mulholland, pages 109-127

delivered from ourselves, because we put up the strongest obstacles. We ask to be released from guilt, so that it does not have power over us anymore. We ask to overcome all other barriers put in front of us. We acknowledge the power of this and all prayer. We admit that we are stronger when we are united in worship. We confess that we follow Christ's example, and are led by the Word of God, against the enemy.⁹

Evil exists. Evil even exists in the church. We stray into temptation. But do not fear. The victory over evil is won. We stand in the midst of this prayer, evaluating ourselves, and seeing that we need to change. By this point of the prayer, we have said to God that we know whose Kingdom we should work for, and whose will is right, and what we are to do to make that happen. But here we acknowledge that we may not be fulfilling our part. In fact, we admit we may be working against it. And so we ask God to change our hearts, to turn us around by praying **AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL.**

Title: And Lead Us Not Into Temptation, But Deliver Us From Evil

Text: Matthew 6:9b-13

Theme: Christ has won victory over evil

Doctrine: Evil

Need: We are tempted

Image: Heart

Mission: Go to areas of temptation

Date: April 3, 2019

Liturgical: Lenten Midweek

Direction: Must go into world

Remarks: 5th in series

⁹ David Westphal, "Thy Will Be Done", pages 80-93