

Deliver Us From Evil (Matthew 6:13)

Big Idea: Life is dangerous, so pray that God protects you from sin and keeps you close to him.

There are six petitions in the Lord's Prayer. The one that I find the most confusing is the last one:

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

(Matthew 6:13)

We've been looking at the Lord's Prayer these past few weeks. The first three petitions have to do with God: God's honor, God's kingdom, and God's will. Jesus wants us to see the bigger picture: that we're part of something much bigger. We're part of the story that God is writing in this world.

That's the first half of the Lord's Prayer. The second half deals with us. Jesus tells us to pray for daily bread, forgiveness, and finally for protection from evil. Jesus wants us to pray about our needs too. We need provision, pardon, and protection.

But it seems strange to ask him to not lead us into temptation. Why should we have ask God not to lead us into temptation? Couldn't we just assume that God isn't in the business of leading people into temptation? After all, James 1:13 says, "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." It seems strange to ask God not to do what the Bible says he doesn't do. So what does this mean?

I think Jesus is using a figure of speech here. If Char is giving me directions, I might say, "Don't send me in the wrong direction!" It's not that she was thinking of sending me in the wrong direction. It's just another way of saying, "Please give me good directions so that we end up in the right place."

This prayer is another way of praying, "Lord, we live in a dangerous world. We have an enemy who threatens our souls. We still have a desire to sin that lives within us that just might lead us astray. So please protect us from temptation and keep us close to you."

Life is Dangerous

Here's the reality we live in.

On May 1, 1915, the Lusitania set sail from New York to Liverpool. Almost 2,000 people were on board, including 95 children and 39 infants. It was an amazing ship: fast, comfortable, luxurious, and beloved.

But this voyage was to be its last. Days before the ship had left New York, The Imperial German Embassy placed a warning advertisement in 50 American newspapers, including some in New York:

NOTICE!

TRAVELLERS intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany and her allies and Great Britain and her allies; that the zone of war includes the waters adjacent to the British Isles;

that, in accordance with formal notice given by the Imperial German Government, vessels flying the flag of Great Britain, or any of her allies, are liable to destruction in those waters and that travellers sailing in the war zone on the ships of Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk.

IMPERIAL GERMAN EMBASSY

Washington, D.C., 22 April 1915.

Despite that ad, people embarked on the Lusitania, and you can still watch the film of the ship leaving port on its last voyage with people waving excitedly, before going to their first-class cabins and enjoying all the food and amenities that the ship had to offer.

On May 7, near the end of her 202nd crossing, a German U-boat spotted the ship. At a 700-meter range, orders were given for one torpedo to be fired. The torpedo – a single torpedo – hit the ship. Seawater drenched the passengers; children jumping rope on the deck stopped jumping. Within seconds, the ship rolled to the right. 18 minutes later, the ship sank, killing almost 1,200 of its passengers and crew. Never before had an attack on a civilian ship taken place like this. When you enter a war zone, even when you're on a luxurious civilian ship, you may experience the worst that war can offer.

It's important for us to realize this as well. We're in a very similar position. A declaration of war has been issued. We've been told to expect attack. Yet it's easy for us to think we live in peacetime conditions, and to be surprised when we find ourselves embattled and attacked. I don't know how many times I've been surprised when it feels like I'm under attack. We live in wartime, but we expect peacetime conditions.

I read think of this quote by Charles Spurgeon often: "When you sleep, remember that you are resting on the battlefield; when you travel, suspect an ambush in every hedge."

We're at war! We often forget this, but we live in wartime conditions.

In Ephesians 6, Paul writes:

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:11-12)

Here's what Paul is teaching us.

We have enemies.

Verse 11 talks about the schemes of the devil. He is the head of the demons, the fallen angels who are enemies of God. Jesus called him a liar and a murderer. He's out to get us, to deceive us, and to rob us of our very lives. And he's not alone. Verse 12 says that he's joined by "the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." There's not just one spiritual being who's our enemy, but a whole range of evil spiritual forces. They vary in rank, authority, and capability, but they're all opposed to us.

We don't know all the details of these beings that are against us. We don't have enough information to figure out every detail of how the hierarchy works. But we know enough to realize that a battle is going on with unseen spiritual forces against us. They're powerful, wicked, cunning, and invisible. If our fight was against other hu-

mans, we'd maybe have to worry, but at least we'd have a chance. We have no chance on our own against these unseen spiritual enemies, which is why Paul is going to tell us what to do to stand under the attack of these spiritual forces against us. Don't be surprised when you feel like you're under attack.

So we learn that we have enemies. Then we learn that:

They have tactics.

Paul tells us that we're to stand against the "schemes of the devil." What is a scheme? It's a strategy designed by a careful strategist to defeat us. It means that the devil and his forces will use every scheme possible to turn us aside from pursuing Christ and achieving the goals that God has for us. Beneath the surface, there's a battle going on. One preacher says:

He has been honing his methods for millennia. His emissaries visited the church councils at Nicea and Chalcedon. He sat in on medieval faculty meetings. He is an accomplished philosopher, theologian, and psychologist. He has had thousands of years to study.

I am no genius at mathematics, but even with my limited capabilities I could be terrific at math if I worked at it for 100 years (maybe!). If I labored hard at it for a 1,000 years and read all the learned theories, I would be a Newton or an Einstein. Or what if I had 10,000 years? Given that time, any of us could become the world's greatest philosopher or psychologist or theologian or linguist (we could curse or preach in a thousand languages). Satan has had multiple millennia to study and master the human disciplines, and when it comes to human subversion, he is the ultimate manipulator. (R. Kent Hughes)

When you read this passage, you may have pictures of wild spiritual battles and direct spiritual attack. But there are a variety of ways that he can come after us that aren't that spectacular.

Most of the time, Satan and his demons don't use a direct attack. What we experience most of the time is much more subtle than that. That's why the devil's so wily. Satan doesn't usually tip his hand. He likes to use trickery and subterfuge. As one person said, "Evil rarely looks evil until it accomplishes its goal; it gains entrance by appearing attractive, desirable, and perfectly legitimate. It is a baited and camouflaged trap" (Klyne Snodgrass).

One of his most effective tactics is simply to get us to question God's goodness. He tries to tempt us to think that God is holding back on us. He causes us to question God's Word. He loves to deceive us, and he knows what works. He's been at it for thousands of years. We have an enemy, Paul says, and he has tactics.

We learn one more thing about the battle:

The battle is up close and personal.

Paul says, "We wrestle..." The word for wrestle is more of an athletic one than a military one. When you wrestle, you're in close contact with your enemy. Paul uses this image to help us realize that this isn't warfare that takes place with drones and joysticks. It's close and intense. The battle takes place in our minds and hearts. It couldn't be closer and more intimate than it is.

"If you are a true believer, Satan hates you." That's the way the book *Fighting Satan* by Joel Beeke begins. He hates you. He wants you back. You have an enemy, and that enemy is "a living, intelligent, resourceful and cunning enemy who can outlive the old-

est Christian, outwork the busiest, outfight the strongest and outwit the wisest" (John Blanchard).

That's why we need this prayer. We are at war. We have enemies. Our enemies have tactics. These tactics are up close and personal.

So Pray

That's why we need to pray:

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

(Matthew 6:13)

In this petition, we're praying "that God would either keep us from being tempted to sin, (Matt. 26:41) or support and deliver us when we are tempted. (2 Cor. 12:7-8)" (Westminster Shorter Catechism).

We're praying for help with the temptations that Satan sends us in which we're tempted to be unfaithful to God and to choose the path of sin rather than obeying and loving him.

I love how James Boice paraphrases this petition: "Keep us from wandering into paths where we will be tempted by the devil; but if he comes, keep us out of his clutches."

I used to want to do great things for God. By "great things" I mean I wanted to do impressive things for God. Sometimes I think it was really more about me than about God.

The older I get, the more I realize how dangerous this world is. I've changed my goal a little. I want to reach the finish line with faithfulness. I don't want to dishonor God with my life and disqualify myself. I want to become a godly, humble, gracious old man who loves God more than I do now.

And I need God's help to do this. I can't do it alone. The older I get, the more I realize how weak I am, that I will not be able to stay faithful to him without his help.

That's why we pray this prayer. If you have turned to Jesus in repentance and faith, he has already given you a new heart, a heart that wants to please him (Jeremiah 32:39). But that's not the only thing that God offers us. He offers us, as Hebrews says, a Savior who sympathizes with us, because he was tempted in every way as we are, and yet was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). Come to God when you're tempted. He is ready to help you.

He also gives us a way of escape when we face temptation. 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." We never have to sin. God always provides other options. He always gives us a way out.

He has given us so many Scriptures on how to handle temptation: to resist the devil, because he will flee from us (James 4:7), to put on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6), and so much more. He's also given us assurance:

*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil ... Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.
(Ephesians 6:11, 13)*

But one of the things he's told us to do is pray. You have divine power ready to help you. Satan is no match for God's power. So pray. Pray that God will keep you safe and close to him in every temptation right to the end.

And remember to pray this along with others. This is a communal prayer, and we all need God's help. **Life is dangerous, so pray that God protects you from sin and keeps you close to him.**

Because, as the Latin Church father Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, wrote in the fourth century:

The Lord who has taken away your sin and pardoned your faults also protects you and keeps you from the wiles of our adversary the devil, so that the enemy, who is accustomed to leading into sin, may not surprise you. One who entrusts himself to God does not dread the devil. "If God is for us, who is against us?"
(Romans 8:31)