

Deliver Us From Evil

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[0 : 0 0] Morning, everybody. My name is Daniel. I'm an elder here at the table. We don't have our co-pastors, Toneta and Anthony, here with us today, so you have me instead. And I'm excited to welcome you to the season finale for our series on the Lord's Prayer. As you can tell, I have been loving some of the new shows out, The Bear, The Acolyte, House of the Dragons, I'm in a bit of a cinematic mood.

And so it's fitting that we're coming today to the last line of the Lord's Prayer. Over the last few weeks, we've explored what this foundational prayer, which has been prayed by Christians for centuries across the world, what this prayer means to us here in DC as the table church.

Now, before we turn to today's verse, I'm going to do a little recap, because the Lord's Prayer builds off of each other as a sequence, a story to it. Unfortunately, unlike with HBO, there's no cinematic cool music in the background as I do this recap, but feel free to imagine some cool animations, you know, some Hans Zimmer in the background as we talk through the things that we've covered in the last few weeks. So just some very basic facts about the Lord's Prayer. It takes place as part of the Sermon on the Mount, which occurs in Matthew 5. Now, right before the Sermon on the Mount, at the end of Matthew 4, we see that a large crowd of people who are sick and oppressed and possessed by demons from all over Judea, from all over the countryside, come to Jesus. They come and they experience healing, they experience deliverance, they experience community. As an additional context, at this point in time, Judea was an occupied country. It was occupied by the Roman Empire and was experiencing quite a bit of economic oppression, primarily through systems of taxation. So as a result of that, there was rampant debt in society at that time. Families would be forced to sell their land in order to make ends meet. They'd often continue working and living on that land, but the land would be owned by a wealthy person who lived off in the city somewhere. And so when we read through Matthew, we see a lot of talk about debt and landlords, and that is often the context that Jesus is referring to.

And so this great crowd, some of those would have been people who were in debt. Some of them would have been people who had lost the land that had been in their family for generations, all of whom lived under occupation. And they came to Jesus, and he begins to teach them, starting off with the attitudes, saying, blessed are the poor. From there, after covering a number of ethical topics, in Matthew 6, Jesus turns to this topic of prayer. He starts off by warning people of what they should not pray as, warning them against praying to be seen, praying with lots of meaningless words.

As a counter to that, gives them a formula, a liturgy, a guide to how they should pray. So you can see up on the screen the Lord's Prayer.

[3 : 3 6] Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Now, along with the context of the crowd listening to this prayer being a crowd living under occupation, a crowd that knew poverty, that knew oppression, there are two other things that we can notice in this prayer. The first that I use is us and we language. Give us our daily bread. Forgive us.

Lead us. Lead us. Deliver us. The prayer is given in communal, collective terms. It was meant to be prayed in community. It was meant to be prayed with the people around you.

We can also see that's split into two different sections. The first section has three God-focused statements. So we'll see on the screen over here those three statements. The first, an affirmation that God is holy. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Hallowed basically means holy.

God is creator. God is father. God is mother. God is holy. Followed by a request that God's kingdom would come. And then another request that God's will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. That first section is followed up by a series of four more human-centered statements.

[5 : 36] Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts. Lead us not into temptation. And deliver us from evil. And as a whole, combining the first and second section, we can think of the second section as being an answer to the first section.

So we pray at the beginning that God's will is done on earth. And then we see in the us, we statements how God's will is done on earth.

And so over the last few weeks, we've talked about how give us our daily bread is both a statement about everyone having what they need and nobody having more than what they need, taking from others.

We've talked about how forgive us our debts in a society where land-based debt was a common driver of poverty was a liberating statement.

It was a counter-cultural call. A reminder of the original commands given to the people of Israel to forgive economic debt on a regular basis.

[6 : 45] And finally, at the end, we come to the third and the fourth ways that God's will is to be done on earth. And they have to do with the really, really fun topics of temptation and evil.

I'm a lot of fun at parties because I actually do like talking about evil a lot. I was at a housewarming party a few years ago and totally derailed the conversation into policing in America.

That was fun. Went to a Santa-themed Christmas party a few years back where we all had to wear Santa costumes. I was like, what better place to talk about mass incarceration than a Santa-themed party?

Invite me to all of your parties. I'm a blast. I promise you. I promise you. These are kind of heavy topics. They are serious, but they are topics that I think we see in the real world.

We see with... As we have more and more access to technology, we can see what's happening in the world more. I think we see more and more where evil exists in the world.

[7 : 49] It's harder and harder to ignore. So I moved here to D.C. in 2015, almost a decade ago from California. And when I moved here, I was working for a non-profit.

The nature of my work was supporting people who would have very likely been similar to the crowd at the beginning of Matthew. People who were experiencing poverty and experiencing oppression.

I worked with people who had been unhoused for decades, who were going from couch to couch, living in parks, living in tents.

I worked with people who had been on housing voucher wait lists for years, waiting for their family to move in to an apartment. Worked with people who couldn't find jobs after returning home from decades of incarceration.

People who experienced violence from police, from court systems, from their neighbors. The longer that I worked at that job, the more powerless I began to feel.

[8 : 59] Day after day, I was confronted with the fruits of injustice, with the effects of evil in this world. And more often than not, there was very little that I could do about it.

At that time, D.C. had a housing voucher wait list of around 40,000 people on its backlog. I could not make the city go through that wait list any faster.

I couldn't change the racial disparities in the ways that the U.S.'s mass incarceration system has prosecuted people. I couldn't make employers hire my clients, no matter how long I worked with them on their resumes, or did interviews with them.

At the end of the day, many of them went to interviews and came back rejected. I felt powerless also against the changes that I was noticing inside myself.

The hardness of my own heart, the disbelief and the doubt that I began to feel listening to people's stories, wondering, did that really happen to them?

[10 : 11] Are they just trying to get a little bit extra cash out of me? The allure of power over others when I was quickly promoted over people who had worked in that industry for decades.

And I was all of a sudden their boss. I was a manager with one year of experience. It was great. And when I left the non-profit world to move towards the tech industry, I felt a loss of generosity within me as I began to have access to more and more wealth than I had ever had before and found myself stingier and stingier than I had ever been before as well, wanting to keep more and more for myself.

And as I was wrestling with those feelings of powerlessness, both looking at the world around me and what I was feeling inside of me, I thought back to an experience I had the year before I moved to D.C. in 2014.

As part of a small, multiracial group at my university, I read through a couple of books, including James Cone's seminal book, A Black Theology of Liberation, and Michelle Alexander's book, The New Jim Crow, which is about mass incarceration in the U.S.

This was a really deeply impactful time for me, reading through liberation-focused texts that both came from a spiritual and a sociological background. To name just three of what I learned, three things that I learned from that time, James Cone introduced me to the world of liberation theology, a world where people grappled openly and angrily with questions of poverty and justice, forming theologies that were intended to confront those evils.

[12 : 08] Michelle Alexander introduced me to the world of systematic thinking about evil, highlighting how systems of oppression create the conditions that we as individuals live in.

Kimberly Crenshaw introduced me to the term intersectionality, a phrase that has been used often in social justice spaces over the last few years, which she coined to describe how black women in particular experience oppression both from patriarchal systems and from racist systems.

these authors deepened my knowledge of how evil works in the world, how groups of people and individuals go along with evil in the world.

And so as I found myself facing evil in the world around me, and in my own heart as well, I returned to those lessons yet again.

The professor who introduced me to those books would often ask his class, what does the good news of Jesus mean to somebody who is starving?

[13 : 17] What does the good news of Jesus mean to someone who can't provide for their family? What does the good news of Jesus mean in an unjust society?

Here in DC, I began to ask questions like, what does the good news of Jesus mean in a city that has one of the highest levels of income inequality in the nation?

What does the good news of Jesus mean for people who have been incarcerated incarcerated by unjust laws? I also began to flip these questions around and ask, what does the good news of Jesus mean to me as someone who has wealth and economic stability?

What does the good news mean to me when I no longer want to be generous, when I want to ignore the pain around me? More recently, I've asked the question, what does the good news of Jesus mean to me as a U.S. citizen when U.S. bombs are dropped in schools and on refugee tents in Gaza?

This question solidified into something that I felt like I needed to answer if my faith was going to mean something. Did the gospel of Jesus in any way have power to liberate and free people from evil, both within and in the world?

[14 : 41] And I think that the Lord's Prayer and the ending in particular gives us a guide to answer that question. So the third request in the prayer, lead us not into temptation, is one that I've often been confused by.

So growing up, when I heard this in church, generally was kind of a debate around, does God tempt people or not? That was sort of the depth of my understanding of this particular line.

Which was confusing. If God doesn't want me to sin, why am I supposed to ask God, not put me in situations where I'm being tempted by God to do the things that God doesn't want me to do?

Like, that doesn't quite make sense. I'm not sure I'm understanding and tracking with this. It sort of paints an almost manipulative picture of God, of don't put me in situations where I'll do the things that you don't want me to do.

So as I mentioned, I work in the tech world, and I can't help but think of something that we call, see there is a deceptive pattern. So essentially, a deceptive pattern is when a website or an app manipulates you into taking a certain action.

[15 : 59] You've probably seen this before. If you've ever been shopping online on a website, you're going around, you're putting things into your cart, and you get a pop-up asking if you want to subscribe to that company's mailing list.

Instead of just yes or no, you might get an option like, yes, the yes option says, yes, I want to save money. The no option says, no, I hate saving money.

This example here says, want 20% off? Yes, please. No, I'll never buy. I want the economy to collapse. I've seen some pretty egregious examples of this.

There was a sort of like health care medic-focused website that I was looking at, and there are no options said, no, I don't want to help people survive. And I was like, that's really dark.

Like, I'm going to click yes and buy this thing just because I can't live with it what I'll feel like if I click no. And my understanding of temptation was pretty similar to that, where God basically puts a little pop-up in my life with the options of, yes, I want to follow God, or, no, I love sinning.

[17 : 12] We all know which one we're going to select. Yes, I want to follow God, even if I don't want to. Or maybe, no, I love sinning, and then I'll just feel bad about it. The other way I've heard temptation talked about is that temptation is a way that God makes people stronger.

There's a saying that I've heard before, which I can guarantee you is not in the Bible, that says, God gives his toughest battles to his strongest soldiers. And it's often laid over idyllic images like the one on the screen.

You look on Pinterest, you might find some of these, you might see these as fridge magnets, Instagram posts. So beyond my pretty clear doubt that this is theologically accurate, I have to be honest that I don't want God's toughest battles.

I don't want them. I'll pass on the tough battles. But as a little bit of levity, I do appreciate that this has given me one of my favorite memes of all time. So, it says, God gives me, gives his toughest battles to his strongest soldiers.

I don't know if that's a raccoon or a possum. That's a possum? Great. I am not one of them. I am not one of the strongest soldiers. Please make it stop. And I feel this way.

[18 : 34] I think a lot of the time when I look at the evil in the world, when I feel those kind of generosity going away from me at my own hardness of heart, I'm just like, I'm not strong enough.

Please just make this stop. I'm an possum just playing dead in the road. I don't want this anymore. But all jokes aside, my confusion around this verse increased when I looked at the scope of Scripture.

Like in James 1, 13 through 15, that says pretty clearly, God does not tempt people. It's very straightforward. And on a personal level, stuck in theological debates about does God tempt people or not had very little meaning to me.

Now, I'm not trying to discount that hardship and suffering certainly can be transformative. But I don't think that's primarily what Lead Us Not Into Temptation is talking about.

So let's look at three different translations because I think that the way we've translated this verse has made it a little bit difficult to understand it. So on the screen, we have three translations.

[19 : 47] One is the ESV, the English Standard Version. One is from the NRSV. NRSV and one from the FNV, which is the First Nations Version. It's a newer translation written by indigenous scholars who have translated from the Greek into English, but using a lot of their cultural frameworks for the words.

So we see in the ESV the language that we used earlier Lead Us Not Into Temptation. The NRSV says, do not bring us to the time of trial.

And the First Nations Version says, guide us away from the things that tempt us to stray from your good road. So this verse isn't referring as much to an internal temptation from within, but something something else.

And we can understand this by looking at the Sermon on the Mount, which gives us an answer to what Jesus is talking about here. Think back to the audience.

These were people who knew times of trial and hardship. There would have been people in that crowd who were sick, unable to work, taken to court by their neighbors, and sued for everything that they had.

[21 : 12] That is a time of trial. There would have been people in the crowd who had experienced violence at the hands of the Roman military, the occupying force that essentially was the police of Judea.

That was a time of trial. There would have been people in the crowd who were forced into debt, losing the land that had been in their family for generations. That was a time of trial.

There would have been people in the crowd who were considered unclean, shunned from society, and socially excluded. That was a time of trial for them. So this prayer, lead us not into a time of trial, prayed by those who had been through countless trials, was a communal cry for equity, for justice, for God to lead them away from situations where their land belonged to wealthy, absentee landlords, for God to lead them away from situations where they were treated as less than or they're excluded from society.

It reminds me of the numerous times in the Hebrew Scriptures where the people of Israel called out to God to see their suffering, to see their trials. So rather than an abstract, don't let me feel internal urges to do something wrong, this part of the prayer would have carried with it indignation, anguish, the cry of God.

Do not put us in situations where we are in debt, where we don't have enough food, where we face discrimination and violence. And the beauty of this is that the Lord's Prayer encouraged people to bring those trials before God.

[23 : 01] They weren't meant to be ignored or swept into the rug. They encouraged, bring those trials, those things that you are angry about, those injustices that you rage against, bring them into your prayers before God.

As much as it is a cry to God, I think that the act of praying lead us not into a time of trial was also intended for the people praying and the people listening.

It would have stirred up humility, it would have been a communal promise that they would not put each other through those trials either. As a community, the daily prayer do not bring us into a time of trial was reaffirming the commitment that they would not do the same to each other as had been done to them.

That they would not lead each other into trials of debt. They would not lead each other into trials of theft, the trials of discrimination. going back to the structure of this prayer where these human-centered statements are how we see God's will done on earth, we can say that God's will is done on earth when we speak honestly before our creator and our community of the trials that we are going through.

When we rightfully rage against the injustices that we have seen and experienced, and when we remember in humility that we too are capable of putting others through trial.

[24 : 43] And so after this cry of anguish, after this cry of humility, we come to the fourth request. Deliver us from evil.

Just like with the third request, we haven't done very many favors to ourselves with how we translate this. So we're going to look at the same three translations to look at some differences between them. So in the ESV, we see lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

In the, in our SV, we see do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. And then finally, in the first nations version, we see, guide us away from the things that tempt us to stray from your good road, set us free from the evil one and his worthless ways.

The key difference in most translations is between the words evil or evil one. they all agree that we're being delivered, we're being rescued from something, but they're not as clear on what it is we're being delivered and rescued from.

It brings up the question of what is the evil spoken of here? Who is the evil one? Is the evil one referring to a spiritual being called Satan that tempts people, that controls people?

[26 : 15] Is it evil, just generally speaking, anything bad in the world? Now here at the table, we don't often use terms like spiritual warfare, we don't often talk about Satan in our sermons, but I spent many of my foundational years, my faith, within the charismatic church, within a Pentecostal setting where we talked every day about spiritual warfare, Satan, and demons.

Every day. And I can't deny that the things that I saw and experienced in those settings seemed to reflect that evil had a spiritual and a personal aspect to it.

Evil was talked about as something that was in the room with us. It wasn't this big system out there, it was here. And there's also a sense of hope and victoriousness that happened in those rooms, those conversations of evil is here in the room, and Jesus can deliver us from evil.

As I've shared, my background is primarily more in talking about evil in terms of structure and systems. But I found that talking about evil just in that way can feel very impersonal to me.

It feels very abstract at times. evil is, whereas my experience of evil is that it can be very personal. It can be people that I know and people that I love.

[28 : 00] It can be people around me, my neighbors. And I think that both the language of the charismatic church and the language of systems can come together to help us understand a bit more about what evil is and what it looks like to be delivered from it.

Thankfully, Jesus tells us what exactly he's talking about when he says evil. So this is not the first time in the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus speaks of evil.

Earlier in the passage, in Matthew 5, 38 through 42, we see Jesus talking about evil doers. and he uses the same word that he uses in the Lord's Prayer.

He's using them to describe certain actions. And we see these on the screen. In Matthew 5, 38 through 42, Jesus talks about evil doers as somebody who strikes you, somebody who uses violence against you.

Jesus describes evil as someone who sues you for everything you have, including the clothes on your back, one who takes everything from you. Jesus describes evil as someone who unjustly forces you to work for them.

[29 : 25] Now, within that context, it's really hard for me to think that Jesus pivots for one line to talk about a spiritual being called Satan that is not mentioned again for the rest of the Sermon on the Mount.

I think within context, it feels very clear to me that the evil Jesus is talking about is the evil that he's already described, that he's already told the crowd about that they've seen.

This was an outer evil that could be seen, that could be observed, that was committed by people. Not only that, but this was an evil that was often legally allowable.

evil that could be evil. So Jesus wasn't talking about Satan as a small devil on your shoulder that whispers things into your ears saying, go do this thing, go do that thing.

But talking about court systems, about economic systems, about policing systems, the evils that Jesus' audience would have been praying for deliverance from were evils that they could see.

[30 : 33] The neighbor who they thought they could trust, who brings them into court and sues them. The Roman soldier who discriminates against them because they're from Judea.

The judge who makes decisions that benefit the wealthy. It was an outer systematic evil. But at the same time, we can see that through the rest of the gospel that Jesus speaks of an evil that comes from within, that has some personal elements to it.

Leonardo Buff is a Brazilian theologian who puts it this way. He says that in his exhortations, Jesus does not warn the disciples to beware of uncontrollable and diabolical forces, but to beware of the excessive yearning that can come from their own hearts.

For these are what corrupt a person's life. What keeps one from entering the kingdom is not so much the devil as it is wealth, as it is excessive worry, as it is a self-centered attitude, passing judgment on others, lusting for power, honor, and glory, an exaggerated, sterile piety, and the temptation to abuse the good faith of others.

The principal cause of the world's ills is to be found in our insensitivity, our lack of solidarity, and the failure to love.

[32 : 12] These are the real demons that we must exercise from our lives. And so, although I don't necessarily believe that there is a single being called Satan, I do, but there is a spiritual power behind the evils that Jesus talks about, which is why deliverance from evil is something that we pray for.

It's a spiritual act. It's something that we pray for within us, and we pray for in the world around us. And so the last line reads, lead us not into temptation, sorry, I have about 30 years of unlearning all that verse, lead us not into times of trial, and deliver us from evil.

This last line feels kind of unsatisfying to me, to be honest. It feels like it ends abruptly. It just ends, deliver us from evil. It doesn't answer the question of how does God deliver us from this evil?

how does God rescue us from those times of trial? Is it through societal revolution, like the liberation theologians would suggest, where we dismantle the systems around us?

Is it through prayer and fasting, through exorcism, like my charismatic brethren have taught me? Or does this not happen at all, actually, in this world, but only in the one to come?

[33 : 45] And yet again, the Lord's prayer answers that question for us. Being delivered from evil happens when we ensure that we have our daily bread, that those who need have enough, and that no one has too much.

Being delivered from evil happens when we go about the work of forgiveness, both in our personal relationships and in the world around us. Being delivered from evil happens when we are indignant, when we are angry and cry out to God at the trials and the suffering of this world and the ones that we go through personally.

That is how God delivers us from evil. And lastly, deliverance from evil happens in community. For me to be delivered from evil, I need you, every single person in this room.

And for you to be delivered from evil, you need me. We are able to give each other gifts of wisdom, of courage, sometimes of confrontation, as we walk together towards what we here at the table often call collective liberation, God's will being done on earth.

God's kingdom comes to earth, God's will is done on earth, when we are delivered from evil by loving and caring for each other.

[35 : 26] As we move towards a time of communion and worship, I want to end with some words from a gospel song by Hezekiah Walker.

The song is called I Need You to Survive. I'm not on our worship team, I will not be singing these lines, so go listen to Hezekiah Walker afterwards. It's one of the few worship songs that I feel like involves us talking to each other, which is what the Lord's prayer was, talking to each other.

So the song, it goes, I pray for you, pray for me. I love you. I need you to survive.

I won't harm you with words from my mouth. I love you. I need you to survive. And I would add here, I need you to be delivered from evil, and you need me to be delivered from evil, as we worship the Creator who brings all of us, who brings our friends, our neighbors, and even our enemies into the collective liberation that He has promised to us.

Amen.