Deliver Us from Evil

Last in the series; Humble Prayers for Thanksgiving

# Scripture: Matthew 6:13; 1 Peter 5:6-11

# Key thought: In humility before God we are instructed to pray for deliverance from evil.

# Intro:

## Conscious of the contrast at Thanksgiving

I don’t know about you, but at great times of Thanksgiving like this past week, when I am so conscious of all the blessings I enjoy, I also become a little more conscious of the stark contrast between the things for which I give thanks and the evil in the world. Evil never seems to go away. The handiwork of the enemy of our souls –war, broken relationships, drug addictions, injustice, greed and immorality are too much in evidence. Whenever such human-caused tragedies of our world are held up next to the ideals and benefits of Christian living, I become more conscious of my need to pray one particular petition in the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray, both for myself and for others.

I feel compelled to pray, “Deliver us from evil.”

## “Evil” or “evil one”

You have probably noticed that translations are split between the readings “deliver us from evil” (KJV, ESV) and “from the evil one” (NRSV, NIV). The Greek form can be either neuter or masculine. However, according to Expositor’s Bible Commentary, the prepositional construction found here is more often used of persons than things. So more present day translations tend to side with the rendering "evil one." In fact the Greek form is the same as in Mathew 13:38 where Jesus contrasts the children of the kingdom with the children “of the wicked one” (toú ponērú). Yet an older commentator points out that in 2 Tim. 4:18 Paul uses an almost identical Greek structure to refer to “evil deeds.” Practically, it makes little difference because if we are to be delivered from spiritual evil, from evil deeds, and giving in to temptation, we must also be delivered from the power and influence and chicanery of the evil one.

# More than a liturgy for recitation

## A guide, not just a recitation

It’s so important to understand that Jesus gave us the Lord’s Prayer to be so much more than a memorized recitation. Sometimes we treat it as something that we get points for repeating as if it were a meritorious good deed in and of itself. This was not Jesus’ intention in giving us this example for prayer. Jesus’ introduction to the prayer in Matthew 6:9 does not say, “Pray this,” but rather, “Pray then in this way!” (NRSV) or to use a parallel construction, “Pray like this!” In other words, the example of prayer that Jesus is giving us is not something simply to say by rote, it is a model after which we should pattern our prayers. It is a list of topics that are proper for us to cover in our prayers. It displays the right attitudes for Christians approaching their heavenly Father. The order of subjects in the prayer will help us if we order our own prayers in a similar way. It’s not that there’s anything wrong with us repeating the Lord’s Prayer. We do so almost every Sunday as a part of our worship and we do so also in Bible studies. It’s just that we need to be aware that the reason we repeat it is because it is so important for us to pray its sentiments. Using the words Jesus gave us is good, but using the concepts, and the order, and the ideas, and then putting the prayer into our own words is even better.

Once when I was a student, I was asked to speak at a youth group event and to lead a group of teenagers in a prayer service. Like most people who have never used any kind of outline to help with their prayers, the group’s prayer time had typically been pretty short. Five minutes was a long time for the group to pray. Somebody listed off the request ahead of time. Somebody prayed for them. Maybe one person said something about one of them. And that was about it. Does that sound like the prayer groups you been in? Well, JoAnne and I explained the concept of conversational prayer to the teenagers. Conversational prayer usually proceeds by each person only praying one or two sentences on one topic at a time. Then another person is to pray on the same topic, only a sentence or two. After there is silence, someone may be led to pray on another topic, only a sentence or two. Then another a sentence on that topic. Maybe a third person speaks to God about that same topic. Then there is quiet. Perhaps the leader introduces another topic. And the pattern continues. We also suggested to the teens that we use the Lord’s Prayer as an outline for how to proceed in our time of prayer together. To make a long story short, with very little coaching, the team prayer time that evening lasted 45 minutes with very little silence. The leaders were shocked. The teens could not believe that much time had passed. It was all because they had used the Lord’s Prayer as an outline and guide for prayer rather than as a recitation.

## Pray this petition alone too

This concept also means that we might pray an extended prayer on just one area suggested by the Lord’s Prayer. We might pray just about the petition “Deliver us from evil” out of our hearts crying out to God even if we are not praying the whole prayer. We can pray words to that effect on many topics. For example: “Lord, please help me to overcome this temptation in my life.” Or maybe we are talking to God about the cultural issue in the news the last two weeks, the treatment of women. “Oh Lord, please deliver us from the devilish perspective that men of power can take advantage of women. Please continue to expose this evil and bring it to justice. Please bring us back to an acknowledgment of your holy ways.” By making these kinds of prayers a regular part of our prayer lives, the petition , “Deliver us from evil” becomes a regular part of our prayer life just like giving thanks, or words of adoration or prayers of confession, or times of intercession.

# Understanding our vulnerability

## Pictures of spiritual protection

Let’s try to examine more deeply what we are talking about when we speak of spiritual protection. For example, there is a very instructive contrast in the book of Numbers that will help us. In Num. 14:1-10, in the account of the report of the 12 spies who had gone into Canaan, we learn that the children of Israel rebelled against the report of the two faithful spies, Joshua and Caleb. But Joshua and Caleb spoke bravely to the people who were thinking of stoning them and tried to persuade them to follow God’s leading. Joshua and Caleb said of the Canaanites, “Their protection is gone” (Num. 14:9) which contrasted with Israel’s situation “The Lord is with us.” In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses explains God’s protection for Israel,

For the Lord your God moves about in your camp to protect you and to deliver your enemies to you. “Deut 23:14”

We conclude then that the favor of God in the spiritual realm, though beyond our awareness, greatly influences our lives and brings us spiritual protection. This is partly what Jesus is urging us to pray for.

## What spiritual protection does and doesn’t do.

We have to admit that there is a great deal of mystery about spiritual protection. Often, spiritual protection seems to translate into physical protection as well. For example, in the case of Elisha in OT, God opened the eyes of Elisha’s servant to see spiritual reality and the servant saw the armies of God around the city defending Elisha (2 Kings 6:17). Twice in the book of Acts, Peter was released from jail by an angel.

But it was not always so that spiritual protection equaled physical protection. In the OT, Job enjoyed spiritual protection, but he lost all he had except his wife and his life. No one was ever closer to God than Jesus, yet he was crucified. The apostle James was beheaded and the deacon Stephen was martyred.

So how do we sort out this idea of praying for spiritual protection?

At least once in Scripture, a prophet experienced a lack of physical protection for the sake of spiritual protection. That man was Balaam. The Bible tells us that God allowed Balaam’s foot to be crushed against the rocks by his donkey so that Balaam’s spiritual eyes would be open to the greater spiritual danger that he was in. Balaam was about to let greed cause him to betray his prophetic calling (Num. 22).

We are explicitly told in Rom. 8:31-38 that when we walk with Jesus, our spiritual protection transcends the outward state of our physical circumstances.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom 8:35-39

So we conclude that while spiritual protection often results in physical protection, they are not the same thing. If fact, we can be spiritually protected even in circumstances where we were not physically protected.

## We must understand our vulnerability

One of our problems today, and a key reason why we do not pray more than we do is that we fail to understand our spiritual vulnerability to the enemy.

Jesus said to Peter in Gethsemane,

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Matt 26:41

So another reason that we need spiritual protection is our fleshly weakness in the face of temptation.

In Rev. 12:12, 17 our spiritual enemy is pictured as an enormous serpent dragon making war with the assistance of evil angels against Christian people.

Paul counsels us:

Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Eph. 6:12 NIV

So we must understand that today in the spiritual realm there are powerful forces at war against us as Christians.

Jesus speaks of some of the ways the devil attacks us.

For example, he refers to the evil one in Mathew 5.

Do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.
Matt 5:36, 37 NIV

So one kind of temptation that the enemy of our souls sends our way is the temptation to take God’s name in vain and speak in ways that dishonor God.

When Jesus is explaining his parable of the sower or parable of the soils, he said to the disciples,

When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. Matt 13:19 NIV

So another way that the evil one is active is in distracting us from hearing the messages that God has for us.

Peter warns us:

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8 NIV

When the lion roars it is related to seeking prey. Our spiritual enemy desires to prey upon us. Unless we understand our vulnerability we will not be motivated to pray this prayer, “Deliver us from evil.”

# Conclusion

# Claiming our victory through Jesus

But being vulnerable does not mean that we are on the losing side.

We do not pray out of weakness and fear of failure. Rather we pray in order to obtain victory through Jesus our Lord. We pray as a means of claiming the Bible’s promises of victory.

## Claim the Promises concerning spiritual protection

The enemy seeks to use other people who are following the devil’s ways and listening to him, consciously or unconsciously, to destroy us. But God promises to defend and vindicate us.

 The wicked lie in wait for the righteous, intent on putting them to death;
 but the Lord will not leave them in the power of the wicked or let them be condemned when brought to trial. Ps 37:32-33 NIV

 Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice.
He rescues me unharmed from the battle waged against me, even though many oppose me.

Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken. Ps 55:17-18, 22 NIV

And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people, for not everyone has faith. But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.
 2 Thess. 3:2, 3 NIV

The enemy seeks to use difficult circumstances to undermine God’s people and God’s work, but God promises that he will help and uphold his people and make us victorious.

The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord; he is their stronghold in time of trouble. The Lord helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him. Ps 37:39-40 NIV

“Because he loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.
He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. Ps 91:14-15

The enemy desires to accuse us before God but God promises that he will not be successful because Jesus is the believer’s advocate.

We never have to feel that we do not have and advocate before God, for I John 2:1 tells us that Jesus is the one who speaks to the Father in our defense.

## Three beautiful images of God’s protection in Scripture

One of the beautiful metaphors of divine protection in the Bible is the repeated description of God as our shield.

For the Lord God is a sun and shield; Ps 84:11 NIV

The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. Ps 28:7

We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. Ps 33:20

If you go to a dentist’s office and need a tooth x-ray, they will put a heavy shield over your throat and chest to protect you from the radiation. A shield is something interposed between the threat and the intended victim. God interposes himself between devil and us.

Another Biblical illustration of God as our protection is the picture of God as encircling his people for defense. There are some variations of this in Scripture.

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.
 Ps 34:7 NIV

Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people both now and forevermore. Ps 125:1-2

A third Biblical image of God’s protection is a maternal one.

He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. Ps 91:4

All of these Biblical pictures are given to us to assure us of God’s desire and intention to protect us spiritually.

## Entering into Jesus’ victorious intercession

There is yet another powerful word of assurance to us in Scripture.

Jesus himself has prayed this prayer for our deliverance ahead of us and when we pray it, we are entering into his intercession for us. Remember that in his high priestly prayer for us he prayed:

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. John 17:15

Jesus has already prayed that we would be delivered from evil! So we can pray with confidence! Though we face a powerful enemy, Jesus has interceded and won the victory already. Paul assured us of this.

"And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." Col 2:15

So friends, we have confidence in God to hear our prayers.

"The Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one."
2 Thess. 3:3