**Matthew 6:13b** August 21, 2016

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*Matthew 6:13b“But deliver us from evil.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

I hope and pray that in this past week the Lord has kept evil from your doorstep, from the people closest to you. And if you have felt the sting of evil, may you trust that God will use it for his loving purpose.

Before we get to the text for today, I need to tell you that this will be the last of our series on the Lord’s Prayer. But why end here? Isn’t there a little bit more? Don’t we pray, *“For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, now and forever. Amen.”*? Indeed, that is what we pray. But if you look in your Bibles, except for one or two translations, *“For thine is the kingdom…”* does not appear in the Bible. This is not 21st century historical revisionism. The Catholic Church—some of you at one time worshiped in the Catholic Church and you know this—the Catholic Church has never prayed this closing. Maybe you didn’t know this: When Martin Luther wrote his catechism explaining the Lord’s Prayer for Christians, he left out these closing words. The church has always known these words to be a later addition.

Which makes us ask, “Should we, in fact, even pray it?” These words are not found in the prayer that Jesus taught to his disciples in Matthew chapter 6, but it is a godly prayer. Instead, it seems to be modeled on another part of Scripture. In 1 Chronicles 29 David prayed, *“From everlasting to everlasting. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor”* (vv.10-11). So, even though this ending is almost certainly a later addition, we should not fear that this is displeasing to our heavenly Father. It is a fitting close to the Lord’s Prayer.

However, the text we consider today is this:

**“Deliver us from evil.”**

**I. Can’t Deny It, Evil Is Out There**

If you ever get into religious discussions with non-Christians, sooner or later—and it might be later—you will hear something along these lines: “How can there be a loving god with so much evil and suffering in this world.” That is a pretty strong argument on the face of it. No sensible person can deny the existence of evil. Nor can any Christian claim to be immune from it. We see it, we know it, we experience it. There is a Christian hymn “The World Is Very Evil.” Some might remember it from the old hymnal, but it didn’t make the cut in 1993. But there it is, Christians admitting that this world is very evil.

When Jesus tells us to pray for deliverance from “evil,” maybe we should define evil. “Evil” brings up images of wicked, sinful, destructive behavior and people. Moral evil that make the news reports and millions of views on social media. That is the English connotation behind the word. The Bible word “evil”, in the Greek language, had a wider meaning. It was not just moral evil, but also all that is not good. An example? Think of all the destruction by floods in Louisiana. In English, we would probably consider that bad, but not evil. Yet in the Greek language that would fit under what Jesus teaches us when he says, ***“Pray… Deliver us from evil.”***

Last week we prayed, *“Lead us not into temptation.”* That spoke of the internal struggle. *“Lead us not into temptation”* prayed that we keep far sin, that we not be perpetrators of evil. This week’s ***“Deliver us from evil”*** is different. It is a prayer that we not be the victims of evil. It is a prayer that the things we fear stay far from our house and our loved ones.

When Jesus teaches us to pray, ***“Our Father… Deliver us from evil,”*** we are really entrusting all aspects of our lives to him. We pray that the detrimental, painful, unpleasant things of this world stay away.

It is sometimes said that pastors don’t live in the real world. There is *some* truth to that, but only some. This week I heard that a classmate of mine was buried. He graduated from the Seminary with me. As of last week he was still a pastor. He had a wife and three children. His wife was rushing him to the hospital and on the way he had a massive heart attack, and that was it. His Savior called him from this life at age 47. And while the Lord has his time and plans, this man’s family certainly looks at this as one of the darkest moments of life; yes we might even say, as “evil”.

You, too, hear of much evil. Evil includes the tragedies every family experiences sooner or later. The evil we pray to be delivered from includes almost daily murders within an hour of your house, it includes the damage and destruction of 40,000 houses by floodwaters. You know people trapped in abusive relationships; that is evil. You too know classmates afflicted with disease which lingers and wastes and leeches life. We know of evil in far-off lands like Iraq and Syria where ISIS does evil of every evil. We pray, for ourselves and others, ***“Deliver us from evil.”***

But while the Christian prays, the agnostic, atheist, or unbeliever would like to go up to God’s throne and shake his finger at him, blaming him for the evils of this world. “How can you do such things?! What is the meaning of all this?” If God were to give such a person an audience, all he would need to do is turn that person’s head around and say, “Let’s see whose doing this really is.”

God could open the unbeliever’s eyes to look back in time and watch the creation of light out of darkness. And he would hear God’s decree, “It is good.” When God created the green grass, the leafy trees and the colorful flowers, “It is good.” When God made the birds, fish and land animals, “It is good.” When he stood back and looked at the completion of the universe, including mankind, God changed his tune and said, “It is *very* good!”

Having watched the unfolding of creation, God would tell him, “This evil you speak of, it is not mine.” And God would show that unbeliever what followed and how the source of all the evil, the violence, the sickness, the pain, the depression, the oppression, the loss of child and spouse, all of it, had its origin not in God, but elsewhere. Because even after Satan’s great rebellion, God insulated the created physical world from the effects of Satan’s fall. Even then, all was still good. What was required for all humanity to fall into the evils we know was not God, nor even Satan, but our choice. It was mankind’s free choice that poured the evils we see into God’s creation. We chose freedom. We chose autonomy from God’s will. We chose sin, and now we reap the whirlwind.

**II. Deliver Us – A Prayer of Faith**

When we pray, ***“Deliver us from evil.”*** We are praying about the difference. We pray about the difference between that first perfection and what we now experience. We pray that God will deliver us from all the evil things that we have invited into this world by our human choice.

So we pray. When we pray for deliverance from evil, we pray in faith. It is not just throwing a prayer out there hoping that God will maybe hear and maybe answer. That is how many people pray. And how else could they pray? They have not prayed to God in weeks, months or years in spite of his invitations. Never mind that they have ridiculed his rules for their lives, that they have neglected their relationship with God, that they have mocked and scoffed at the idea of God’s sovereignty. But with the signs of real trouble, they show up on God’s doorstep.

They come with that prayer, *“Please God, help.”* It is not a prayer of faith, because they do not trust God like you do. They utter a prayer of hopeless, last-resort, self-seeking desperation. Such people never had faith and trust in God. Regarding this kind of prayer God says, *“When he asks… he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord”* (James 1:6-7). Oh yes, God can choose to answer such prayers, and in his mercy he sometimes even does. But such a person cannot confidently lay hold of God’s promises because God’s promises do not apply to such people.

Yet there is a way that even such people can be brought into God’s household, under his protection. God’s protective presence becomes theirs when they repent and, abandoning hope in themselves, trust Jesus Christ.

But you who know God, who have known his goodness, who have experienced his favor, you approach God and are certain of his hearing even in the worst of times. In Jesus’ name, he will listen.

The Bible is full of examples of believers who prayed to God, and God delivered them from evil. When the sick came to Jesus and prayed for his deliverance from those evils, Jesus answered. He delivered them. When godly kings of Israel prayed for deliverance from Israel's enemies, God provided the way out.

**III. What about When We’re Not Delivered?**

But God does not answer all prayers in such a way, and that brings questions. Why does God not deliver all his people from all the evil of this world? We might even begin to ask the questions the unbelievers ask, “If God is so good and loving, why does this happen to me, his child?”

This question is not unanswered. When the unbeliever challenges us with that question, “How can a good and loving god allow the evil we see in our world?”

* Think of that man Joseph, enslaved and imprisoned for 13 years. Do you think he never prayed to be delivered? Thirteen years is a long time! Perhaps you remember that at the end of 13 years Joseph ended up in a position of authority to save thousands of people from starvation. Joseph witnessed to his former tormentors: *“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives”* (Gen. 50:20).
* We should also remember the sermon message from about four weeks ago. *“Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons… God disciplines us for our good.”* (Heb. 12:7,10). What we call “evil” can be the same unpleasantness that an adult looks back upon and says, “Yes, my parents did love me.” Or to use another picture, the same pain that an Olympic athlete experiences in training for the race of a lifetime.
* Sometimes God allows “evil” to protect his beloved child from even worse things. Isaiah 57:1 says, *“The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil.”*

As we go through God’s word we find many different reasons that God allows evil to happen, even to his own children. God’s has a long-range plan greater than we can imagine. All of this world’s “evils”, even the great evil of death, is a short-term step in God’s long-term plans. His long-term plan is that as many as possible may share the blessedness of eternal life in Jesus’ name.

Which is what it means to pray, ***“Deliver us from evil.”*** It is a prayer that God wants us to pray. It is a prayer of faith, faith that God has power, that he will work for our good, that he will protect us from what is eternally detrimental, but it is a prayer that leaves the answer in God’s hands and his wisdom.

In closing, let us look at the last portion of the Lord’s Prayer as explained in our catechism, under the 7th petition:

*In conclusion we pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would deliver us from every evil that threatens body and soul, property and reputation, and finally when our last hour comes, grant us a blessed end and graciously take us from this world of sorrow to himself in heaven. Amen.*