

## Deliver Us From Evil

Tom Peryer

Ephesians 6:10-18

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As we have heard already, today is the last in our series on how and what to pray for linked to the Lord's Prayer – the prayer that Jesus himself taught us. By the way the picture on the title slide is Picasso's painting called Guernica – inspired by the bombing of the Spanish town of Guernica in the Spanish Civil War.

When Jesus responded to the disciples request as to how they should pray, he gave them not just a set of words to pray every day or every time they came together, not just a structure for putting their prayers and praying together but he was also teaching them a way of thinking spiritually and providing them with a pattern for godly living.

And in the last section of the prayer, '*Lead us not into temptation or testing but deliver us from evil*', he is making clear that in our lives and in our world we face enormous challenges, pressures and forces which are all designed to weaken and eradicate everything that belongs to the light and to God himself. And we need rescuing or delivering from those forces and pressures because we cannot do it on our own or save ourselves.

As we shall see when we pray the phrase 'deliver us from evil' or when we pray in and around and through that phrase, we are praying:

- Lord rescue me and deliver me from those things within me and my nature which are contrary to you and contrary to what you want me to be and be like

We are praying:

- Lord deliver us from those forces and those people who would seek to undermine us and weaken or destroy our faith

We are praying:

- Lord rescue your church, deliver your church from the onslaughts of Satan, from Governments and Caesars who would make the church conform to their image or wipe it out altogether

We are praying:

- God deliver and rescue your world and the people in it who you love from the actions of all those who seek to dominate and oppress.

And there are many more things we are praying when we pray deliver us from evil. Now let's dig into it a bit more.

**First let's consider the prevalence and presence of evil.**

## 1) The prevalence of evil

The first thing to say is that I believe our modern understanding of the word 'evil' is very different to the way it is used in the New Testament, where it is almost equivalent to 'sin' and 'sinful'.

We usually reserve the word 'evil' for some of the worst things done by human beings:

- Think Auschwitz and Belsen and the holocaust – we might especially think that in this time of heightened antisemitism.
- Or we might think of horrific serial murderers like Fred and Rose West.
- Then there is historic and modern slavery, or those who scam people out of their savings or those who sexually abuse children.

And so on and so on.

I don't suppose we would look around this church or around the people travelling into Bath on the bus or people gathered with their children in Victoria Park as being examples of 'evil'. But actually, Jesus and the later New Testament writers used the Greek word meaning evil to cover if you like, a multitude of sins – not just the very worst.

For example, Jesus included our thought-life as well as our actions in the 'evil category'. He said:

### Matthew 15:19

**“<sup>19</sup>For out of the heart come evil thoughts – murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”**

Talking to a group of the holier-than-thou sect, he said:

**Matthew 9:4**

**“4 ‘Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?’”**

On another occasion, talking about God’s generous nature, he said:

**Matthew 7:11**

**“11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”**

The apostle James says:

**James 1:14**

**“14 but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.”**

So, in the way in which scripture refers to ‘evil’, it is more like the opposite of ‘good’ – a word which we don’t just use for the highest examples of goodness.

At one end of the spectrum if you like are those habits and faults within ourselves – impatience, intolerance, envy, minor resentments and at the other end of the spectrum are death and destruction unleashed by governments and megalomaniacs, or the millions of unjustified and unwarranted abortions, millions in thrall to addictions and those addictions wreaking havoc on themselves, families, communities and society at large. The over-exploitation and abuse of our planet earth and of course demonic forces and practices. And there is a multitude of sin and evil in between.

We can say then that evil forces and the consequences of evil are everywhere from the almost invisible to the full-on in your face kind. Everything that stands opposed to the good can be thought of as evil. It is prevalent and present everywhere and in everyone, to one degree or another.

## 2) The Person of Evil

Having thought about the prevalence of evil from which we all need deliverance, we can now turn to the person or personification of evil. In scripture this person is referred to as either the devil or Satan. Those two words are interchangeable. Also interchangeable is the last word of the Lord's prayer, in Greek 'poneros' ([πονηρός](#)), which can just as easily be translated as 'the evil one'. In fact, that is how some Bible translations, for example the NIV, which is the one we mostly use in church, translate 'poneros'. In other words we can equally well read it as 'Deliver us from the evil one' as it can mean 'Deliver us from evil.'

To the modern Western sensibility, and indeed for many Christians, the idea of God as a person is challenging but even more challenging or incomprehensible is the idea that evil and evil power can be thought in terms of a person or persons.

Nowadays we have in our secular, materialistic thinking made the devil into a figure of fun, a caricature to be brought out in masks, capes and plastic pitchforks at Halloween. An entirely imaginary character.

We've taken inspiration, if that is the right word, from the medieval illustrations of the devil like these ones. But Jesus didn't see him as a figure of fun nor did the apostles. Nor did they fall for one of the devil's most successful strategies of getting clever and educated people to think he does not exist. And in fact, Satan is a master of disguise and deceit, so he mostly doesn't appear in an obviously grotesque and evil-looking way. St Paul refers to him masquerading as an angel of light.

Jesus took Satan seriously. He told Peter in that upper room: 'Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail.'

#### **Luke 22:31-32**

**“<sup>31</sup> ‘Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. <sup>32</sup> But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail.’”**

And on that same occasion, the eye-witness apostle John writes:

#### **John 13:27**

**“<sup>17</sup> As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.”**

When he was criticised for “working” on the Sabbath by healing a woman Jesus turned on his critics saying:

#### **John 13:27**

**“<sup>16</sup> ‘Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?’”**

And the apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians explaining the trouble Satan was giving him and his plans. He wrote:

#### **1 Thessalonians 2:18**

**“<sup>18</sup> For we wanted to come to you – certainly I, Paul, did, again and again – but Satan blocked our way.”**

So, it is very clear that we need to think in terms both of 'evil' and as the Scots might say, the 'deevil'. Deliver us from evil and deliver us from the evil one. Just as we can talk about the power of love and the power of forgiveness and the power of the cross, and ultimately the power of God, so we can talk about the power of hate, the power of addiction and the power of the devil or Satan. God is real. Satan is real. Love is a force to be reckoned with. Hatred is a force to be reckoned with.

### 3) The Long War

And of course, these forces are at war with each other. This is where we come to the battle or the long war against evil. In our English history, we had something called the 100 Years War but this war against evil against Satan and his forces has been going on for much longer than 100 years and it is an on-going war which will continue until the final defeat, when God will put all things under Christ's feet.

Sometimes this war and the battles with evil are very obvious but as often as not, these battles are unseen and hidden. We sometimes refer to a person 'battling with his demons' – which are often drink or drugs or a feeling of worthlessness or uncontrollable anger and often those things are hidden from most people's eye.

In the world of geo-politics, most of us are unaware of the wars of espionage, of propaganda, of the infiltration into IT systems of bugs and ransoms. We only have an inkling of what is happening in the field of artificial intelligence when it comes to modern and future warfare or the domination of our minds by the algorithms of corporations and countries.

In our reading from Ephesians, we are told:

#### **Ephesians 6:12**

**“<sup>12</sup> For 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.”**

Much of the battle is unseen - even by Christians. We are only dimly aware of it. But it is going on all the same – and when we pray the deliverance prayer, we need to be mindful of this heavenly spiritual battle.

You remember our first reading from Kings and that very scared servant of Elisha when he saw the army of the king of Aram. Elisha told him, “Those who are with us are more than those who are against us” and Elisha prayed “Lord open his eyes that he may see” Then the Lord opened his servants eyes and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Jesus rebuked his disciples in the garden of Gethsemane when they drew their swords.

#### **Matthew 26:53**

**“<sup>53</sup> Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?”**

But of course he chose not to.

So there is a battle and a war. Listen to these words from scripture. Jesus says:

#### **John 10:10**

**“<sup>53</sup> The thief (i.e. the devil) comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”**

Paul writes to the Romans:

**Romans 8:37**

**“<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”**

And to the Corinthians:

**1 Corinthians 15:57**

**“<sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

Jesus tells his disciples:

**John 16:33**

**“<sup>33</sup> ‘In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.’”**

Perhaps the battle of good against evil, of love against hate, of hope against despair was played out in and during the hours at Calvary.

Evil was seen in the way in which Satan entered into Judas... it was there in the unseen psychological testing and taunting of Jesus by Satan in the garden of Gethsemane ... it was there in the self-righteousness, fear, superiority and blindness of the Jewish religious authorities ...it was there in the weakness and cowardice of Pilate ...it was there is the delight in physical cruelty and torture of the Roman soldiers ...it was there in the denial and flight from Jesus by Peter and the others ....it was there in the mocking taunts of the crowd who stood around jeering. And every one of those examples of evil is going in in the world right now.

You could say and the world did say that God did not answer Jesus prayer to be delivered from evil. That Calvary was a defeat – it certainly seemed like that. In fact, that's what some of the onlookers said:

### Matthew 27:39-43

**“<sup>39</sup> Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads <sup>40</sup> and saying... ‘Come down from the cross’ ... <sup>41</sup> In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. <sup>42</sup> ‘He saved others,’ they said, ‘but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. <sup>43</sup> He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, “I am the Son of God.””**

You might say at 3pm on that Friday afternoon when the sky went black that the prayer for rescue and deliverance from evil had gone unanswered. But 3pm on Friday was not the end of the battle or the war. The evil one did not have the last word on that day nor will he have the last word on any other day. Two days later victory over death was declared when Jesus rose from the dead.

Hebrews tells us that Jesus became human ‘so that through his death he might destroy the Devil, who has the power over death’.

I like early renaissance pictures of Jesus entering hell, and putting the devil or one of the devil's minions. It is as if he kicked the gates of hell in and flattened the devil – particularly in that left hand one by the Dominican friar and painter Fr. Angelico.

#### 4) We are in the battle too

My final point is that we are not just passive prayers of the Lord's Prayer. In our prayer life and in our day-to-day life, we recognise that we are called to take part in the war against evil and every kind of wrong, just as we are meant to be builders of the kingdom. Every Christian is called to be a soldier in one sense or another. We are not meant to be armchair sergeants or generals. No - Christ wants us to fight alongside him under his leadership, using the resources, the armour, the tactics and the strategy that he has devised.

That's where the armour of God comes in in. And if you are new to this church you may not have noticed the stained-glass windows up there depicting the armour of God. **In this fight against evil we are to stand firm wearing God's armour.** And what does this armour and our weapons consist of?

- We wear a breastplate of righteousness – Christ's righteousness and goodness so that when the devil accuses us and slanders us we can point to Christ's righteousness
- We hold a shield of faith – we put our trust and faith wholeheartedly in God and his faithfulness and promises – no matter how bleak the situation is knowing that the final victory is assured
- Wherever we walk we walk wearing the shoes of peace not discord or bitterness
- Our head and body are covered by the salvation that God has worked for us through the cross and resurrection. We let that salvation permeate and protect our thinking, our imagination and our motivation.

- Then there is the sword which is the word of God. We use the scriptures not only to feed and grow spiritually but to fight off all that would seek to bring us low, to discourage us, to make us fearful. We turn to the psalms, to the promises of God. We know where they are to be found and we learn them by heart.

And not only do we use the armour God has given us we seek to use the tactics he has given us to win the fight against evil.

Tactics such as the very broad and far-reaching as in

- 'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.' Romans 12

Or very practical small things such as;

- Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Ephesians 4

And there are many more by way of advice, instruction and command.

So, to conclude. When we pray the Lord's prayer and especially the last line, we are not just thinking about being rescued from the very worst things that can happen. We are recognizing that **we need God's daily help to overcome those things in us which undermine the work of his Holy Spirit** as well as asking God to restrain all the forces in the world which are working against what is good and right. We are praying too and recognizing that there is an evil one who keeps men and women in thrall to him and in darkness and would do so to us if he could. There is a battle and a war going on between truth and lies, between love and hatred, between good and evil. The outcome of that war is certain but in the meantime we are called in prayer and in daily living to pray and work against all the tricks and treats of the devil, trusting in the Lord and being a true soldier of Jesus Christ.

Yes, in our spiritual war as an individual and as a family or a church there will be set-backs and struggles. **Not every day is a victory. But ultimately as we pray and rely on God and trust in his redeeming work, putting on his armour and the weapons and tactics he has given us, evil will be overcome, the battle and the war will be won.**

Let me end with the prayer that Paul prayed for the Ephesian Church and a prayer that we can all pray for ourselves and each other:

I pray that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened in order that we may know ...his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. This earth and all its groaning creation will be saved and then renewed. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory and who will deliver us from all evil.



@allsaintswestonchurch



All Saints Weston Church



01225 447663

All Saints Church, Church Street, Weston, Bath, BA1 4BT  
[office@allsaintsweston.org.uk](mailto:office@allsaintsweston.org.uk)    [allsaintsweston.org.uk](http://allsaintsweston.org.uk)