

DELIVERANCE FROM EVIL

"Deliver us from evil." Matthew 6:13.

In the second part of the Model Prayer we see a picture of real need. "Give us this day our daily bread"--hunger. "Forgive us our debts"--sin. "Lead us not into temptation"--weakness. "Deliver us from evil." Against powerful adversaries the child of God prays for forgiveness, for protection and for deliverance.

Our Lord taught us to pray, "Deliver us from evil," because it is His will that we should be delivered. In the midst of the conflict of Christian living, the Lord Jesus Christ plants this living hope in the heart of each one of His own--the hope that one day He shall break every yoke, snap every fetter, burst every chain, remove every burden and set His people free. So, while we here touch the greatest depths of human need, we also rise to the greatest heights of Christian faith and confidence in God. Notice the unlimited scope of this petition, "Deliver us from evil." The more one meditates on it the more conscious he becomes of its vastness and inclusiveness of it.

What does this word "evil" mean? We generally use it to describe two distinct things, one of them internal and the other external. One has to do with character and the other with circumstance; the one with sin and the other with sorrow. There is in all our lives what we call physical evil--pain, sorrow and everything that destroys our happiness. There is also what we call moral evil--everything that wars against our longings for character, purity and goodness. There is no part of human life which has not been blighted by evil.

So ceaselessly does the Spirit war against the flesh, and the flesh against the Spirit, that we cannot do the things that we would. Therefore, when we cry, "Lord, deliver us from evil!" we are actually saying, "O Lord, rescue us!" We are like men and women who have been overcome by the tempest and the flood. We are in imminent danger unless someone comes to our rescue.

There is no part of life which is not touched by evil. It has ruined our circumstances, it has marred our character, it has affected the whole of God's lovely creation, for Paul said: "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body," (Romans 8:22--23).

When we pray unto the Lord, "Deliver us from evil," we find the limitless breadth of that prayer covering everything that makes our bodies ache and our hearts break and our consciences sore. There is no boundary to the evil which has gripped this world. There is no limit to the evil which has gripped our hearts and molested our lives. Evil is the thing against which we Christians battle every day of our experience.

This petition is the natural cry of conscious weakness to infinite strength. It voices a universal longing. There is not one of us who has not at some time prayed for deliverance, if not with our lips, then with our hearts. It is a prayer that we can never cease to pray as long as we live in this world with its sins and griefs and graves. Deliverance--that is what Adam and Eve were seeking when, in the consciousness of their guilt, they hurried to hide themselves among the trees of the garden. It

was the longing of the Psalmist as he held up his crimsoned hands before God and cried: "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness." It was the prayer of tortured Job as he wailed, "When shall I arise, and the night be gone?" We hear it on the lips of Paul as he cries, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" Consciously or unconsciously man is forever crying, "Deliver us from evil."

This prayer indicates a desire for deliverance from all evil, for victory over every foe. We are asking for clean hands and a stainless heart. We are asking for the removal of all guilt. Most of all we are praying for freedom to be and do our best. We are praying for deliverance from everything that can in any way mar our lives. We are asking for deliverance from suffering, whether it be the evil of a pain-racked body, of a tortured mind, or of a broken heart. We are asking for victory over our worries and anxieties. We are asking for comfort in our loneliness. We are asking for freedom from the bitterness of bereavement, from the wolf of poverty, etc. We are praying for victory in the face of dreams that never come true and hopes long deferred that have made the heart sick.

There is more in this petition than is expressed; the thing expressed is that we may be kept from evil; the thing further intended is that we may make progress in piety. We pray that God would deliver us more and more from the power and practice of sin.

This petition reveals the unity and source of evil, which is a person. Like some monster of imagination which has a hundred heads, he has but one heart. When we pray, "Deliver us from evil," we are asking God to "deliver us from the evil one." At the bottom of all evil is the person of Satan. He achieved an initial triumph when he succeeded in dragging the human race into sin against God the Creator. It is still Satan's aim to frustrate God's purpose of grace. Satan's ultimate design is to blot out every trace of the image of God upon humanity, to bring about man's eternal ruin in order to show himself more powerful than God.

Every day our lives are being molded and shaped. Satan is attacking us, but the Holy Spirit is offering us power and strength to resist him. We cannot afford to live the Christian life on the circumference of reality. We are engaged in a desperate battle against powerful evil forces, so daily we should pray, "Lord, deliver us from evil."

Our Lord teaches us through many different circumstances that, "... all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Sometimes He chooses to take His child out of suffering almost immediately. Sometimes He chooses to let His child remain in it for a lifetime, but always He takes him through it. In the end He is going to deliver us from evil by taking us home to Himself.

We are greatly encouraged by this prayer. It tells us that Christ Jesus recognizes evil as a reality. He does not look upon it as a mere illusion. He does not consider it as good in the making. Our Lord not only faces the fact of evil, but He takes His stand against it. When He commands us to pray, "Deliver us from evil," He means to tell us that there is no evil in this world that is according to His will. Joseph suffered greatly, but he refused to blame God for his suffering. He put the responsibility where it belonged and that was upon his brothers. He said, "Ye meant it unto me for evil, but God meant it unto good." What a pity that all of us do not possess his wisdom!

The fact that God is against evil is a guarantee of our final victory over it. We may, therefore, throw ourselves into the fight against evil with the full assurance that we do not battle for a failing or lost cause.

How does God deliver us from evil? He does not do so by hiding us away where the rude winds that blow upon other lives cannot reach us. In His prayer of intercession for His disciples, our Lord said, "I pray not that thou shouldest keep them from evil." The deliverance for which we pray is not one that we have to get out of the world in order to win. It is a deliverance which we are privileged to experience in the here and now. He will break the fetters of sin and enable us to conquer where we previously went down in defeat. "He breaks the power of canceled sin, and sets the prisoner free."