

"DELIVER US FROM EVIL."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for Sermon: Matthew 6:13; 10:28; Ephesians 6:12; Hebrews 3:12

Introduction:

I have been on several battle fields where there are generals and infantry men, soldiers, heavy artillery. There was a clear enemy and there were allied forces in an all-out attack.

The place is the oncology unit at St. Joseph's Hospital where they do battle against cancer. Doctors and nurses and specialist have been rallied, family and friends and churches are praying. Powerful weapons have been brought in, powerful machines to look inside and identify the enemy, power medicines to kill the enemy. There's hope of victory. In the battle against cancer you don't want an oncologist who's a pacifist and you don't want parents or patients who are in total denial.

And yet on another battle front that is exactly what we find, pacifists and people in total denial. A battle is raging all around us and yet we are oblivious to the danger. When the battle is for our bodies and our health we are proactive and aggressive, yet when the battle is for our souls we are lulled to sleep by the enemy, we are complacent and nonchalant. Why do we listen to the wake up call from the oncologist's biopsy report but we don't wake up to the call of the Holy Spirit?

Ephesians 6:10-13 Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day.

To the average America Christian this comes off as a bit over the top maybe, certainly not a petition to take too seriously or to take too far.

Most of us go through our daily routines blissfully unaware of the danger that surrounds us. We are so comfortable in our free, comfortable, peaceful country we don't sense the danger around us. And we are naïve about the danger that is within us.

Jesus teaches us we are in danger, our daily lives are in danger and we need daily prayer for protection from evil and the evil one. We are liable at all times to fall, to be led astray, to be deceived.

When we pray "deliver us from evil" we are asking a lot. There are *three sources of evil*, the evil within our hearts, the evil around us in the world, and the Evil One. When I pray this prayer for myself and my family and this flock, I pray against all three, the world, the flesh, the devil.

Satan is serious.

Jesus takes Satan seriously. He believes in the personal existence of Satan, the Evil One. He is not just an impersonal force, or some mysterious cosmic dark side. Nor is he some silly guy in a red suit and horns and a tail.

Satan is serious. He is serious because he has exceedingly great powers and because he leads an exceedingly great army. If we don't believe in him, we won't pray against him.

The good news is Satan is not God's equal, he is only a fallen angel. That means there are not two equal and opposite forces in the universe. God has no equal and God is not shaking in His boots over Satan and his legends. God is ten million times stronger. As Luther's hymn says, "one little word will fell him."

But the bad news is he is a fallen angel filled with cunning and craftiness and a vile hatred for God and all His children,. We are no match for any angel, let alone an angel full of malice and hell bent to destroy us and everything good in God's creation.

He brought down Adam, Moses, David twice, Solomon, and countless millions through the ages. He is good at what he does, very good. He is exceedingly malicious and deceitful. He knows just what to say, just what buttons to push and just where the chinks in our armor are. He and his legions never sleep, never rest from their drive to tempt us and cause us to fall.

Satan hates God with a pure and perfect hatred. He loathes God and despises His glory. He is callous, unfair, unrelenting, constantly scheming, always looking for an opportune moment. He lurks in the shadows and comes out disguised as something good, something pleasant, something desirable.

He is the one who snatches away the good seed of God's Word.

He is the one who sows weeds in God's good field.

He is the one behind every evil person and every evil deed.

He is a liar, a deceiver, an accuser, a tempter, a destroyer.

From the most gross and obvious sins of murder, theft, adultery, sexual immorality, corruption, covetousness, selfishness, impatience, gossip, hatred, ***to the subtle and less obvious sins*** of pride, envy, lust, bitterness in our hearts, resentments, unforgiveness.

He is never to be underestimated. He has a brilliant intellect, deceptive beyond anything or anyone we can imagine.

He has real spiritual powers and he exercises those powers in our world in a myriad of ways. All unbelieving sinners are under his sway and influence and control.

Ephesians 2:1-3 You were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Satan is serious. Christians would do well to re-read C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters* from time to time.

Evil is real in the world and in our hearts.

Evil is real, Scripture is honest and direct about it and Jesus teaches us to pray against it. Christian Scientists, Hindus, pagans, secularist and others who think it's an illusion are deceived, living in denial or ignorance, like someone who says there is no such thing as cancer.

Evil lurks within all our hearts and evil lurks all around us. As long as we live, as long as we draw a breath we are locked in a constant battle with evil. If we are at all spiritually discerning we will see, hear and feel the presence of evil, both within us and all around us.

Jeremiah reminds us our own hearts are desperately wicked and there is no good in us, meaning there is much evil within us.

Have we ever stopped to examine our hearts long enough to ask why we become impatient or angry, or resentful or critical of others so easily? Why it is so easy for us to brag, boast, be selfish, be harsh or cruel to someone, be fearful of the future, have doubts, disbelief?

Hebrews 3:12-13 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Scripture constantly reminds us that our world is locked in deadly, mortal combat with evil and is filled with evil in every place. Darkness reigns in this present world. Paul calls the days evil. One pastor describes our world like this.

"In this battle, there are no spectators. There are only active combatants and prisoners of war. Again, this battle is not intermittent; there have been no skipped centuries, years,

months, days, hours, or even minutes. There's no demilitarized zone; no countries, states, cities, neighborhoods, or homes have remained neutral. The war is so universal that we are surrounded by conflicts, campaigns, casualties, traitors, infiltrators, victories, training exercises, challenges to the defenses, deployment of the weaponry, joys, sorrows, flag-draped coffins, and memorials to dead heroes” (Pastor David Currell, blog post 10/17/07).

We are in danger.

Matthew 10:28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

We are in danger and the reason we are in danger is because we are weak and vulnerable. And because we are weak, we are dependent on someone else for deliverance.

Just as we are completely dependent on God for our physical needs so are we dependent on Him for our moral and spiritual needs.

James 1:14-15 Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

One of the major themes of the Bible is exodus, deliverance. The people of Israel were not the only people who needed it. Their story is our story and the story of all of mankind.

We need a great deliverance from the bondage and slavery of our sin. This is where the Lord's Prayer comes in. Prayer is the first step, the first line of defense.

It is a key element in the armor of God in Ephesians 6:10-20. Don't go into life without it.

Our only defense is in Christ and the tools of grace He gives us. We are foolish to fight without them and in fact our folly will be exposed in defeat.

If you don't know your weakness and vulnerability you won't pray this petition with any meaning and therefore, you will not experience the Lord's strength and power in your life.

We are weak yet He is strong. The praying Christian will lean on and know the strength of the Lord.

The Lord's Prayer is not the only time and place Jesus prayed for our deliverance from evil. John 17:15-17 records another prayer of Jesus.

Jesus prays the same thing, only he expands it: “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.” Then verse 17 says, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”

Jesus prays for us that the Father keep us from the evil one, and then Jesus goes on to tell the Father how to do that. “In the truth — make them holy in the truth; your word is truth.”

Sanctify means to help them be holy and to conquer temptation by being holy. How? In your Word which is truth; meaning, those promises God had made to us about His will.

Well, the antidote to every falsehood and lie of the enemy are the truths of Scripture. It was when Jesus was being tempted and it is when we are being tempted.

God is Sovereign.

This petition is a plead, an entreaty with the Father, who alone is able to deliver us, protect us and preserve us from so great a power. Jesus urges us to pray and His urging is a clear indication to us the Father is both willing and able to deliver us.

II Timothy 4:18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

When we try to get our head around evil and sin and Satan and God’s purposes behind all of that, I find I need a guard rail to keep my thinking from going off track and ending up in a ditch. The most important guard rail for my thinking is the absolute truth that God is God and He is the most glorious being in all the universe and everything in creation somehow reflects the glory of its creator and that everything that happens, must bow to Him and serve Him and bring Him glory. Everything. All the time. Forever.

That is my guard rail. So anything I say about evil, sin and Satan, must lead in that direction or my thinking is off base. Any conclusion I come to that is contrary to that premise is false.

If I can’t come up with anything that makes sense in light of God’s glory then the problem is with me and in my finite mind. The problem is not with God, that He is inconsistent or evil or not a perfect, good God.

II Corinthians 1:10 He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.

Evil is real and God is honest and direct about it. He faces it head-on on the cross, defeating it, triumphing over it by rising Jesus from the dead, gaining absolute victory over and control of death.

Hebrews 2:14 ... through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.

Satan may be a lion, but he is a lion on a leash and his days are numbered.

The sovereign power and love of God sustains us and preserves us in the testing of our faith in times of trial and tribulation.

The Future is victorious.

And one day the battle will be complete.

John 16:33 These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

Romans 16:20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

Prayer: Holy Father in heaven, we confess we have been too lax, too casual about our souls and the serious danger they are in. We have thought ourselves too strong when we have gone places and done things we thought would be harmless. We have not avoided the appearances of evil and have ended up in evil. We have not taken you and your Word seriously and it has cost us sin, guilt, shame, needless suffering for those we know and love.

Father, have mercy on us and deliver us from evil and the evil one. Deliver us from the present evil we are trapped in and see no way out. Deliver us from our own self-deception and from the lies we try to tell ourselves. Deliver us from Satan's bait, lust, envy, pride, gossip, hate and bitterness, laziness and neglect. Some sins get us every time, Lord, deliver us by your strength and power. Lord, deliver us today from today's evil and tomorrow from tomorrow's evil.

Holy Father, it's our daily prayer that you yourself would take a personal interest in our spiritual safety and protection, that you would not lead us into any temptation that is beyond our endurance and that when that testing comes, as we know it inevitably will, deliver us from the Evil One and all his purposes.