

# The World's Greatest Prayer - Deliver Us From Evil

Pastor Jana Swenson, St. Mark Lutheran Church, 09 March 2008

For those of you who are joining us in worship for the first time, you need to know that we're close to the end of a sermon series on the Lord's Prayer. In the last several weeks we've taken a close look at each of the petitions. And for those of you who *have* been in worship for this series, it's time for a pop-quiz! Don't worry, it's just one question: "What's the final petition of the Lord's Prayer."

8:30 and 11:00: *Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, now and forever.*

9:45: *Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the Kingdom and the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.*

So what's the final petition? It's kind of a trick question. The correct answer is: "Deliver us from evil." In both the gospel of Matthew and Luke where this prayer is recorded, Jesus concludes with "deliver us from evil." The "kingdom, power and glory are yours" part though true, and a great summary statement, was added on later. Pastor Perry will have more to say about that next week.

It's interesting that the Lord's Prayer begins with "Our Father, who art in Heaven" and ends with "Deliver us from the evil one." When we hear the first petition, we think of goodness and wholeness, perfection, benevolent power. But when we hear the last one, we are filled with images of, well, evil!

Why does Jesus do that? Why does he start this magnificent prayer with heavenly images of God as our Father, and end it with images that are polar opposites? Well, we need to keep in mind, that the Lord's Prayer is really a description of the attributes of God. It is Jesus' way of helping us understand who God is.

A preacher once said: "A prayer is only as good as the one to whom you are praying." As we look at the final petition of this prayer, the attribute of God is "deliverer" or "rescuer". Jesus is making it clear that God is still good. And that deep at the core of who he is, is one who rescues his people.

*However*, Jesus is also acknowledging that the evil one, otherwise known as Satan, or the devil, is a power to be reckoned with. He is the embodiment of evil. From the time the serpent tempted Adam and Eve in the garden, to this very moment, humanity has been and is in a battle with the evil one. And that reality won't change until Jesus comes again.

That's why the apostle Paul implores us in **Ephesians 6:10-12** to "*Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood,*" Paul says, "*but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*"

So Jesus encourages us to be persistent in asking God to “deliver or rescue us from the evil one.” If I were to ask each of you if you’ve ever needed rescuing from the evil one, many of you would say yes without hesitation. You have a situation in your mind where the evil one was clearly at work.

Others of you might not be so sure. If you find yourself in this category, let me ask you a couple of questions: Have you ever questioned God’s goodness? Have you ever felt hopeless? Have you ever given in to taking the easy way instead of the right way? Have you ever done what you’ve wanted to instead of what you should? Have you ever thrown in the towel, and said, “Why bother”?

If you answered yes to any of these then you have needed to be rescued from the devil. Doubt, discouragement, diversion, and defeat, are all subtle, but powerful weapons Satan has in his arsenal. He loves to use them to mess up our lives and draw us away from God. So the truth is, each and every one of us needs to be rescued from the evil one.

Ok, I’m going to show you a clip and I want you to pay attention to the feeling this scene evokes in you. So watch for the primary emotion you experience. Take a look...

### **Video clip \*\***

So what emotion did you feel? Fear. Now what was this a scene of? What kind of help did the boy need? He needed to be rescued....

My point is that whenever we find ourselves in a situation where we need to be rescued our primary feeling is fear. As I said, the devil is a master at getting us into positions where we need rescuing. And if we’re honest, in those moments we’re afraid. Now that fear is sometimes masked by other feelings like anger, panic, or depression, but at the root of those feelings is fear.

As I look at my own life, and the lives of those I’ve counseled over the years, there seem to be two things we universally fear the most. Interestingly, those two fears are described in one of the most well known passages of scripture, a passage that for centuries has brought great comfort and hope: Psalm 23. And it just so happens they can be found in adjoining verses, verses 4-5.

So let me read them, and then you identify what I think are our two greatest fears. *“Even when I walk through the dark valley of death, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me. You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows.”* **Psalm 23:4-5**

So what are the two things we fear the most? Death, and our enemies.

Certainly we can all agree that we fear death. Anyone who has waited anxiously for test results or heard the doctor say “you have cancer” knows the kind of power it has. We are helpless in its presence. We can struggle with pain, suffering, disease, injury

– but strength and courage cannot overcome death. In death, the evil one has his final word. It is the essence of evil.

But what about our enemies? Do we fear them as much as we do death? Maybe not as much, but close. If we didn't, authors, movie producers, and script writers would be out of work because they make their living by writing and producing storylines that we can identify with.

And those storylines are filled with relational conflict. Every one of them has an enemy. And we identify with them because every one of us has an enemy. And just like the main characters in those storylines, we fear our enemies.

Why is it that our enemies have so much power over us? Because we were created as relational beings. Any time there is a break or a breach in our relationships we are no longer whole. We cannot survive on our own the way God designed us.

Have you ever seen a baby that has been diagnosed with "failure to thrive"? Do you know the number one reason why they don't thrive? Lack of loving human contact. Well failure to thrive isn't just an issue for babies. Adults fail to thrive too – and for the same reason. That's why we fear our enemies so much – we know that our survival is at stake.

Thankfully, many of the breaks and breaches in our relationships can be repaired. But that also means that our enemies are not just strangers like the masterminds behind 911, mass murderers or rapists.

Our enemies are also those closest to us – our best friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Our enemies can even be the people we eat and sleep with. That's why there's so much shock and pain when there is a breach in the relationship. That's why we fear our enemies almost as much as we fear death.

But here's the good news: Jesus answers our fearFULness with God's fearlessness! Let me say that again. Jesus answers our fearFULness with God's fearlessness! Remember when I said, the Lord's Prayer is Jesus way of helping us better understand who God is and what He is like? Well, when he tells us to pray the words "Deliver us from evil" he is helping us see that one of God's attributes is His fearlessness! He is telling us that God is not afraid of evil!

I recently read a story about a woman who owned two dogs, Prince and Charlie. Prince was a German Shepherd. Charlie was a toy poodle. Charlie, the poodle had delusions of German Shepherdness. Every now and then Charlie would go up to Prince and in a single act leap into the air, hurling himself at Prince's throat growling as viciously as he could. Most of the time Prince just ignored him.

One day, Prince apparently had enough. He grabbed Charlie's head in his mouth and effortlessly tossed the toy poodle across the room. Charlie's threats proved empty against Prince's vastly superior size and strength. Charlie may have been too proud, dumb or nuts to be afraid of Prince, but Prince saw no reason whatsoever to fear Charlie.

Somehow we've gotten it into our minds that Satan is equal in being and power to God. That couldn't be less true. Satan is even less to God than Charlie was to Prince. In fact, Satan is defined by fear, because he knows he is no match for God. He knows that the day is coming when God will take Satan by the head and fling him into hell. God sees no reason whatsoever to fear Satan.

This is good news for us because it means that God will deal with our enemies and he has the power to overcome even death! In His fearlessness, he enters the valley and walks with us through the shadow of death until we reach the other side where we will live forever. As the author of Psalm 23 says, death is inevitable, but God will not abandon us. And there is an even greater life waiting for us on that side of the valley.

The apostle Peter underscored this truth centuries later in his letter to those believers facing persecution. *"Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around looking for someone to devour... but cast your anxiety on him, because after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen and establish you."* **1 Peter 5:7-9**

And your enemies? How does God deal with them? Well, in Psalm 23 we read that he prepares a lavish meal for you in their presence. While your enemies wage their war on you, Jesus prepares a banquet just for you! He enters your war-torn world, sets the table, prepares the meal, blesses and cares for you. He anoints you with his healing love and revitalizes your soul. And as a result, your enemies lose their power over you. And you are rescued.

In God's fearlessness, he takes on our fears – and he rescues us from our enemies, and from the finality of death. And we look forward to the day he conquers the evil one once and for all. A day when we will fully see the goodness of God through His Son, Jesus.

I'd like to close this morning with a passage from the book of Revelation. It is a beautiful description of what that day will be like:

*There was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried in a loud voice: salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb...*

*He who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst... For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.* **Revelation 7:9-17**

**Amen.**

**\*\* Vertigo**

**(video clip of these words scrolling down and then back up again.)**

This is the truth

If we turn things upside down

We can't expect goodness to win in the world

I would be lying to you if I said

The human race has a great future ahead

That altruism could replace egotism

That your lives could be filled with joy

That your children could be safe and healthy

Before anything you must know

The human race does not deserve these things.

I am convinced of this because I know you

Corruption and hypocrisy and are in your nature

Compassion breeds weakness when only the strong survive [that]

I refuse to believe under any circumstance [that]

That you can turn things around in coming years

This world may be sinking to new depths [but]

There are even more revelations to come

The human race has only one destiny and

Whether you like it or not, this is what is real

I am the Lord your God and you should know that I believe exactly the opposite