

Prayer is always a challenge to the status quo. It recognizes that what is, just isn't good enough, that we need God's intervention to change it. When we pray, we acknowledge that God is God (and we are not) and that we need God's action in our lives. Prayer is surrendering to God as King and Lord not just of the universe (which we're usually ok with) but also, specifically, King and Lord of our lives (which we're sometimes less ok with.)

That is ultimately what the Lord's prayer is about. The first half acknowledges God as God. "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" That's the "you're God" part. We confess that God is mighty, powerful, transcendent, holy, good.

The second half, acknowledges the reality of our lives. Life is out of our control, and so we need God to be present and active with us. And so we pray for God's providence in our lives, for forgiveness, and, finally, for God's deliverance from the power of evil and temptation. We recognize their power in our lives. We recognize that without God's divine help, without God fighting on our side, we will fall into our own broken ways or into the traps of the evil one.

And so Jesus tells us to pray this prayer: "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Lead us, or in the Greek, literally "carry us", not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Some of you may have in your bible translation "deliver us from the evil one." I don't have time for a lesson in Greek grammar, so, in short, the slightly different Greek words for "evil" and "evil one" end up looking identical in this position in a sentence. I'd say it probably doesn't matter which way it is translated. The evils in the world and the evils in our hearts are often indistinguishable from the works of the evil one. When we pray, we pray for deliverance from all of the above.

Now I don't want to get too wrapped up in contemplating the work of Satan this morning. Today, it's enough to know that he's real and that he means you harm. It's also enough to know that Jesus Christ is the victor. Sin, Death, Temptation, Satan, demons, evil of every shape, size and texture all were defeated at the cross of Christ. *Colossians 2:9-15 (write it down)*, says Jesus disarmed them all, and made a public spectacle of them on the cross. The powers of this world are defeated. Evil has already lost. Satan is a loser. (I just had to say it.) The problem is we just don't always live like it.

For starters, we continue to make space for this dead, defeated sin in our lives. We promise to give God our whole lives, but we're like this coin I found a while back. It's a normal nickel, but someone has cut two notches into its edge across from one another. Do you know what it is for? (Of course not, we're all good church folk.) Well, "I hear" from reliable sources that it's for tying a string around. The idea is that you plunk it into a vending machine and then, once the machine registers it, you fish it back out. (Kids, don't even think about it. It's stealing.) This is what we do, though, with our lives. We say "Here you go God!" Then, "Well, not today, not in this" and YOINK! we pull it right back. God saved us and gave us a new life, but we can't help but jump right back in to the old.

We keep little pockets of sin in our lives, just a few quiet dark corners in an otherwise light life. "It's just a little thing," we think. "It doesn't hurt anybody." Well let me tell you about small dark corners. We built a sandbox in the back yard for the kids last year. We made it cat-proof, with a hinged lid that would open and attach to the fence when the kids were playing, then shut tightly when they weren't. Next to the sandbox we had some of the kids Tonka trucks and

things, and next to that I was storing a few stacks of those black plastic pots that plants come in from the nursery. Everything was fine. We had a great spring, playing in the sand and digging in the dirt. Then summer came, and it was too hot for sandboxes or gardening or breathing or pretty much anything else. So we closed the lid on the sandbox and just left everything 'til fall.

When the weather cooled down and we lifted the lid on the sandbox again, well... Some of you know what we found, don't you? One big, black spider with a red hourglass. It was my first time seeing one. It had made it's home in the corner of the lid, and a few of its family had spread out into other parts of the sandbox. So we ran to the store and got some insecticide (it listed spiders on the label!) We emptied that can into every corner, then shut the lid to let 'em die.

So a month or so ago, when it started getting warm we went back out and lifted the lid. Apparently insecticide is like a vitamin for black widows. There were over a dozen of them in that box. But not just in the sandbox. The toys were infested (there are a lot of small, dark corners on a Tonka truck.) And those plastic gardening pots? It was like black widow condos; every one had a black widow living in it. By the time I had finished cleaning up, personally crushing each and every spider, I had counted more than four-dozen in various stages of growth.

Apparently, in Southern Oregon, if you give them a little dark corner, they will happily come to live in it, and if you leave them, they will multiply and they will spread and sooner or later it will be bad news.

And it's no different when we leave those little pockets of sin and temptation unopposed in our lives. That sin grows and spreads. And we become desensitized; we start to think it's normal. We ignore the webs, and that tickling sensation as sin crawls across our skin and sucks the very life from us and poisons our hearts. Lord, "*deliver us from evil!*" Are there pockets of darkness in your life?

We need to stop flirting with darkness and seize hold of the freedom we have in Christ. We need to live as the redeemed. I remember when I was a kid watching the Woodland Park Zoo release a bald eagle it had rehabilitated back to its home on the Skagit River. It was a beautiful sight. The babbling water, the wind in the trees, the blue sky (well, ok, the grey sky). The cameras were clicking as they stepped back from the cage and pulled the release mechanism that opened the door. Nothing. It just sat there in its cage. After a bit, one of the experts went up and jostled the cage and finally convinced it to come out. It stretched it's wings and took a few experimental flaps and then... hopped up on top of its cage and started preening itself. It wouldn't fly. This glorious bird in its glorious setting stayed right there with its cage. The cage was familiar. The cage smelt right. In the end they had to chase the bird away. Not the photo-op they were looking for.

The secret to dealing with temptation and evil is realizing, first and foremost, that we've been freed from it. I don't mean we'll never experience temptation or know the presence of evil in our lives. James is pretty clear. Temptation comes, and, as often as not, it comes through our own evil desires. What I mean is that we have been *delivered* from it.

What we pray for has already happened. We are asking God to make real *in us* something that has already been accomplished *for us*. The Greek word here, *ρυσαι*, literally means "rescue." The only other place it's used here in Matthew is in chapter 27, verse 43. Jesus is hanging on the cross, bleeding his life away for you and me. And it says, "the chief priests, the teachers of the

law and the elders mocked him... ‘He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

Did Jesus come down from the cross? I can imagine that he was tempted to! But Jesus resisted the temptation and endured the evil. He couldn't make it easy on himself! On that cross he was dealing with the reality of our temptations, our sin, our evil, and those aren't easy. If he had taken the easy road, he would have been leaving us behind. Instead, he was tempted in every way, just like us, yet did not sin. He was tempted by Satan in the desert, he drove evil out of people who were possessed, he sweat blood in the garden of Gethsemane as he faced the reality of what was about to occur, and he crushed that temptation and evil once and for all, choosing to hang on that cross for us. Temptation is the invitation to live independently from God, to seek your own will over the will of God, to reassert your ownership of your life and deny God's. Jesus faced that temptation, and each and every time, he chose his Father's will over his own. Thy will be done.

Did Jesus come down from the cross? Yeah, to be laid in a tomb. But was Jesus rescued? Was Jesus delivered? You better believe it. Those watching him die jokingly thought it would be impressive for God to save him from that pain and shame and helplessness. God didn't think that would be impressive enough. He wanted to break death wide open first. He wanted to strip and disarm Satan and Hell and all the sin and powers and darkness of this world first. And *that rescue, that deliverance* is what really matters, both in the big scheme of things and for your life today. God can deliver you, he's done it before. Just give him full access to your life. Give your life to God and don't yank it back again.

I must confess. I had planned a nice, practical 5-step sermon on how you could defeat Satan, resist temptation and make your life a sweet-smelling bastion of love and light. I was going to talk about arming yourself with scripture and dedicating yourselves to prayer and one another and just generally doing a thorough housecleaning on your own life. Thank God I just didn't have enough time. Don't get me wrong, those are all great things and you should try very hard to do them. But I would hate for you to go out of here this morning with the wrong impression. I would hate for you to leave thinking that somehow it's all up to you to make life work and then be crushed when it doesn't. I would hate for you to be tempted to try and make it all on your own.

In Romans 7:14ff, Paul talks about the reality of temptation in his life. “What is this?” he says, “I do what I know I'm not supposed to do and I don't do what I know I'm supposed to do? Who can DELIVER me (same Greek word) from this body of death? But thanks be to God- through Jesus Christ our Lord!” And he goes on to talk about the cross of Christ. We have deliverance.

In the end, our prayer is not “Lord make me strong to fight temptation.” “Or Lord, give me gifts to wrestle Satan out of my life.” Those are good, and God will equip you for both of those battles. But in the end, our prayer must simply be “Deliver us.” Because we recognize that we just can't deliver ourselves. If you try to do it on your own you will fail. You need God, 100% in your life. You need to give your life all the way to God.

When my wife Julie was a kid, they were living in Kenya, out in the bush with the Maasai. One day, Julie's dad left for work and left the screen door slightly ajar. He realized he'd forgotten something and turned around. Just then he saw the tip of a tail slithering through the door and gave a shout. The warriors all came running with their weapons. They put Julie and her sister on the top bunk, and looked all through the house under the furniture, behind the furniture,

everywhere... but they found no snake, so they figured he'd imagined it and left. Then he realized one place he hadn't looked and reached over and turned on the oven. He sat down and waited while it got hot, then suddenly *thump, thump, slither* ...out came a king cobra. It had crawled up into the stove and found a nice dark corner to hide in. But it didn't like it when it's dark corner was suddenly filled with fire.

Our God is a holy fire. Let him scour your life. Stop surrendering to the dead powers of sin and temptation and surrender fully to God. If you're tired of sin and Satan and evil and darkness lurking in your life, it's a matter of returning to the beginning of the Lord's prayer. Our Father... thy will be done! Give complete control of your life, every part, every dark, ugly, infested corner, to God and let him clean it out. It's the only way! You can't do it. He can, and will. He's promised deliverance. Christ bought deliverance for you on the cross. Accept the gift of his grace and live like one who has been delivered.