

"The Lord's Prayer - Protection" - Matthew 6

I have some questions for you. Is everything good that happens to you a gift from God? Is everything bad that happens to you an attack of the Devil? How do you know? Do you believe in luck and if so, is there good luck and bad luck or are these good and bad spiritual forces? I know, it's getting pretty deep around here quickly, isn't it? Is God sovereign – meaning, is God in charge of this world, this universe, this church, you? If God is in charge, do we still have free will or are we puppets that just think we have free will because God wants us to think that? Those are some deep questions, that's for sure and I'm not going to answer any of them because, partly, I want you to have something to talk about over lunch today, but mainly because I don't know the answers to most of them.

When people ask me those kinds of questions, I'm usually pretty quick to quote **Isaiah 55:8** that says, *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.* I'm fine not understanding all there is to know about how God works because if I could understand Him completely, He wouldn't be much of a God, right? I will say that I know that God is sovereign and while not everything that happens is His will, like sin, for instance, but His overall will is going to be done. **Job 42:2** says, *"I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted."* We know that God can do anything He wants. He gives and He takes away and He doesn't have to ask our permission, does He?

But there really is a devil and he is called the prince of this world so evidently he must be pretty powerful as well. Would you agree to that? I hope so. I don't know about you individually, but this church has been hammered on by the devil. He has tried to kill us financially and relationally, by trying to disrupt our unity and our good name. He has tried discouragement, pride, job-loss, job-change, sickness and even death. He has tried storms -physical and emotional. He has tried to confuse us with lies that sound truthful. We've had the cops disrupt our service. We have had drunks disrupt our service and almost had a fistfight once or twice with some crazy women. And when that doesn't work, he gets the sound system to go on the fritz and when all else fails, he will lull you to sleep in the pew with a lullaby. So, I guess we are doing what we are supposed to be doing but it's hard. It's real hard. It's hard because Satan, while not as powerful as God, is more powerful than we are. He's stronger, bigger, faster, meaner, tougher and he has been doing this for a long, long time so he knows what works and what doesn't. He knows how to push our buttons. He knows our weaknesses and our strengths and he hates us so the only thing that keeps him from prowling around and devouring us is the mighty right hand of God.

We are finishing up our look at the Lord's Prayer in the Psalms and we come to the last line of the Lord's Prayer that says something we have all said a hundred times but we might not really understand. So, turn first to **Matthew 6** and let's read **verses 9-13** but our focus will be on **verse 13** and then we will go over to the Book of Psalms and get an illustration of what that part of the prayer should sound like. We know that the Lord's Prayer is a model prayer but not necessarily a prayer to be repeated over and over. It is a skeleton that we are to flesh out with our own prayers so we get the model from Matthew and the examples from Psalms. So, let's read it from **Matthew 6:9-13** right now and see how Jesus said we are to pray. *"This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."*

As I have studied the Lord's Prayer for the last few weeks, every week I think, *"Well, obviously this part of the prayer is the most important."* So, as we come to the last part, I have thought the same thing and I finally just concluded that Jesus just really knew how to pray! In four sentences He has summed up everything we need to pray for and how it should be done. We should start with praise, praising God just for who He is and what He has done. We should ask God, the Creator and Provider of all things to provide what we need to survive and even thrive in this world and the next. It should break our hearts but we should then ask God to forgive us of all our sins and then accept that forgiveness that leads to joy and freedom.

Now, lastly, Jesus tells us we should pray, *“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”* We know, though, that God doesn’t tempt us to sin. **James 1:13** makes that plain when it says, *“When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.”* The misunderstanding comes because, while the word “temptation” is correctly translated, the Greek word originally used could mean “temptation” or “trial”.

But while James also tells us to *“consider it pure joy when we go through trials”* the meaning of Jesus is, *“Lord, protect me from anything that might lead to sin, even if it is a God-given trial.”* Both lines of **verse 13** have to do with avoiding sin, whether by our old sin nature or from Satan himself. Yes, we need trials to grow and mature and prove God’s grace but our prayer should be that God would protect us from the very worst thing that could happen to us and that is...sin!

When we ask God for protection, we usually mean for Him to protect us from sickness or car wrecks or people like Joe Biden from being president but what Jesus says we should pray for is protection from sin. Last week we saw that King David understood how to go to God for forgiveness in **Psalm 51** and this week we see that David also knew how to ask for protection. Well...he kinda knew. Okay, he didn’t really know but it’s not his fault and we are going to use **Psalm 140** as an example any way of how to ask God for protection.

Turn to Psalm 140 and let’s read through it once just like David wrote it.

1 Rescue me, Lord, from evil men; protect me from the violent, 2 who devise evil plans in their hearts and stir up war every day. 3 They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent’s; the poison of vipers is on their lips. 4 Keep me safe, Lord, from the hands of the wicked; protect me from the violent, who devise ways to trip my feet. 5 The arrogant have hidden a snare for me; they have spread out the cords of their net and have set traps for me along my path. 6 I say to the Lord, “You are my God.” Hear, Lord, my cry for mercy. 7 Sovereign Lord, my strong deliverer, you shield my head in the day of battle. 8 Do not grant the wicked their desires, Lord; do not let their plans succeed. 9 Those who surround me proudly rear their heads; may the mischief of their lips engulf them. 10 May burning coals fall on them; may they be thrown into the fire, into miry pits, never to rise. 11 May slanderers not be established in the land; may disaster hunt down the violent. 12 I know that the Lord secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy. 13 Surely the righteous will praise your name, and the upright will live in your presence.

Now, does anybody see any problem with that prayer for us today? Should we pray similar prayers? Should we pray that our enemies have burning coals fall on them and be thrown into Hell? Because that is what David is praying here. This is what is called an imprecatory prayer. David is famous for this kind of prayer and it is the kind of prayer almost all of us have wanted to pray at one time or another.

The problem is that this is not exactly the prayer we are to pray. David, and everybody else in the Old Testament didn’t really have a good understanding of Satan like we do today. The scriptures had not been written showing them that there was an evil spiritual being behind sinful man and they didn’t have **Ephesians 6** that tells us that our battles are not against flesh and blood so David was doing the only thing he knew to do as he prayed for God’s protection.

That passage in **Ephesians 6 (verse 12)** tells us specifically that our battles are not against flesh and blood but they are against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Now if we substitute those satanic forces for what David calls evil men, then our prayer is powerful and effective...and biblical and that’s what we want.

But maybe you think it’s not all that important to pray for protection against satanic forces like that. You’re not demon-possessed. Is it really necessary? Well, first, Jesus told us to pray this way and that should be good enough but He did so for a reason. You may not be demon-possessed but do you ever feel depressed? Do you ever feel discouraged? Do you ever have impure thoughts or bad thoughts against somebody else or even yourself? Are you tempted to go back to that old habit that God has delivered you from? The question is, are you ever tempted to sin?

Well, some of that may happen because we are sinful and fallen mankind but that temptation doesn't come from God so it ultimately and predominately comes from Satan and his minions, the authorities, powers and dark spiritual forces of the evil one.

So, let's go back and re-read **Psalm 140**, substituting those names for what David calls evil men. I'm not adding to or taking away from scripture. I'm just using this as an example of how we should pray when Jesus tells us we should pray for protection from sin. Okay, let's go.

Rescue me, Lord, from the powers of this dark world, protect me from the violent demons, 2 who devise evil plans in their hearts and stir up war every day. They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent's; the poison of vipers is on their lips. 4 Keep me safe, Lord, from the hands of the wicked spiritual forces; protect me from the violent satanic authorities, who devise ways to trip my feet. 5 The arrogant evil rulers have hidden a snare for me; they have spread out the cords of their net and have set traps for me along my path. 6 I say to the Lord, "You are my God."

Hear, Lord, my cry for mercy. 7 Sovereign Lord, my strong deliverer, you shield my head in the day of battle. 8 Do not grant the wicked dark forces their desires, Lord; do not let their plans succeed. 9 Those satanic spiritual forces who surround me proudly rear their heads; may the mischief of their lips engulf them. 10 May burning coals fall on them; may they be thrown into the fire, into miry pits, never to rise. 11 May slanderous devils and demons not be established in me or in Christ Fellowship; may disaster hunt down the violent and evil spiritual powers. 12 I know that he Lord secures justice for the poor, the addicted and the incarcerated and upholds the cause of the needy. 13 Surely the righteous in our church will praise your name, and the upright in Wise County will live in your presence.

Amen and Amen! Now, that's a powerful prayer and an example of how we should pray when we are asking God for His protection. If you think that is over the top or being too dramatic by talking about devils and demons then why does Jesus tell us to pray deliver us from the evil one? Why does it say in **1 Peter 5:8** that the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking to see whom he may devour? **Ephesians 6** lays it out plainly that these are our enemies.

All we can do is acknowledge that God is the Protector. We can't beat Satan and his minions on our own. This prayer is an example, like every aspect of the Lord's prayer is an example, of simply acknowledging God's omnipotence and infinity and of our impotence and finite-ness, if that's a word.

We go to God with praise because He is God and we are not. We ask for provision because He is the Provider and we are not. We request pardon for our sins because He is the Savior and we are not and we ask for protection from sin and everything evil that would hurt us because He is the Protector and we are not.

That's the Lord's Prayer for us today so let's do that right now. Let's bow our heads and close our eyes and just spend some time praying as we have learned. Praising God for his grace and His mercy, His love and forgiveness.

Now, thinking about all that God has done in our lives, we ask Him for continued blessings of provision, making us content with what we have, acknowledging that He is the Provider of all good and perfect things. Also, as much as it might pain us to do it, we need to come before God humbly and ask Him for forgiveness of all our sins. Name those sins to Him right now and turn from those sins, acknowledging that it was that sin that put Jesus on the cross.

We end our prayer as Jesus taught us by asking for His continued protection from Satan and all the evil forces of this world that surround us and hammer on us every day. Lord, keep us strong in the power of your name and through the Holy Spirit keep us from sin. We ask all these things in the name of Jesus, our Redeemer, Sustainer, Deliverer and King. Amen.