

“God’s Word, Prayer, and Promise”

Lord’s Prayer Sixth and Seventh Petitions

Sermon for Lenten Midweek April 6, 2022

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

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We wrap up our Lenten Midweek services this year by bringing into view the sixth and seventh petitions of the Lord’s Prayer: “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

In the sixth petition, Jesus teaches us first that we are in a battle. Christian life takes place among wills that are set against God’s will. These are the will of the devil, the world, and also, unfortunately, our own corrupted passions and desires (James 1:13-15). As faith prays that God’s will would be done in one’s life, faith also prays for God’s help in obtaining the victory when the wills that are set against God’s will “deceive ... or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice,” as the Small Catechism puts it (Martin Luther, “Explanation to the Sixth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, *Small Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986).

There are many things we could say about this. Today, let’s focus on two things that are crucial for standing firm in this battle of wills. The first is God’s Word. The second is faith and hope.

We see the importance of God’s Word in this battle of wills when we see how Jesus handled the devil’s temptations. His strategy is revealed in what He said in response to the devil: It is written and it has been said (Luke 4:4, 7, 12). When Jesus responded to the devil with “it has been said,” this is not just what any old someone has said; it is what God has said that is found in His written word, the Bible. Jesus takes His stand against the devil on the written Word of God, the Scriptures.

This is vitally important for two reasons. The first is so that we know God’s will, both with respect to what He wants us to do and with respect to what He wants us to believe. What He wants us to believe is wrapped up in Jesus Christ. This is about both the Law and the Gospel. The Law has to do with what the Catechism calls “great shame and vice.” The Gospel sets Jesus Himself against false belief and despair for the antidote against them. Both Law and Gospel are taught to us by God in His written word.

The point is that we need to hear, take to heart, and learn God’s Word of Law and Gospel in this battle of wills. This is necessary so that we are able to discern, to identify, to know, when we are being tempted. This is necessary so that we can stand against false belief and despair.

We spoke these things together in the Psalmody this evening from Psalm 119. How can a young man keep his way pure?—let’s say how can a Christian keep his or her way pure: “By guarding it according to [God’s] word” (Ps. 119:9). “Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies” (Ps. 119:98 ESV). “Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way” (Ps. 119:104 ESV). Take the word “hate” here to mean that the Christian does not desire to embrace what is contrary to God’s word as true and right and good, and something to be cherished, but desires to reject it. We need the instruction of God’s Word to give us discernment (Eph. 5:10). We need to pray that God the Father would strengthen us in this new desire by faith and in the Spirit.

The second reason that we need God’s Word in the battle of wills is because God’s Word has the uncanny ability to defeat the contrary wills when God’s Word is used in faith and as one’s spiritual weapon. It is the sword of Spirit, as the Apostle Paul says (Eph. 6:17). Follow

Jesus's example. When the devil tempted Him, Jesus said: "It is written." The devil could not overcome it.

So, Jesus teaches us to pray that He would inspire in us a hunger for God's Word and that it would renew our hearts, that we would believe it and be transformed by it. For God's Word will inspire our faith, and turn our hearts. It teaches and sharpens our minds for discernment. It fortifies the will of the new man, born of God according to His image, to resist the devil firm faith (1 Peter, 5:9); to stand firm in the strength of the Lord's might in the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:10-11), taking the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:14-16).

The Christian who relies only on how he or she feels, how the heart moves one, will not long be able to stand (Jer. 17:9). God's word is the anchor of the soul in the battle.

It is great consolation that Jesus teaches the seventh petition right after this one: "but deliver us from evil." As Jesus teaches us to pray for this, we should also take this as a promise. It is as much to fortify our faith in final outcomes as it is to teach us to pray for some specific victory. For why would He teach us to ask God for deliverance from evil if it were not essential to our hope? God will win the victory, and Jesus directs our souls to this hope and promise as He teaches us to pray for it.

But is this then a formula for despair? For we may have prayed for this or that specific circumstance in our lives and the answer may not have appeared to us to be the victory of goodness, truth, and life over evil and death. Yet, let us pray for the faith to believe that God is working beneath how things appear.

So the Catechism teaches us a little wisdom born of faith that is informed by the death and resurrection of our Lord. In this life, we live under the cross. Our lives exhibit no more and no less than Jesus' life exhibited. This means that we will experience victories and what appear to be defeats. The real victory as Christians through it all in our pilgrimage here is to keep faith in God's promises, which promise His favor and goodness to us in Jesus, in the forgiveness of sins and the Gospel of peace. This is why the Catechism talks to us about false belief and despair. The greatest and most important spiritual battle now is against false belief and despair.

In this connection, the world presses false belief on us with a full-court press, using a basketball metaphor, with a ferocious fore-check, using a hockey metaphor, with many arguments and much rhetoric. The heart of it goes like this: This world is all there is. The only promise worth believing in is a promise that can be fulfilled, completely, for sight and the rest of our senses to verify, to prove, right now; a fulfillment that will include completely defeating evil, injustice, here and now with finality, that will save the planet and all humanity.

This is a temptation to false belief, though it sounds so good. The problem with it is its ultimate demand. In ultimate terms, in macro terms, the planet, that is, this created order, and all humanity is in God's hands, whether humans recognize it or not and give thanks and glory to God in faith. But the ultimate demand for fulfillment of all things in this present world order is a temptation to false belief, because God's Word teaches clearly that this world is corrupted by sin; it is ruled by the prince of the power of the air; the [evil] spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, who are children of wrath, as the Apostle Paul says (Eph. 2: 2-3). The world testifies to this fact every day. And so this world is passing away (1 Cor. 7:31).

The promise is God's faithfulness to us now in the fight, the victory of His forgiveness and life in Jesus, who is God with us, and also the ultimate victory at the final judgment. Yes, the ultimate victory at the final judgment. There is life after death and a reckoning; a reckoning for those who have not hidden their lives in Jesus by faith. There is a world to come, the new

Jerusalem that is above and is waiting to come down from above at the consummation of all things (Gal. 4:26; Rev. 21:1-2).

This Jerusalem is the true city of everlasting life, joy, and peace. It can only be had by us in the turning our hearts away from evil and the embracing the King of this City in the Gospel of peace, His Gospel.

So to pray “deliver us from evil” is to pray that Jesus would instill in us this faith and this hope, not being persuaded by the arguments and rhetoric that would lead us into false belief. For those arguments also lead us into despair, for they provide no true renewal of our nature and place all hope only in this life, which is passing away. Those arguments know nothing about the new creation at the revelation of the children of God when Jesus returns (Rom. 8:18-23). And so the world acts accordingly.

What should you be doing as a Christian? Work faithfully within the scope of your vocation, according to God’s word.

So Jesus teaches us to pray that He would fortify us with every spiritual weapon in God’s arsenal against the devil, the world, and our own corrupted nature; to stand firm in faith that God’s will would be done and that God will ultimate prevail, as He works out history according to His good purposes in Jesus. The greatest weapons are His Word, His Son, and His Spirit. His Son appeared in our flesh, was crucified as the atoning sacrifice that has completely won your forgiveness, and rose in indestructible life, as He said He would. He now reigns with all the authority of heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18). The Spirit brings Jesus and our hope in Him into your hearts, in and through God’s Word (Rom. 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14). God’s Word teaches us all of these things and gives the promise of His victory in the grace and mercy of Christ and so inspires our hearts. So we pray deliver us from evil in faith, for it will be done in God’s good time and pleasure in our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.