

Psalm 79 “And Lead Us Not into Temptation, but Deliver Us from the Evil One” March 1, 2009
Jonah 2

Tonight we come to the conclusion of our study of the basic teachings of the Christian faith
as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism,
and also the conclusion of our miniseries on the Lord’s Prayer from the Psalms.

127. Q. What is the sixth petition?

A. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. That is: In ourselves we are so weak that we cannot stand even for a moment. Moreover, our sworn enemies - the devil, the world, and our own flesh - do not cease to attack us. Wilt Thou, therefore, uphold and strengthen us by the power of Thy Holy Spirit, so that in this spiritual war we may not go down to defeat, but always firmly resist our enemies, until we finally obtain the complete victory.

You may have noticed that the Heidelberg says
“deliver us from the evil one.”

In Greek if you want to say “deliver us from *evil*” you would use the neuter.
If you use the masculine gender, then you are saying “deliver us from the evil *one*.”
Jesus uses the masculine gender in the Lord’s Prayer,
so it is likely that “evil one” is the right translation.

Psalm 79 provides us with an example of what this spiritual warfare looked like for Israel.

*O God, the nations have come into your inheritance;
they have defiled your holy temple;
they have laid Jerusalem in ruins.
They have given the bodies of your servants to the birds of the heavens for food,
the flesh of your faithful to the beasts of the earth.
They have poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem,
and there was no one to bury them.
We have become a taunt to our neighbors,
mocked and derided by those around us. (79:1-4)*

Asaph begins his prayer with the problem.

We have seen that *usually* prayer begins with who God is and what he has done.
But sometimes you have to start with the situation!

But notice that Asaph still does not pray a self-centered prayer.
What is the problem?

The problem is that the nations have come into *your* inheritance.
The problem is that *God’s* holy temple has been defiled.

Verse 1 shows what has happened to the *land*.

The land was “the inheritance” that God gave to Abraham’s seed.
Within this holy land was the holy city, Jerusalem.
And within the holy city was the holy temple.
So the first problem is that the holy land (focused on the holy city and the holy temple)
has been overrun by the nations.

Verses 2-3 then show what has happened to the *seed*.
The bodies of *your* servants have been fed
to the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the earth.
This was the taunt of Goliath,
when he promised to feed David and the Israelites to the birds and beasts.

What Goliath failed to do has now been done.
And the nations have poured out the blood of the faithful like water
all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them.

This is not the way that it is supposed to be!
The Son of David is supposed to be God’s vicegerent
ruling over the nations as the Son of God.

But instead of ruling over the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the earth,
we are food for them.
And instead of living and dying and being buried in the land,
no one buries our corpses.

And so Asaph says,
We have become a taunt to our neighbors, mocked and derided by those around us.

What are the three parts of the promise to Abraham?
Land
Seed
Blessing to the Nations (I will bless those who will bless you,
and I will curse those who curse you).

Asaph reviews the promises to Abraham:
the land is overrun, the seed is dead (and left unburied), and the nations are mocking us.

This is *not* the way it is supposed to be!!!!

And so in verses 5-7 Asaph prays, “Thy kingdom come!”

*How long, O Lord? Will you be angry forever?
Will your jealousy burn like fire?
Pour out your anger on the nations that do not know you,
and on the kingdoms that do not call upon your name!*

For they have devoured Jacob and laid waste his habitation.

How long, O LORD?

You have said that you would curse those who curse us.
When will you do what you have promised?

We are under attack from the evil one.
The world, the flesh, and the devil are trying to destroy us.
When will you avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?

And so in verses 8-10 Asaph pleads “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:”

*Do not remember against us our former iniquities;
let your compassion come speedily to meet us, for we are brought very low.
Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name;
deliver us, and atone for our sins, for your name's sake!
Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?”
Let the avenging of the outpoured blood of your servants
be known among the nations before our eyes!*

At the heart of this petition is the rationale for *why* God should hear and help:
for the glory of your name...for your name's sake.

Hallowed be thy name.

It is because your name is holy that you should act.
It is not because of us –
we have sinned – our former iniquities got us into this mess!
And why should God atone for our sins?
Again, only for your name's sake!

The honor of God's holy name demands that God do something!

After all, why should the nations say, “Where is their God?”
You can hear echoes of Moses petition in Exodus after Israel had sinned –
Moses did not try to excuse Israel or say, “O God, they are not so bad!”
No, Moses begged God to have mercy on Israel for the sake of his holy name.
What would the nations say if God destroyed his own people?

When we pray, “lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil,”
even this is not because of anything in us!
God forgives our sins for his name's sake –
and he delivers us from the evil one for the glory of his name.

It is because of who God is (Our Father who art in heaven)

that we have confidence that God will act!
Another reason why we need to remember who God is,
is because we need to remember that the evil one only has a temporary power.

If you look at the trials and temptations of this age,
you would be inclined to say that the world, the flesh and the devil are winning.

Just look around you!

The nations have come into your inheritance:
how many churches are left that clearly preach the Word of God?
They have defiled your holy temple:
the corruption of worship has reached the point that anything goes.
Jerusalem lies in ruins.
Look around the globe and seek for faithful churches
that preach Christ and him crucified.

But we don't need to go outside of our own congregation
to see the power of the world, the flesh and the devil!

Indeed, you can see it in your own heart!

You are God's inheritance –
and yet you prefer friendship with the world to friendship with God.
You would rather watch TV than read the scriptures.
You would rather Twitter and Facebook than pray.

The nations have invaded the heritage of the LORD!

And they have defiled God's holy temple.

You are the temple of God's Spirit.

And yet the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life
rule in your heart.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1

What agreement has the temple of God with idols?

For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

*“I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them,
and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

*Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch no unclean thing;*

then I will welcome you,

*and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me,
says the Lord Almighty.”*

Since we have these promises, beloved,

*let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit,
bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.*

If we are the temple of the living God,
then we must be separate from the unclean ways of life of those around us.
We must cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit.
What are you doing with your body?
How are you using your time?
What did you do in the last week to cleanse yourself from defilement?
If all you are doing is sitting there “trying not to sin”
then you are missing the point entirely!
The only way to “avoid sin” is to turn from it to Christ.
In other words, there must be an active pursuit of holiness.

How are you “bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God”?

If you are a parent, how are you modeling (and teaching) this to your children?
If you are married, how do you demonstrate holiness with your spouse?

The nations have invaded.
The holy temple of God has been defiled.
Jerusalem lies in ruins.

The church has become a taunt to our neighbors, mocked and derided by those around us.

And so Asaph concludes:

*Let the groans of the prisoners come before you;
according to your great power, preserve those doomed to die!
Return sevenfold into the lap of our neighbors
the taunts with which they have taunted you, O Lord!*

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil!
You do realize, of course, that when you pray “deliver us from evil”
(or deliver us from the evil one)
you are praying for the overthrow of Satan’s kingdom?
You are praying that God would hear the groans of those who are suffering.
You are praying that God would have mercy on those doomed to die.
And you are praying that God would bring judgment on all his and our enemies.

After all, the promise to Abraham included the third part:
I will bless all those who bless you; and those who curse you, I will curse.

I know that we don’t feel entirely comfortable praying that God would
“return sevenfold into the lap of our neighbors
the taunts with which they have taunted you, O Lord!”
But if you ever want to see justice come on the earth,
then you will need to learn to pray that God would bring justice!

that God would rescue his people from those who would destroy them –
AND that God would do away with the destroyers!

In one sense, Jonah understood this.

Jonah wanted justice!
He knew that Ninevah was wicked,
and so he longed for that wicked city to be destroyed.

And being a prophet, he knew that God generally sent prophets
to warn people of judgment, *so that* they would repent,
so that he might have mercy on them.

So Jonah refused to go to Ninevah.

Our reading began with Jonah 1:17

And Yahweh appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah.

Usually when something “swallows” something else in Hebrew,
it is a sign of judgment.

The earth swallowed Dathan and Abiram in Numbers 16.
Proverbs 1:12 speaks of the grave (and the wicked) swallowing people up.
But here God appoints the great fish to swallow up Jonah.
Ordinarily being swallowed up alive is a bad thing,
but here, being swallowed alive is a means of deliverance!

And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jesus will say in Matthew 12

that the only sign given to this “wicked and adulterous generation”
is the sign of Jonah,
*For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish,
so also will the Son of Man be three days and three nights
in the heart of the earth*

If Jonah represents Israel,
then the prophetic message to Israel
is that Israel must die (at least symbolically)
so that the nations can live.

In other words, the *problem* of Psalm 79 is a picture of the solution.

The invasion of God’s heritage –
the defiling of the temple –
the overthrow of Jerusalem –
is actually pointing to our redemption!

After all, what will Jesus do?

The Son of Man will lay down his life,
he will descend into hell,
and be swallowed up by the grave,
so that those who trust in him might live.

It is in that context that we hear Jonah's prayer.

Jonah's prayer consists of two parallel sections, followed by a conclusion.

The parallel sections are verses 2-4 and verses 5-7.

This poem is very carefully constructed.

Each section has a similar flow:

in verses 2 and 3 he is crying from the belly of Sheol,
and surrounded by the flood
while in verse 5 he is surrounded by the deep;
and in verse six he goes down to the land
whose bars closed upon him.

Each section concludes with a reference to Jonah's prayer and the holy temple,
in verses 4 and 7.

So the poem moves from the grave to the waters to the temple (section one),
and then from the waters to the grave to the temple (section two).

So while the two sections operate in parallel,
the parallelism is not exact!

But I would like us to consider especially how Jonah prays,
"lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one."

After all, Jonah is here because of what God did!

Verse three points out that Jonah's plight was a result of God's act of judgment:

*For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas,
And the flood surrounded me;
All your waves and your billows passed over me.*

The raging seas can be an image of death and the grave,
or an image of the nations raging against the people of God – or both.

But Jonah understands that this is God's doing.

You cast me into the deeps.

And yet, from the very belly of Sheol – from the very depths of the grave –
Jonah cries out to God:

*I am driven away from your sight;
Yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.*

In the midst of judgment, Jonah has hope.

After all, what is the “belly of Sheol”?

“Sheol” is the Hebrew name for the grave – the realm of the dead.

Sheol is the place that is furthest from the presence of God.

In all the earth, Sheol and the Temple are polar opposites.

From the belly of Sheol – from the depths of the grave –

Jonah knows that he will see the holy temple of God again.

Deliver us from evil!

Jonah descended into the belly of Sheol as a sign to Israel.

And Jesus explains what the sign of Jonah means.

Because Jesus descended into Sheol.

He endured the wrath and torment – the curse – that we deserved.

He remained under the power of death for three days, just like Jonah.

Jesus was driven away from God’s sight –

so that he cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?!”

All this he endured because of your sin!

He descended into hell so that you might ascend into heaven!

Even as part one insisted that it was God who cast him into the deep,

so also part two insists that God is the one who has raised him up from the dead.

As the raging sea reminded the Israelites of their enemies, raging against them,

the sign of Jonah reminds them that God will raise them up on the third day.

Salvation belongs to the LORD!

When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD,

and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.

As we have seen, the temple is at the heart of this prayer.

God’s holy temple is where both of the two main sections of the prayer conclude.

Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.

But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you;

what I have vowed I will pay.

Salvation belongs to the LORD.

Jonah, like Israel, has run away from God –

he has run away from his task –

but Salvation belongs to the LORD,

and so God has brought Jonah through death to life,

and now he will complete the mission that God had given him.

And even so, our Lord Jesus Christ has passed through fire and water and death,
and has been raised up and seated at the right hand of the Father.
He has successfully passed through the waters of judgment and death,
and so our hope is in him.

But of course, as the scriptures witness so abundantly,
the triumph of the church will come through our participation in and imitation of Christ.
Our road to glory is the way of the cross.

When you pray “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”
you are not praying for an easy life!

Rather, you are praying that God would conform you to the sufferings of Messiah.
You are praying that God would deliver you
from the onslaught of the world, the flesh and the devil.

And he will!

And so, as Asaph concludes Psalm 79:13

*But we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever;
from generation to generation we will recount your praise.*

128. Q. How do you conclude your prayer?

A. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. That is: All this we ask of Thee because, as our King, having power over all things, Thou art both willing and able to give us all that is good, and because not we but Thy holy Name should so receive all glory for ever.

This particular ending is not found in the more ancient manuscripts of Matthew’s gospel.

It seems clear that no one in the first couple centuries ever used the words

“For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever.”

These words come from 1 Chronicles 29.

Apparently what happened was that many people felt as though the Lord’s Prayer ended too abruptly.

So at some point in the 2nd or 3rd century, some people added this concluding phrase from 1 Chronicles 29.

And then one day a scribe who had grown up using this ending to the Lord’s Prayer was copying a manuscript of Matthew.

He was horrified that someone had accidentally “left out” this ending,
and so, since it was “obviously” the ending of the Lord’s Prayer,
he “corrected” the manuscript.

So when Jesus taught his disciples to pray,
he probably did not use these words,

but as we have seen, Jesus *was* teaching his disciples to pray after the pattern of the prayers of the Old Testament, so it is (in some respects) appropriate that we conclude the Lord's Prayer with this phrase from David's prayer in 1 Chronicles 29.

129. Q. What does the word Amen mean?

A. Amen means: It is true and certain. For God has much more certainly heard my prayer than I feel in my heart that I desire this of Him.

So let me ask you:

127. Q. What is the sixth petition?

A. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. That is: In ourselves we are so weak that we cannot stand even for a moment. Moreover, our sworn enemies - the devil, the world, and our own flesh - do not cease to attack us. Wilt Thou, therefore, uphold and strengthen us by the power of Thy Holy Spirit, so that in this spiritual war we may not go down to defeat, but always firmly resist our enemies, until we finally obtain the complete victory.

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