

4 Priorities For The New Year

“Prayer”

Matthew 6:13

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on December 27, 2015

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Please open your Bibles to Matthew 6.
- When people become Christians, they begin to learn that they are in a battle. A battle against their own sin. A battle against evil spiritual powers.
 - And in this battle, Christians often find themselves thrown back and forth, from one extreme to another.
- On the one extreme are those who know what it means to battle with their own sin. It is all they can see. And they often fall into despair.
 - You know you are in this group if you feel that sin is always beating you down, if the wounds from fighting against things such as anger, lust, bitterness, jealousy, and envy, are still fresh in your life, if you are more aware of your sin than you are aware of Jesus' love for you.
- And yet a Christian can then swing to the opposite extreme and forget there is a battle at all. There is no desperation for God. There is no crying out for help to God.
 - I liken this to the Franklin Expedition. In 1845 John Franklin left Europe for the North Pole. The ships were lost until just last year when one of the ships was found. What struck me about this expedition was how naïve and ignorant they were about the conditions of such a journey. You can see this in what they took with them.
 - *“The Franklin expedition had 138 officers of Her Majesty’s navy. They had a 1200 volume library, a hand organ to play music, china place settings for officers and men, cut glass wine goblets, sterling silver flatware and no special clothing for the arctic only the uniforms from her Majesty’s navy. They were noble and well dressed but they all died and their corpses were found with pieces of backgammon boards and a great deal of table silver engraved with officer’s initials and family crests.”*
- Christians have a tendency to either forget that we are in a battle and consequently to not take temptation seriously, or we are so acutely aware of our own sin and our battle with it that we get discouraged and overwhelmed.
 - But oh the grace of God toward us. Here in the 6th petition of the Lord’s Prayer Jesus gives us a gift – a gift that liberates us from continually being thrown back and forth between the two extremes.
 - The 6th petition is a gift because it disturbs our naïve arrogance by showing us what weak and defenseless children we actually are but then it comforts us by revealing an all-powerful Father who defends his helpless children.
 - This morning Jesus will comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable.
- Oh I want you to see what a gift this petition that you might constantly use it in your prayers as you enter this New Year. To that end I want to do two things:

- First, I want to expound the meaning of the request and then second I want to expose our great need to make use of this gift.
 - Expound the meaning, expose the need.

EXPOUNDING THE MEANING OF THE REQUEST

- First then, let's expound the meaning of the request. **(SHOW SLIDE 2)**
 - We need to begin by **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** setting it within the Lord's Prayer.
- Notice first that Jesus divides the prayer into two sections. The first three requests concern God while the last three concern us. We ask him to hallow *his* name, cause *his* kingdom to come, and *his* will to be done. The focus then shifts to three requests that concern us.
 - **READ 11-13** - *Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*
 - Jesus boils our ultimate needs in life down to just three things: bread, forgiveness, and deliverance. Or we could say provision, pardon, and protection.
- These three requests wrap up all of life – past, present, and future. We pray for bread for the present day. We pray for forgiveness for our bad past. And now in the 6th we pray for protection that we might have a good future.
 - It is said that Martin Luther went to bed praying the 5th request, ***“Forgive us our debts”*** and woke up praying the 6th ***“Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.”***
 - I have found this to be a good practice. As I review the day at night I ask for pardon. As I preview the day in the morning I ask that God protect me so that I don't fall into the sins that cause me to ask for forgiveness.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** Secondly, notice that the Lord's Prayer is a family prayer. We are to pray to ***“Our Father in heaven.”*** In the context of the 6th petition this means that we are weak and defenseless children who are encouraged to look to our Father for protection.
 - One night Emily was scared that something was climbing up the outside of the house to her window. I said to her, ***“Emily, who is the strongest in this house?” “You are daddy.” “Right and I will protect you. But Emily who is even stronger than Daddy?” “God.”***
 - Her fears disappeared as she looked to her earthly and heavenly father for protection. That is the image here in this request. We, the children, look to God our Father for protection.

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION

- Now that we have set the 6th request within the Lord's prayer, **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** let's look at the request itself now by breaking it into its two parts. Look at the first half with me. **READ 13a** - *And lead us not into temptation...* What does it mean to pray ***“Lead us not into temptation”***? Does it mean that God is the one who leads us into temptation and so we are asking God to please not do that?
 - James 1:13 provides clarity: ***“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt***

anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.”

- We see clearly then that God does not cause us to be tempted and therefore he also does not ever cause us to sin. **(SHOW SLIDE 6)**
So the 6th petition does mean, *“Father, you are the one who places temptation in my path. Please don’t do that.”*
- So what does the first half of the request mean? It means, **(SHOW SLIDE 7)**
“Father, keep me away from paths that will lead me into temptation.”
 - A helpful image would be that life is like a big open field covered in lush beautiful tall grass. But throughout that tall grass the devil has dug spike-filled pits and then camouflaged them so they cannot be seen. The devil then seeks to lead us, who are naïve little children, to fall into those pits. The pits are temptations to sin – sin that will destroy us.
 - So in the first half of the request we are praying, *“Father, I am like a naïve child. I cannot discern where the spike-filled pits are. So Father, please lead my path away from them. Direct my steps so I don’t even come near temptation.”*

DELIVER US FROM THE EVIL ONE

- Let’s come now to expound the second half of the request.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 8) READ 13b** - ...*but deliver us from evil.*
- This word ‘deliver’ is an aggressive, almost violent word. It means to grab by force, to seize, to snatch. But what are we asking the Father to deliver us from?
 - Some translations use *“evil one”* but the ESV uses *“evil”*. Both are right. The original Greek text uses the definite article, *“the evil”*. So it is literally, *“Deliver us from the evil.”*
 - What is “the evil”? In the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus speaks of *“the evil”*, He is referring to the devil who is *the* evil one.¹
- So we are not praying that God would just deliver us evil in general as if we are asking to be delivered from all trials and troubles in life. Jesus never promises that if you become a Christian he will insulate you and keep you from all the problems of this world. He actually promises the opposite for those who follow Him.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 9)** Jesus is not teaching us to pray, *“Deliver us from the difficulties we face in this evil world”*. He is teaching us to pray that as we live in this evil world, God would deliver us from the evil one who would seek to destroy us.
 - Jesus summarizes this perfectly in his prayer for us in John 17. *“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world (the evil and trials of this world) but that you protect them from the evil one.”*²
- So as we walk through the lush green field of life the evil one does not just dig spike filled pits for children to fall into. He is so wicked that he uses all his power to influence helpless children to fall into those pits.
 - So to put the two halves together then we are praying, *“Dear Father, please lead us away from the spike filled pits of temptation and Father*

¹ See Matthew 5:37.

² John 17:15.

when the devil seduces our childlike minds so that our feet approach the edge come and grab us, swoop down and seize us, deliver us from his influence.”

- What a gift this request is. It shows us how weak we are but also shows how loving and powerful our Father is – a Father who, when his children cry out to him will deliver them.

EXPOSING OUR NEED FOR THIS REQUEST

- So now we have expounded the request. For the remainder of our time let me **(SHOW SLIDE 10)** expose our great need for this request. One of the devil’s greatest strategies is to make us feel comfortable and secure, not sensing a great need to pray this petition. But this is as naïve and foolish as the Franklin expedition.
 - So how do you maintain a keen sense that protection is among your three greatest needs in life? **(SHOW SLIDE 11)** One of the greatest ways to cultivate your sense of need for God’s protection is to meditate on how people greater than yourself have fallen prey to the devil’s traps.
- This is what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10. Israel fell into sin and so Paul writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 12)** *“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us...so, if you think you are standing firm, be careful you don’t fall.”*
 - This message has grown out of my own sense of this. As I read the Bible I am continually struck by how people far greater than myself have fallen. Reading their stories, my hearts cries out, *“Father in heaven, lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from the evil one.”*
 - So in order to expose your need for this request and make this a heartfelt cry of yours throughout life, let’s recall a few stories of great heroes who fell.

DAVID WITH BATHSHEBA

- Let’s begin with King David. **(SHOW SLIDE 13)** Turn back with me to 2 Samuel 11. The first 10 chapters of 2 Samuel are filled with his victories and godliness. In chapter 10 he utterly crushes the Syrians.
 - He is about 49 or 50 years old here. But as is so often the case, success can breed apathy and complacency. In his middle-aged success David grows lax and as he rests on his laurels the door opens for temptation.
 - **READ 1** - *In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.*
- So instead of leading his army against Ammon, David decided to relax at home while Joab went to war.
 - **READ 2** - *It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king’s house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful.*
 - In those days rooftops were used as balconies and David’s was above all others. Looking down he saw the most alluring woman

he had ever seen bathing herself. But David did not just look. He did not even just fantasize. He had to have this woman.

- **READ 3-5** - *And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."*
 - Who knows what she felt when she heard the king wanted to see her. She may not have anticipated his true desires but sometime after the met there was intense mutual attraction. They slept together and she got pregnant.
 - As is so often the case one sin leads to another. To cover up their illicit affair David conspires to have Uriah killed and then takes Bathsheba as his own wife.
- This story should shake you to the core, revealing how weak your. For consider who this man is: he is no spiritual weakling. God says of David that he is a man after his own heart. This is the man who wrote most of the psalms including Psalm 23.
 - His godliness and character are astounding: he is loyal to his friends, generous to his enemies, he battles against injustice, and seeks after God with all he has. David is the prototypical king and under him Israel experiences their golden age.
- And yet as Philip Keller writes, *"David the formidable warrior who had killed the lion, the bear, Goliath, hundreds of Philistines and Syrians would himself suddenly fall prey to his own delicate desires for ease, luxury and pleasure. He who in the heat of battle could discipline himself and his men for heroic exploits could not control the sinister cravings of his inner soul for personal gratification."*³
 - As you walk into this next year the devil will have spike filled pits of sexual temptation dug and waiting for you. When life is going well and you sit down to relax at your computer one click can lead you into pornography. When you are lonely someone of the opposite sex may come along who cares for you and suddenly you find yourself going places you never thought of two weeks earlier – places that can destroy your life.
- After reading this story I am so grateful for the gift of the sixth petition. If King David, a man after God's own heart can fall into sexual sin, we must heed the warning and cry out, *"Our Father in heaven...lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one."*

UZZIAH AND HEZEKIAH

- Let's now consider two other Old Testament kings. **(SHOW SLIDE 14)** In 2 Chronicles 26 we read of the good and godly King Uzziah, *"He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD...he sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of the God."* We read that God gave him victory

³ Phillip Keller, "David the Shepherd King II", 85.

over his enemies and that ***“his fame spread as far as the border of Egypt, because he had become very powerful.”***

- And then after all this success and seeking after God we read in 26:16 these sobering words, ***“But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall.”***
- **(SHOW SLIDE 15)** It is the same with Hezekiah in 2 Chronicles 32. For three chapters the Bible lists all the good he did and then summarizes it by saying, ***“This is what Hezekiah did throughout Judah, doing what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God. In everything that he undertook in the service of God’s temple and in obedience to the law and the commands, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. And so he prospered.”***
 - Oh, that those words could be said of my life. But then in 2 Chronicles 32:6 we read, ***“in those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. He prayed to the LORD, who answered him and gave him a miraculous sign. But Hezekiah’s heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness shown to him; therefore the Lord’s wrath was on him and on Judah and Jerusalem.”***
- Pride is at the root of all our problems with other people. Think over your past. Why do you have so many ruptured relationships? What is the common denominator in all your relational breakdowns? The humbling answer is that you are the common denominator. Your pride has caused great trouble.
 - You see, pride blinds us to our own faults but magnifies the faults of others.
 - Pride is the root of anger and bitterness because we refuse to give in. Pride keeps us from listening.
 - Pride causes us to blame instead of look to ourselves.
 - Pride is what makes us think the 6th petition is not really one of our top three needs in life.
- What I am most struck by is that fact that Uzziah and Hezekiah were the good kings. There are lists of bad kings who did evil. But these are the ones who sought God, who lived for him, who loved him and still fell into great sins because of their pride.
 - ***“Our Father in heaven...lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.”***

PETER

- Or finally consider Peter. **(SHOW SLIDE 16)** Here was a young man who walked and talked with Jesus himself for 3 years. He was part of Jesus’ innermost circle and had amazing spiritual encounters as he saw Jesus transfigured on the mountain. He may have been bullheaded and brash but he earnestly wanted to follow Jesus.
 - But then Jesus says something that clearly expounds the meaning of the 6th petition and exposes our need for it. ***“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail.”***
- But even after Jesus says this Peter is naively arrogant about his own spiritual strength. He says, ***“Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.”*** Do you think Peter was just talking big? No, I think he meant it just like we do when

we say, ***“Lord, I will follow you this time.”*** Peter really did love Jesus and he was very serious in wanting to follow him.

- Jesus answered, ***“I tell you Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.”*** And that is exactly what happened.
 - Do you see the power of Satan? Without the protection of Jesus, I think Simon would have ended up like Judas. This year we will all at times be tempted, like Peter, to deny Jesus for the sake of our reputation, advancement, or looking good in front of others.
“Father in heaven...lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

CONCLUSION

- As I read these stories, which could be multiplied many times over in biblical times and in our day, I am humbled to see my great need for this request. I see what a gift this request is as I watch people around me falling into sin. I see what a gift this request is when I consider my own heart for like the hymn says, ***“Prone to wander Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.”***
 - There is no more dangerous place to be in the Christian life than when you do not feel a deep need to seek the face of God each day for help and deliverance...when you are content just to wake up and go about your life.
- It does not matter if you are young or old, a new Christian or a mature one, we are all weak children who desperately need the protection of our Father.
 - Being young has unique temptations but so does getting older. The battle does not get easier. In some ways it gets harder. For notice that it was when David was 50 that he fell. It was in their older years that Uzziah and Hezekiah became prideful through their accomplishments.
 - How many marriages collapse in middle age? How many people commit fraud in their latter years?
- You see as a Christian you never move past the point of needing this request. You never arrive at a place where you can say, ***“I have made it and can handle it from here God”***. No, the Christian life is always one great cry for help and deliverance.
 - Help me to bridle my tongue
 - Help me to not gossip or slander
 - Help me to love those who harm me
 - Help me not to envy others
 - Help me not to not give in to lust
 - Help me not wreck my marriage through adultery
 - Help me to be content
 - Help me to have a heart that loves you oh God
 - Help, help, help, help, help!
- The good news of this request is that help is available. Our Father loves us and delights to answer the requests of his children.
 - And notice this is the last request. What a great way to end prayer. As we are about to say ***“Amen”*** and go into the world, back to our lives where there is much trouble and temptation, we end by saying,
 - ***“Father in heaven...lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”***