

“Signed, Sealed & Delivered: The Lord’s Prayer, part 5”

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Luke 11:1-4

Children’s Time

How many of you have ever seen one of these? These pocket knives have been around for more than 100 years. In the late 1800's, a knife maker in Switzerland named Karl Elsener designed a pocket knife that he called the Soldier's Knife. He sold it to the Swiss Army in 1891 and soon they were being sold not only in Switzerland, but all over the world. They became even more famous in the 1940's when they were shipped to the United States to be sold on U.S. Army bases. In fact, it was American soldiers who gave them their name, the "Swiss Army Knife."

The purpose of these little knives was to give the soldiers an all-in-one tool to meet their every need. It has a can opener, a screwdriver, scissors, and of course, a knife. There is a tool there to do just about anything you might want to do.

There are a lot of imitations of the Swiss Army knife. In fact, this is an imitation. But the real thing is still made in Switzerland, and one of the finest pocketknives available. They are sold with a lifetime guarantee. That means if anything ever goes wrong with it the company will replace it for free.

The Swiss Army knife reminds me of God. Every day we can face difficult situations. The Bible tells us that God has an everlasting, lifetime guaranteed to be with us, loving us, no matter what.

Sermon

Through this series on the Lord’s Prayer, we are building an understanding of what it means for us to be the Church, growing the Kingdom of Heaven here in this world.

During the first week, we discussed how this prayer summarized Jesus’ teaching and leads us into an other-centered life beyond our safe and secure “in-crowd” as we imitate Jesus’ example.

We talked about the Kingdom Jesus referred to so much — the Kingdom of Heaven is alive in this world as we do the will of God.

During the third week, we discussed daily bread. God honors not only our spiritual nature but is concerned about our physical bodies as well. We can trust God to provide enough of what we need each day. But not only this, we also are called to help meet the needs of those around us — this is what it means to live in God's Kingdom.

Last week, we considered forgiveness as a way of life in the Kingdom of Heaven. Forgiveness has us separate a human being from their actions allowing all of us to live more whole and free.

Forgiveness is so basic and important to life that it is like breathing — breathing out the toxic anger, resentment, hate and sin ... then breathing in the cleansing, healing, and renewing power of forgiveness — that the place where we are might truly be Heaven on earth!

Next week, we will wrap up our series on the Lord's Prayer by going back to the beginning and talking about how we approach God in prayer. Did you ever wonder why the prayer begins with "hallowed be your name"? We'll talk about that, and also the tag on

the end about the "kingdom and power and glory forever."

But today we consider the phrase, "and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

READ Luke 11:1-4

Luke's gospel says "do not bring us to the time of trial."

In Matthew it says, "do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one."

This has to do with something we all experience: the inner struggle with temptation — and something we all hope for: to be delivered from evil.

We'll look at both of these.

First, the Aramaic word that is often translated as "temptation" is better translated as "trial." God never tempts us. But it is during a trial when we are tempted and face evil, from which we want to be saved.

To understand "lead us not into a time of trial but deliver us from evil" we might think of a traveler going on a trip to an unfamiliar and dangerous place. He or she needs

a guide who they can trust or they might not make it through.

About 19 years ago, I took a trip to Israel, coordinated by David Swink, who some of you know when he served this church as Associate Pastor in the 1970s. David had taken about 14 of these trips prior and had worked with a guide in the Middle East named Theo.

Sometimes, prior to a trip there would be reports about unrest in the Middle East. David kept in touch with Theo about these to determine if it was safe to continue with the trip.

There were times that Theo told David that the news was nothing to worry about because they were isolated incidents and there was no need to worry.

On a couple of occasions, Theo told David that things were just not safe and the trip needed to be rescheduled.

David trusted Theo as his guide. He entrusted the safety of all who were traveling with him into Theo's hands. If David did not trust Theo implicitly, he would never have given him the final say about the trips.

I can imagine that David might say to Theo, "Now Theo, don't put us in a dangerous situation." He would say this not because he distrusted Theo, but precisely the opposite, because he trusted him.

David was reminding himself that he was placing his trust in Theo as his guide to lead the group safely. And every time Theo was faithful to keep every group safe.

When we pray "lead us not into a time of trial" we remember that we are on a sometimes dangerous journey through life and we are orienting ourselves to God by saying "God we trust you."

The second part is about the plea for God to "deliver us from evil."

This reminds me of a song by Stevie Wonder...

Play first 1:25 of "Signed, Sealed, Delivered (I'm Yours)" by Stevie Wonder

This song was written by Stevie Wonder and, interestingly enough, his mother. It is a statement from a man who has messed up and wants his girlfriend back. He wants to give her a guarantee that he is loyal, and faithful, and there is no need to worry about whatever it

was that he had done. The trespass is behind him and his eyes are focused forward on the relationship with her alone.

More than simply taking his word for it, he is offering his word that is also “signed, sealed and delivered.”

This idiom refers to a legal land deed of long ago, which, in order to be valid, had to have the signature of the seller, be sealed, and then delivered to the new owner.

Including a seal on the document was the key part. This was a guarantee of authenticity made with an extra measure of umph — putting even more than their reputation on the line, it goes deeper to the essence of their identity.

The first known seals were made by the signer actually using their unique tooth print by biting the paper of a document.

In feudal times, kings would have a signet ring with a unique crest, initials, or logo that would be pressed into hot wax to seal the document with its imprint. As long as that seal was in place the authenticity of the signer and contents of the contract were ensured.

Seals evolved through the years and cultures to include: attaching embossed gold or silver wafers to a document, crimping with an embossed seal, or later signing “corporate seal” along with a name.

No matter what form, signing “under seal” is an extra measure of assurance and guarantee that whatever is contained in the message is true, accurate, and trustworthy.

When we pray “deliver us from evil” we pray with this extra measure of confidence that God will, as if with sealed guarantee, deliver us safely from any evil we might face.

“Deliver us from evil” also recalled the Exodus story for Jews. It was God who delivered them not only from slavery in Egypt, but also from the inhospitable conditions of the wilderness.

Deliverance is prayed for when people cannot see with their own limited vision and efforts how they might make it through the evil they face.

We don’t only need to be saved from evil around us, but we also wrestle with our inner demons too.

What is evil? Evil is any force that acts in contradiction to the Kingdom of Heaven.

- If God is creating the Kingdom, then evil is the anti-creation that would tear it down.
- If in God's Kingdom we become more fully human, then evil is the force of dehumanization.
- If in God's Kingdom we are free, then evil is the force of enslavement.
- If in God's Kingdom all are given equal status, then evil is the force of injustice, inequality, suppression, and marginalization.
- If in God's Kingdom there is peace, then evil is the force of war and violence, where people suffer and die.
- If in God's Kingdom people work for the well being of others, then evil is a self-centered life.
- If in God's Kingdom there is a vibrant and whole-hearted faith, then evil is the force of arrogance, pride, and fear that keeps people living in mediocrity, never committing to anything of value in God's Kingdom.

Now it may seem that as we live according to God's Kingdom, evil is always at the door working against us. This could lead us into fear or to be disheartened.

But we pray to a God of hope who overcomes all evil. So, when we feel our own frailty, we pray...

"God, don't let us walk into temptation, but deliver us from the evil around and within us that your kingdom may come, and your will be done here in this place."

We can only with our whole hearts and minds pray "lead us not into a time of trial but deliver us from evil" when we are also saying "Yes!" to God's kingdom coming to birth within us.

This prayer of Jesus reminds us what God's Kingdom is all about.

It is about removing all things that would prevent God's Kingdom birthing in us, bringing about the vibrant and full life God intended when we were created.

It is about bringing to fruition the glory of God's love that shines from us into all the world.

This is the prayer of God's new Kingdom! May nothing hinder it!