

Best Practices for Followers of Jesus:

Prayer, Part 5 “Temptation and The Evil One”

From the Series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”

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Introduction

Have you ever been on an ocean cruise? You’ve seen the commercials on TV. There’s great food. There is sunshine and warm tropical ports of call. There’s entertainment. There are all kinds of reasons, we’re told, for going on an ocean cruise.



Now today, a cruise is purely a vacation. There was a time many years ago, when a cruise was transportation. There was a time before the average person had access to air travel. If you wanted to travel from one continent to another, there was only one way to do it- Travel across the ocean on a ship.

Let’s go back to such a time. The year was 1915. It’s May 1st. Travelers boarded a ship docked at pier 54 in New York City. The destination: Liverpool, England.

This was three years after the sinking of the Titanic. There had been investigations and inquiries. So, ocean travel was safe - No more sinking after running into icebergs.

It was Springtime, so after getting settled, the passengers could spend the afternoon on the main deck playing shuffleboard, going for a stroll, or relaxing with a good book. In the evening, they were treated to fine food in the dining room. After dinner, they could watch a concert. This went on for 6 nights.

On May 7, the ship was approaching England. People were enjoying their last day at sea. Then, all of a sudden, disaster hit. There was an explosion. The ship began to sink. A few hours later, the ship disappeared under the waves. Over 1 thousand people perished.

What happened? The people who boarded this ship had forgotten something absolutely vital to their safety - The world of their day was at war. World War I had broken out. The ship’s name was Lusitania. It had been targeted by an enemy submarine and sank after being hit by a torpedo.

Over the last few sessions, we've been learning about Prayer. This includes the pattern for prayer given by Jesus to his followers. Let's read again:

9 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.'
(Matthew 6:9-13)

We've been looking at this pattern in detail. Today, we're focusing on the last sentence: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." Let's try to understand this last part of the pattern for prayer that our Lord Jesus has given to us.

This pattern for prayer, if you think about it, is quite short. It's only 6 sentences. We're not instructed to ask for a large number of things, but what we're instructed to ask for is of immense importance. The things we are instructed to pray for are central to the lives of believers.

We start by approaching God as our Father, and asking that he be honored, and that his kingdom and influence increase. This is good, but we need to understand something: Part of God's kingdom coming, and God's will being done, is to understand that there are forces in opposition to the great King. There are two kingdoms: The Kingdom of heaven, and the kingdom of this earth. These kingdoms are involved in a conflict. They battle against each other.

The Great Father is in heaven.

- However, there are forces on the earth that oppose him.

The Father's name is to be hallowed.

- The forces of earth want his name to be dishonored, to be blasphemed.

The Father's kingdom will come someday.

- But in order to come, it must displace the kingdom of this earth.

The Father's will should be done.

- But the earth is filled with forces that oppose his will.

Jesus started the pattern for prayer with a request for God and his kingdom to be exalted. So, it makes sense that followers of Jesus are instructed to close the prayer by asking that the forces that oppose God would be diminished.

This is all summed up in the sentence we're looking at today: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

So, there is a conflict. In order to understand this conflict, we need to understand three things:

- The existence of the conflict.
- The enemy in the conflict.
- The weapons of the conflict.

Let's look at the first one.

I. The Existence of the conflict.

We've spoken about this at different times, so I won't go into this in detail. If you want to dig deeper, please contact me and I'll give you some resources. There will be some links at the end of this article. For now, let's just be reminded:

1 Why do the nations conspire
and the peoples plot in vain?
2 The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord and against his anointed,
saying,
3 "Let us break their chains
and throw off their shackles."
(Psalm 2:1-3)

The nations of the world are in rebellion. They all conspire to break away from the one true king of the universe. They join together to thwart his will. They want their own kingdom, not his.

We started by looking at the tragedy of the Lusitania, the great ocean liner that was sunk by a torpedo at the beginning of World War I. Do you know what is particularly sad? People were warned about the possibility of an attack.

World War I was a confusing war. In World War II, we had terrible people like Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini and the Imperial Japanese all working together to bring terror. Peaceful nations had to defend against them. So, there were clear bad guys and clear good guys. World War I was not so clear. All anyone knew with certainty at the time was that everyone was fighting. It's very confusing at times.

The Lusitania was a good example of this confusion. In civilized countries, if a war breaks out, you don't target people who aren't involved in the fighting; you don't aim at civilians. It follows though that in order to protect civilians, you don't purposely store or transport weapons near

them. There were rumors that the Lusitania was carrying such weapons from America to England.

Because of that, the Germans put the following add in fifty American newspapers:

NOTICE!

TRAVELLERS intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany and her allies and Great Britain and her allies; that the zone of war includes the waters adjacent to the British Isles; that, in accordance with formal notice given by the Imperial German Government, vessels flying the flag of Great Britain, or any of her allies, are liable to destruction in those waters and that travelers sailing in the war zone on the ships of Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk.

IMPERIAL GERMAN EMBASSY

Washington, D.C. 22 April 1915

Because of this, we know that there were two types of people travelling on the Lusitania on that fateful day in May of 1915: 1) People who didn't know about the warning, and 2) People who knew, but disregarded the warning for some reason.

For the people who didn't know: Perhaps they missed the advertisement. That's sad. Perhaps others though had friends who saw the ad, but chose not to tell their friends? Imagine someone reading this warning and thinking, "Hey, I've got a friend sailing on that ship. Should I tell them? Maybe not – they'll think I'm crazy." If that's what someone thought, then they did a grave disservice to their friends.

Then, there were others who heard, but disregarded the warning. Imagine this: Those people spent six days enjoying fine food, entertainment, and relaxation. Then, one day, it hit home. They became part of a terrible disaster that they could have avoided.

What does this mean for us? My friends, our world is at war. We are part of a titanic spiritual conflict.

This is very important: When we discussed praying for our daily bread, we mentioned that there is a hint in that prayer. We are to pray this pattern for prayer daily, at least. As I said, if you look at the pattern for prayer that Jesus gives us, we aren't instructed to pray for a large number of things - Just a few really. ***One of those things involves us being reminded, daily, that we are at war.***

The war is difficult to understand because it's invisible. The people sailing on the Lusitania in May of 1915 looked out over the ocean and saw blue water. They breathed warm springtime air scented with ocean spray. They didn't see the enemy submarine lurking beneath the surface.

When we look outside, we see a world full of wonderful things. If you visit central park in New York City in the Springtime, you see flowers and fields and sunshine and people enjoying beautiful weather. But if you could see through the eyes of the angels, you'd see something very different: You would see a titanic battle.

So, the first thing we need to understand about this prayer is the existence of the conflict. It's all around us. And we are to be reminded about it daily. We do not do ourselves or the people we care about any favors if we ignore this.

Having looked at the existence of the conflict, let's move on to the next thing we need to understand.

II. The Enemy in the Conflict

We need to understand the enemy in the conflict. We read, "...deliver us from the Evil One."

During our series, we've run into situations where well-known Scriptures can be slightly different, depending on the translation you're reading. For example, in our last session, we noticed that "Forgive us our debts" can be translated as "Forgive us our trespasses", or "Forgive us our sins." Most modern translations today use the word "debts".

This is another one of those situations. Those of you who have recited this with others in public settings know that sometimes people say, "Deliver us from evil". Why is that? This is a nuance in the original Greek language. The words in Greek can be translated correctly either as "evil" or "the evil one."

Notice, I'm using the word "nuance". Here's the idea: We believe that there is evil in our world, and it comes from two sources: -An Evil being known as the Devil, and humans who act in evil ways. The humans who act in evil ways often do so because they're influenced by the Devil in some way. There are also things that happen in our lives that can be called "random". They're a topic for another day. We're concerned here for the things that come from evil as a force.

So, there is an evil being known as the Devil, and there are evil things and events that he causes. These two things are so tightly related, that the Greek uses the same word. In the context, it's probably better to translate this as "evil one", rather than just "evil". So, this is our enemy in the conflict: The Evil One, or the Devil.

The Devil and his work are a topic for a whole series of message or even whole books. We'll concentrate on what we need for this session as it relates to this pattern for prayer.

Let's read something about the Devil:

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

So, the Devil is like a lion waiting in the grass for someone to devour. Again, when we look at a park, we see grass, sunshine and trees. If you had the eyes of an angel, you would see a lion lurking in the grass looking for his next meal.

Here's what we need to know about the Devil. He hates God. He wants to sit on the throne of God. Because God loves you, the Devil hates you. He wants you dead. He wants your soul in hell.

The Devil is an equal opportunity employer. He doesn't care where you come from: Asia, Africa, North or South America, Europe, or the islands. He wants you dead. He wants your soul in hell. That's it.

We've learned two important things so far. The world is in a titanic spiritual conflict. You have a very evil and powerful enemy who hates you.

Jesus wants you to be reminded of these things daily.

Having looked at the conflict and our enemy in the conflict, let's look at the last part:

III. The Weapons of the conflict

Let's learn about the weapons that are used against us in the conflict. They're summed up in the words, "And lead us not into temptation..."

The Devil can attack us in many ways. Let's concentrate today on temptation. We'll look at two times when people are specifically tempted by the Devil.

The first is Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. We've discussed this on many occasions. If you'd like a detailed discussion, again, contact me and I'll tell you where to go. For now, let's just summarize: God placed Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. He told them they could eat any fruit from any tree - Except for one: The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

In Genesis chapter 3, the Devil, represented by a serpent, steps in and tempts Adam and Eve. We'll find that he wants Adam and Eve to doubt three things.

And he said to the woman, "Has God really said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1)

God told Adam and Eve they could eat from most of the trees in the garden - Just not that one tree. The Serpent started by suggesting that God could not get that simple message across in a

dependable, understandable, and meaningful way. Stated simply, he wanted Adam and Eve to **doubt God's Word**.

Next, God did more than tell Adam and Eve to avoid that tree. He told them why. He warned them that if they ate from the tree, they would die. So, here's the next thing the Serpent said:

You certainly will not die! (Genesis 3:4)

The serpent wanted Adam and Eve to believe that when God said things, those things would not happen. In this case the Serpent wanted Adam and Eve to **doubt God's power**.

The worst part of the temptation came when the Serpent said this:

For God knows that on the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will become like God, knowing good and evil. (Genesis 3:5)

Here the Serpent is suggesting that there is some good thing that God is keeping from Adam and Eve. It's summarized by the phrase, "become like God". There's a lot in that one phrase, but for now let's concentrate on the part where the Serpent suggests that God is holding back something good.

What kind of a being holds back good things? Well, someone who is selfish. Someone who wants to keep all the good things for themselves. Maybe, the Serpent suggests, God has some kind of ulterior motive for Adam and Eve? Here, the Serpent wants Adam and Eve to **doubt God's character**.

So, the first temptation on earth involved the three doubts.

- Doubt God's Word.
- Doubt God's Power.
- Doubt God's Character.

That was the first temptation. From this we learn that we need to develop faith. A life of faith involves:

- Trusting God's Word.
- Trusting God's Power.
- Trusting God's Character.

Let's look now at the second temptation. The second temptation is one we covered a while back in our series on Matthew. It involves our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1)

Again, we spent a whole segment on this, so contact me if you want more details. Suffice it to say that our Lord Jesus went one-on-one with the Devil - **And he won.**

Now, notice something interesting about the request that we are instructed to make in the pattern for prayer: “And **lead us not into temptation**, but deliver us from the evil one.”

This is interesting because Jesus was led by the Spirit into temptation. But Jesus tells us to request that the same not happen to us. Why?

This involves the nature of the battle between God’s kingdom and the kingdom of this world, led by the Devil. It is the job of great kings to meet their enemies in battle. No individual resident of a kingdom is required to take on the enemy by themselves. Jesus met the Devil in battle and won. That’s what a great King does.

When Adam and Eve met the devil in the garden, they did something very foolish: They did it alone. They didn’t have to. At any time, they could have said, “Now hold on Mr. Serpent. Let’s ask God about this.” They could have asked for help. They didn’t, and they lost.

God is telling us here that we are never to meet with our enemy, the Devil, alone. We are to ask for help. And once again, we are to do this daily.

Let’s pull this all together.

Conclusion

On the fateful day of May 7, 1915, hundreds of innocent people were sailing the Atlantic on a luxury ship. They enjoyed entertainment, wonderful food, and relaxation. But then, tragedy hit. Those poor people didn’t know that there was an enemy lurking, unseen - An enemy who wanted to destroy them. These people perished because they failed to recognize something. - the world was at war. Sadder, they had been warned about the coming attack.

We’ve learned today that there is something very similar for followers of Jesus. We’ve looked in detail at the last statement in the pattern for prayer that Jesus gave to his followers.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’ (Matthew 6:13)

We’ve learned that there are three things we need to remember, and we need to remember them daily. 1) We are involved in a conflict. The world is at war with the King of the Universe. 2) The enemy in this conflict is no one less than the Devil. He hates God, and he hates you. 3) He has many weapons - today we learned about temptation. The Devil wants us to doubt God’s Word, doubt God’s power, and doubt God’s character. We need to respond by trusting in all these things.

We are also reminded daily that we should never stand against the Devil and his temptations alone. We are to pray and ask that God would not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.

If we take these things to heart, if we follow the pattern of prayer that Jesus has given to his followers, we can be delivered from the Evil one.

Friends, don't let your life be like the Lusitania - A ship full of people that was sunk before it could reach its destination.

Instead, listen and be warned. Trust in God's Word, God's Power, and his Character. He is good, and he loves you dearly. He wants to help. Let him. Let him carry you to your eternal destination – your home in his kingdom.

May God help us as we seek to implement the instructions that he gives to us.