

Trials and Deliverance

Thomas Robinson, *On Earth as in Heaven*, 4, September 9, 2012

Matthew 6:9-13

⁹ Pray then like this:

*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 / testing / trial, (peirasmos)
but deliver us from evil / the evil one. ” (poneros)

Matthew 6:33

³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ”

Mark 1:10-12; Luke 4:13

¹⁰ (When Jesus was baptized) he saw ... the Spirit descending on him ... ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased. ” ¹² The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ And he was in the wilderness forty days, being **tempted / tested** (peirazein) **by Satan.** ”

^{4:13} When the devil had ended **every temptation / test** (peirasmos), he departed ... until an opportune time.

Matthew 26:40-42

⁴⁰ And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, ... ⁴¹ “Watch and pray that you may not **enter into temptation / trial** (peirasmos). The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. ”

⁴² Again... he went and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done. ”

Hebrews 4:15

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who **in every respect has been tempted / tested** (peirazein) **as we are**, yet without sin.

1 Peter 4:12-13

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the **fiery trial** when it comes upon you **to test you** (peirazein), as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as **you share Christ’s sufferings...**

James 1:14-15

¹⁴ Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire gives birth to sin.

Matthew 5:37, 39

³⁷ “Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this **comes from evil / the evil one.** ”

³⁹ “But I say to you, Do not resist **the one who is evil.** But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek.... ”

Matthew 13:19

¹⁹ “When anyone hears the **word of the kingdom** and does not understand it, **the evil one** comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. ”

John 17:15

¹⁵ “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from **the evil one.** ”

Ephesians 6:12

¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the **authorities**, against the cosmic **powers** over this present darkness, against the **spiritual forces of evil** in the heavenly places.

The Journey of Jesus' Prayer

The prayer Jesus taught his disciples leads through the landscape of a life centered on the reality of God. Memorize, recite, but even more meditate. It is simple and brief, but every word has depth and challenge. God as father; the heavens; his name hallowed across ages. Seeking his kingdom, present and coming. Commitment to God's will and the unity of heaven and earth. Bread – physical, spiritual – a gift from God. Seeing our debt (all of life; especially our sins) owed to God and forgiven/absorbed/paid by God for us. Commitment and practice to forgive/absorb the debts/wrongs of others toward us. An amazing range. So many of the words open paths of exploration: Father, name, kingdom, heaven and earth, the invented word *epiousios* - daily, etc., debts. They are linked in important ways to the distinct character of Jesus' work. Today we take the final two lines. Here again are words that unfold: *peirasmos*: temptation, testing, trial – an idea that spans the Bible from Eden to the Last Judgment. Similarly broad is the phrase *tou ponerou*: the evil one, that which is evil, evil generally. Again, it touches the whole Bible and the drama of every life. We often memorize the prayer with a final line: *For yours is the kingdom . . . Amen*. This ending found in the King James Bible, but not in early manuscripts was added for church use from David's great prayer (1Chr 29:11).

Lead Us Not into Temptation

Don't carry us into a (time of) trial. Why pray this when we know that life is filled with temptations, tests, trials? Indeed, the whole of life/the world is a place of testing. God planted Eden with the deadly tree of knowledge at its center. That tree marked danger, freedom, moral choice – a test. The humans chose; their eyes were opened to vulnerability, fear, alienation – the human situation. God put that human crisis at Eden's center. With it he also planted another tree, a cross, for God in Jesus in the middle of history. Jesus faces the trial. Jesus' teaching is full of irony. After his baptism, Jesus is led into temptation/testing with Satan. His whole ministry is full of tests, temptations. In Gethsemane he faces the great test. He prays to be delivered from the evil facing him, the horror of the cross. His deliverance is refused and he embraces the will of God. All the while the disciples sleep, unaware that they could be drawn into the same crisis. Jesus urges them to pray not to enter temptation: *the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak*. Jesus went through the heart of the trial (*peirasmos*), into the darkness of sin and death, so that we don't have to face the same trial. Temptations / tests are part of living in this world, but don't overrate your own power. Don't go into dangerous temptation and pray for strength. Pray to avoid the temptation. Run! Realism about the power of temptation and our own desires saves strength for facing tests that are imposed on us. The disciple can expect "fiery trials" of all kinds – personal, relational, social, political, etc. Learn from Jesus' example.

Deliver Us from the Evil One

Just as Jesus sees God everywhere, he urges us to see evil in personal terms to recognize the Accuser's deceptive and destructive power. An abstract concept of evil does not convey the reality of evil in the world. Jesus saw a malicious, deceptive, powerful, personal evil, a destructive opponent who "desires to have you to sift you like wheat" (Lk 22:31). Satan was vividly present in lives where the mind and will were destroyed by demonic force. But he was also there where religion had been corrupted by power or by legalism and become destructive. In his sermon, Jesus warns that an oath or a slap are encounters with "the evil one." A devotion to money is the face of Mammon. "The evil one" destroys the seeds of God's kingdom. The prayer is not focused on escaping pain or suffering as such but on evil that corrupts the person. The evil one may use suffering or desires for pleasures to destroy a life. But both suffering and pleasure can also lead to good. Because they are strong experiences they are battlegrounds between God and the evil one. Jesus helps us see that we need God. I'm not powerful enough to conquer the Evil One. I'm not in control of myself enough. I need deliverance. Who will deliver me? I need my 'higher power.' I need 'Our Father.' On every scale, whether it's opposing the oppression of a tyranny, standing against dishonesty in business, or fighting my own desires within, I need help. Jesus says Pray! God has already won the battle.