Sermon- Deliver us from the evil

Scripture: Matt 6:5-15 Sunday, September 17, 2017

Today we are working on the third and last sermon on the Lord’s prayer. The first sermon had to do with the first three petitions that help us get centered on our triune God. The next 4 petitions had to do with addressing our needs. Give us this day our daily bread was really about our present needs. Forgive us our sins, has to do with dealing with our past. Today we are going to work with, “Do not let us yield to temptation” and “deliver us from evil”. These two petitions you can see are related to our future. The temptation and evil related petitions are what we are going to focus on today.

Let’s start with the temptation petition. Now the well known version that most people have memorizes is the King James version that reads, “Lead us not into temptation”. Now if you have been reciting it from childhood like I have, this is what will come to your mind automatically without thinking. But this translation, “lead us into temptation” has a fatal flaw. If you look at it at face value it might seem to say that God is the one who leads us to temptations and we know that is absolutely not true. That is because we have other versus in the Bible like James 1:13 which clearly states, “when tempted no one should say, “God is tempting me”, because God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.” If you put these verses next to each other they could not be more opposite. So the question is does God tempt us or does he not? And if he is not tempting us what does is the petition actually mean? If that baffles you, don’t worry, you are in good company because Bible scholars consider it actually one of the most difficult passages in the Bible. So to get at it I am going to use more than half of this sermon to do it. And it is going to get a little technical so please bear with me. This sermon will be more of a teaching sermon than an exhortation sermon. So here we go.

The first principle in interpreting a difficult Biblical passage is to take the concepts raised by that passage and first go to other places in the Bible that address that concept is a simple way. So never take a difficult passage and try and interpret it in isolation. That will lead to a lot of misunderstandings and completely wrong interpretations. In our case James 1:13 is very clear and very straightforward to interpret. It says, God cannot be tempted by evil and does not tempt anyone. It goes on to say, “each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed”. Now this passage is very clear, it is not God who tempts but our own evil desires. The second principle of Biblical interpretation is you have to check it for consistency with the whole Bible. There is no time to do that here but James 1:13 nobody disputes its consistency with the message of the whole Bible. If that is the case, if Matt 6:13 is not actually saying that God has anything to do with us being exposed to temptation then what is Matt 6:13 actually saying?

To get at that we have to go to the Greek. And I want to start with the word “temptation” itself. In Greek the word is “peirasmon”. Can you say, (perasmon)? And peirasmon occurs about 22 times in the New Testament. 10 of those 22 times, almost half of the time, the word actually means “time of trial” or a test. Now this idea that God tests his people is all over the Bible. I am only going to highlight one verse here to make the point, ***Duet 8:2 saysRemember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.*** If you were to scan the whole Bible every single hero in the Book had to undergo a time of testing. And Deut 8:2 is also very clear about the purpose of this testing. It is to see what really is in your heart. Do you love God enough to keep His commandments or not. If you stay faithful it proves that you really love God and it produces righteousness in the person.Ps 66:10 says, For You have tried us, O God; You have refined us as silver is refined. Now ***Jer 17:10 puts it this way. "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds.*** Jer 17:10 seems to imply that God is testing to judge people. But this is part of the refining process as well, he is trying to see which people will truly pass the test. Now just to clarify. The third principle of Biblical interpretation, is that everything in the Bible has to be interpreted through the lens of Christ, because He is the clearest and most complete revelation of God. And we know when we interpret Jer 17:10 through the lens of Christ, that no one can pass the judgment of God unless they depend on Christ. So God is tests to find his flock and refine them to make them more like Christ.

On the other hand, God’s enemy Satan is working hard in the opposite direction. He is working to tempt people with the specific intention of making people fall and to keep them separated from God. When Satan tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden you see this in action. Satan caused them to fall and as a result he spiritually destroyed all of humanity. Satan wants to seduce you so that you will fail and fall. When you fall, he wins and you loose. It is very straight forward.

The test and temptation are two very different concepts. God tests to separate his sheep from the rest and to further refine his sheep to make them for Christlike. Satan tempts to separate people from God. This is the spiritual battle for the human soul that has been going on from the beginning of the world.

Now the question is this. In this verse that we are examining today, Matt 6:13 how will you translate peirasmon. Will you translate it as test or temptation? To get to that question we are going to put perasmon on the shelf for sometime and pick up another key word from that verse, the main verb of that sentence, translated as “lead” in the King James or “yield” in the New Living Translation. Which one is it? “Lead” like you all learned it growing up or is it “yield” like the NLT puts it. Well, I can tell you that the root verb in the original Greek word is “isphero”. Can you say “isphero”? And if you look at the usage of “Isphero”, you will find that most of the time it is used to mean, “brought into” or “yield”. The actual word is “eisenenkes”. Can you say, “eisenenkes”?. Now eisenenkes is an Aorist, Active, subjunctive second person singular verb. Well, I warned you that this was going to technical! Anyway when you apply all that to the interpretation of eiseneskes what it means is that, it is a wish that God would not have allowed us to have yielded to whatever your translation of peirasmon is. (remember, it is either test or temptation)

Now let’s put “eisenenkes” and “peirasmon” back together and see what we get. Dear father, do not allow us to yield to the peirasmon. Now I want you to thing about what I explained to you about both the meaning of a test and a temptation. Here is the fascinating thing. How you translate peirasmon actually reveals something about you, because whether you are tested or tempted depends on who is in control of your life.

So if God has the control of your life, this is what it would look like. Let me illustrate with a thought experiment. Imagine you have two doors. One white door and one black door. You have two keys, a black key and a white key to their respective doors. Now the white door is what God wants you to take, and the black door is the door that Satan wants you to take and God forbids. You have full freedom to take either door. The black door is really tempting because you have to wonder what is behind it. Why does God forbid that one? Will you yield or will you not? If you love God and know that God is testing you. you will willingly surrender the black keys and use the white keys to open the white door. If you do this you have passed the test, proving your faith and love for God.

On the other hand, if you yield and open the black door, it is not that you failed the test. God did not lead you to the black door, even though the black door was next to the white door. God was leading you to the white door. But you succumbed to the black door because of what was in your heart and God because of God’s leading. You see the prayer, do not let us yield to the test only works if at that moment of the test, we ask God to extend his hand of sovereign power into our will and surrender the black keys to him thereby overriding our will. Let your will be done and not our will. So that petition is actually saying, when the time or testing comes on us, let your will take over our will. Let your will be done and not ours. And this prayer can only be prayed by someone who has a deep relationship with God. If you don’t have that kind of relationship, even if you know that you should not go through the black door, your prayer becomes slightly modified to read like this famous theologian called St Augustine. Before he was fully converted, he was really struggling with sexual sin for many years of his life. And he used to pray, God take this temptation from me but not yet. Take the keys of the black door from me God but not now, maybe after a few years. If your prayer is after a few years or take it from me tomorrow and not today, then in your heart you are translating perasmon as temptation and yielding to it. If your prayer is that the black key right now, in your heart you are translating perasmon as test. The Word of God, reads you, revealing what is truly in your heart, not the other way round. So if you are a disciple of Christ, this is what you are saying in your heart, Father Lord don’t let us yield to the tests placed in our life today. If you have not yet become a disciple of Christ you will be praying, God let us not yield to the temptation but please wait till tomorrow.

 Now you will say, that seems to imply that if you are a disciple of Christ, that you will never sin. We know that that is not the case. Even the first 12 disciples without counting Judas Isariot sinned. We know that. So how do you explain that? It’s good that you asked that question because that leads us to the last petition, “Deliver us from the evil one”. This petition is better translated, **Rescue us from the evil one**. You see before we have a relationship with God, we are being controlled whether we like it or not by God’s enemy. And what we need is nothing less than being rescued by the enemy. You see before and after you become a disciple of Christ there is one different in the black door, white door analogy. Because you become a disciple of Christ, the black door is not just a black door that you can walk into and walk out of. The black door is like a black hole. It will suck you in and you cannot come out unless God himself were to reach out his hand to you and pull you out of there. That is what this petition is taking about. What human kind needs is to be rescued from the black hole. Once we are rescued, we have to constantly be reminded that we have been rescued and that black hole is not a black hole any more but a black door. And reminding ourselves that we have been rescued is what helps us to always surrender our keys when we face these two doors in our lives. Rescue us from the evil one, or you have rescued us from the evil one, whichever is applicable to you.

Jesus told his disciples, when you pray, first center yourselves on God, remind yourself of your relationship to him and magnify him in your minds because the world and the flesh have diminished him in your minds and then bring your own petitions to him. If you close your eyes right now, I just want to repray this Lord’s prayer for you. Let us pray, Our dear daddy in heaven, may your name be made holy, may you rule earth just as you rule in heaven, in fact may every will on earth, bend to your will and your will alone. Father please provide us everything we need at this time. Also forgive us our sins. We remember and let go or all the sins anyone has committed against us. Finally, father, when we come to the time of testing in our life, please take away the possibility of me choosing anything that is not according to your will, because you have rescued me from the power of the evil one. For to you alone belong the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory, now and for every. Amen. May this prayer refresh yoru entire prayer life and revive your spirit in every may. May God bless you.