

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
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DELIVER US FROM EVIL

1 Peter 5:6-11

It was good to be off for a couple weeks, to enjoy some R&R and some family time. But it's also good to be back with you today. Maybe you've been away during the last few weeks as well. Whether or not that is the case, I'm awfully glad you're here today.

Earlier this summer, before our VBS last month and then my vacation, we had been looking together at the Lord's Prayer, the prayer Jesus taught His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6. We've looked at most of it, but we're not quite finished yet.

Today we're going to look at the last petition in the prayer where Jesus teaches His disciples to pray "Deliver us from evil." Then next Sunday we'll look at the closing acknowledgement of God's sovereignty, power, and glory – the note on which the Lord's Prayer draws to a conclusion.

As we look at this last petition, this last request in the Prayer today, I invite you to turn with me to the book of 1 Peter, Chapter 5. We'll look together at just a few verses, 1 Peter 5:6-11, actually starting in the middle of verse 5.

I don't know what world they live in, but there are some people in this world who will tell you that evil does not really exist. It's just an illusion. It may appear to us to be real, but it is not.

Mary Baker Eddy, founder of the Christian Science Movement said:

Sin, disease and evil are not real. They only seem to us to be real.

Rick Belzer told me after the first service that the definition of a dilemma is a Christian Scientist with a case of acute appendicitis. That's a dilemma, isn't it?

Some people will tell you that evil is not a "thing" which has its own existence, like love or cherry pie, or the Washington Monument, but it is simply the absence or privation of good. It is not something, but merely the absence of some thing – the absence of what is good. I'm not sure that's an adequate definition of evil.

The Bible does not present a philosophical argument for the existence of evil, but it *assumes* the existence of evil. It *explains* the existence of evil as a result of the rebellion of Satan against God's rule and authority, and the subsequent fall of the human race into sin through the disobedience of Adam and Eve to God in the Garden of Eden.

And the Bible makes it crystal clear, unequivocally clear, that God takes evil seriously. In Psalm 5:4 David said: "You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil." He is not a God who

takes pleasure in evil. There are some people, a lot of people, who really do take pleasure in evil. Some do it openly. Some of them do it brazenly. Some do it quietly, secretly. Behind closed doors where they think no one will ever find out. But God *never* takes pleasure in evil. He can use what is evil for good purposes, as He did with Joseph in all his troubles (Genesis 37-50). He can take what is manifestly evil and bring good out of it. But He does not take pleasure in evil. Never.

Many of you know Proverbs 3:5-6. You may have committed it to memory. It goes like this:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge Him
and He will direct your paths (or He will make your paths straight).

Do you know the next verse? Proverbs 3:7 says:

Do not be wise in your own eyes.
Fear the LORD and shun evil.

Have a proper heart attitude of reverence and respect for God and stay away from evil. Don't get mixed up in any kind of evil. If you're wise, the Bible says, you will watch your steps and avoid evil (Prov. 14-16).

Some people will tell you that the Bible says that money is the root of all evil. You've probably heard that. But you know it ain't so (pardon my grammar!). The Bible doesn't say that. Here is what it does say in 1 Timothy 6:10:

The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

It goes on:

Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith
and pierced themselves with many griefs.

In *The Message* paraphrase it expresses it this way:

Lust for money brings trouble and nothing but trouble.
(Can anyone say "Bernie Madoff"?)
Going down that path, some lose their footing in the faith completely
and live to regret it bitterly ever after.

Let's be clear. Money is not the root of all evil. Money can be used for good or evil purposes. Invested in things that honor God and serve His purposes, money can be used to accomplish things that are incredibly good. Or we can use it for selfish, greedy, unethical, immoral, evil purposes. It is not money but the love of money and the insatiable desire for the things it can buy that is at the root of all kinds of evil.

And we're all susceptible to it. So be vigilant and guard your heart. Don't let the love of money take root there. Instead of money and the things money can buy, set your heart and mind on things above, on the Lord Jesus Christ and the spiritual riches of His grace. He satisfies where all the wealth in the world never can.

In and of itself, money is not evil. But evil really does exist. Some things in this world are inherently evil. I suppose you can argue about whether Iran, Iraq and North Korea really should be called the "Axis of Evil," or whether the former Soviet Union was the "Evil Empire," as President Ronald Reagan believed.

But no reasonable person can deny that the Holocaust was evil. No reasonable person can deny that genocide, wherever it takes place, is evil. No reasonable person can deny that the terrorist attacks that took place on September 11 were evil, or that suicide bombings – which may be better called homicide bombings – are evil. That murder, the taking of innocent human life, sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, pornography – which is both degrading to those depicted in it because they are treated not as persons created in God's image, but as objects for someone's sexual gratification, and it's damaging to everyone who consumes it. No reasonable person can deny that these things are evil. They grieve the heart of God. God takes no pleasure in evil.

We pray "Deliver us from evil" because evil is real. It is the enemy of God. And we need to be delivered from it.

But here is a complicating factor: Evil is not just "out there" somewhere in the world. It's not just something that happens to us from external forces. Evil is *in* us. It is in our hearts.

Jeremiah 17:9 says:

The heart is deceitful above all things.

That is God's diagnosis of our condition – apart from the operation of His transforming grace. And it is out of our hearts, Jesus said, that evil thoughts, sexual morality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly come (Matthew 7:21-22).

I don't think Jesus intends this to be an exhaustive list. I think it is just a representative list. But He makes the point clearly that evil is in us.

Later on in the New Testament, James describes the tongue, this organ with which we speak, as "a restless evil, full of deadly poison" (3:8). And way too often way too many people – too many of us – use it for evil, poisonous purposes. God have mercy on us all.

Evil is real. And God takes no pleasure in it.

But not only is evil real. The devil is real, too. He is not a figment of our fertile human imagination. He is not a mythical figure devised to explain something that may seem beyond our understanding. And the devil is not simply a name for an impersonal force operating somewhere out there in the universe.

The devil is real. He is the determined enemy of God, of good, of God's purposes for human beings and the whole creation. And he is real.

In the Lord's Prayer, if you look at it in the Greek, Jesus says: "Deliver us from *tou ponerou*" – not just evil in general, it literally means "the evil" or, probably more accurately, "the evil one," meaning the devil himself and his evil designs for us. Whether he is called *ho diabolos* – "the devil" – or *ho Satanas* – "Satan," the accuser and adversary of God's people, he is not only real but, as one writer (Robert Mounce) put it, "aggressively hostile" to the people of God. Think about that for a moment.

The devil is not just hostile to God. He's not just hostile to the church (God's people). He's not just hostile to you and me as we seek to live as faithful followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not passively hostile. He is aggressively hostile. He is passionately hostile. He is relentlessly hostile. He *never, ever* has your best interests at heart.

Here's just a bit of what the Bible has to say about the devil. It says the devil was a powerful angel who rebelled against God and was thrown out of heaven. Jesus, in John 8:44, calls him "a liar and the father of lies." He twists the truth to try to trip us up – as he did with Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3) and tried to do with Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4). Revelation 12:9 says he is the one who leads the whole world astray. Revelation 12:10 says he is the accuser of our brothers. He incited David to sin by conducting a census of the people (1 Chronicles 21). He prompted Judas to betray Jesus (John 13:2). Jesus called him a murderer (John 8:44). Paul, in Ephesians 2:2, says he is the ruler of the kingdom of the air and the spirit who is at work in those who have rejected God's rule.

He induces mankind to follow the sinful passions of corrupted human nature, causing us to believe his lies and blinding our eyes and our minds to the light and truth of the gospel. The Bible says he even masquerades as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), pretending to be something he is not in order to trap us and, if he could, to completely destroy us. That's what the devil's like.

There is a classic episode of "The Twilight Zone" from the 1960s about an American who was hiking through Europe and he gets caught in a raging storm. As he's staggering about in the blinding rain he comes upon an imposing medieval castle. It is a monastery for a brotherhood of monks. The reclusive monks reluctantly take him in.

Later that night, as he is exploring the monastery, the American discovers a cell with a man locked inside. An ancient wooden staff bolts the door. The prisoner claims he is being held captive by the "insane" head monk, Brother Jerome. He pleads with the American to release him.

The American is won over by his gentle voice and kind demeanor. So he confronts Brother Jerome, who says the prisoner is none other than Satan himself – “the father of lies” – held captive by the Staff of Truth, which is the one barrier he cannot pass.

This incredible claim convinces the American that Jerome really is crazy. As soon as he gets the chance, he sets the prisoner free – who immediately transforms into a hideous, horned demon and vanishes in a puff of smoke.

Stunned, the American is horrified at the realization of what he has done. “I didn’t believe you,” he says to Jerome. “I saw him and didn’t recognize him.” To which Jerome replies: “That is man’s weakness, and Satan’s strength.”

Sometimes he appears even as an angel of light. Sometimes he comes to us as the voice of reason and tolerance. Sometimes we don’t recognize him. And sometimes, as it says in our text from 1 Peter 5, he is like a roaring lion on the prowl, ready to pounce on us when we let down our guard. When we’re tired. When we’re weak or weary physically or emotionally or spiritually. When we’re under a lot of stress. It’s in times like these when Satan will pounce.

Here’s several things we need to understand about the devil: First of all, he’s real. You’ve probably never heard of a man named Vincent Damon Vernier. Any of you who weren’t at the first service this morning, if you know who Vincent Damon Vernier is, would you raise your hand? I see those hands. I want you to know that there was one hand raised at the first service and it was Pastor Bob. I was really impressed. You see, Vincent Damon Vernier is better known as Alice Cooper, the heavy metal rock star. Pastor Bob blasts his music from his office every day. I hear it every day when I’m here at the church. No, that’s not true.

But here’s something else I bet you didn’t know. Alice Cooper once had a drummer named Neal Smith. How about that? The name was spelled N-E-A-L, so I can’t take any credit for it.

Like many rock stars, Alice Cooper’s life was a mess. He described himself as a functional alcoholic. At the height of his fame he used to drink a bottle of whiskey every day. He says that he celebrated moral decay. I don’t know about you, but I don’t celebrate moral decay, I mourn it. And I believe God does, too. But that’s where he was. Sometime in the 1980s, Alice Cooper came to faith in Christ. He became a Christian. He’s still a rocker, but he’s a Christian today. And as he talks about the importance of his faith I want you to hear what he says:

My faith is everything. It’s what I live for. If you gave me a choice between rock and roll and my faith, I’d take my faith. Rock and roll is fun – it’s what I do for a living. But it’s not what I live on. I believe in classic Christianity. I’ve given my whole life to the Lord.

Cooper has this to say about the devil, about his existence. He says:

You can’t believe in God without believing in the devil. I always tell bands that

the most dangerous thing you can do is to believe just in the concept of the devil or the concept of God, because you're not giving them full credit. When you believe in God, you've got to believe in the all-powerful God. He's not just God, He's the all-powerful God and He has sovereign control over everyone's life. The devil, on the other hand, is a real character that's trying his hardest to tear your life apart. If you believe that this is just mythology, you're a prime target because you know that's exactly what Satan wants. To be a myth. But he's not a myth, of this I'm totally convinced. More than anything in the world, I'm convinced of that.

The devil is real. Never forget that.

Second, he's your enemy. Like a roaring lion, on the prowl, looking for someone to devour. Never forget that.

Third, he's alive. Never forget that.

Fourth, he is powerful – yes – but not all-powerful. He's not omnipotent. He's not equal to God. His power and activity are limited by God. There are some things I don't understand. There are some things that are beyond my capacity to understand and my ability to explain. But I believe the Bible teaches us that nothing Satan does lies outside the scope and the bounds of God's ultimate sovereignty and redemptive power. And this I know. I know that nothing the devil does or devises can ever separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Robinson Crusoe's man Friday asked him: "Why doesn't God destroy the devil?"

Do you know what Crusoe said to Friday?

He said: "God *will* destroy him." He will!

1 John 3:8 says that the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the work of the devil. That's why Jesus came. The Book of Revelation says not only the work of the devil but the devil himself will be thrown into the lake of fire forever (Rev. 20:10). Not just his work will be destroyed, but the devil himself.

Jesus defeated the devil in His death on the cross and His resurrection. Martin Luther is right. The devil's doom is sure. Jesus has sealed the defeat and doom of the devil. The victory is not in doubt, though the fighting goes on and the battles continue and *will* continue for as long as this life lasts, or until Jesus returns.

In the meantime, Jesus has taught us to pray:

Deliver us from evil.
Deliver us from the evil one.

Here is good news for you. He *has* delivered us through His saving work on the cross. He has done it. And He *will* deliver us in the trenches of daily life as we trust in Him.

So do not let the devil deceive you or defeat you. Do not let the devil immobilize you or paralyze you. Do not let the devil foil you or frighten you.

Instead, as Paul said in Ephesians, put on the whole armor of God. Put on the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace. Take the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit which is the Word of God. Exercise the power of prayer.

As Peter says, be self-controlled and alert to Satan's schemes (1 Peter 5:8). Be aware of how he operates and keep your guard up. Resist the devil's advances (James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:9) and send him on his way.

Stand firm in the faith (1 Peter 5:9). By that I think he means two things: Don't give up trusting and believing in Christ when life gets hard. Don't give up your faith. And second, don't ever give in or compromise on the essentials of the faith. Stand firm and hold fast in the truth.

And then one last thing. Keep a firm reliance on the One Peter calls the God of all grace. I really believe what it says out on our church signboard, that grace is the most beautiful word you will ever see or hear or read in any language. And God is the God of all grace. Your enemy, the devil, cannot stand against the power of grace.

Lord, deliver us from evil and from the evil one. May it be so in us, to the glory of Your name. Amen.