

“But deliver us from evil.”

Matthew 6:13b

Dialing 911 Daily

(Part 8 of *Lord's Prayer* Sermon Series)

September 20, 2015

Have you ever dialled 911 by mistake? I have. When I realized it I hung up quickly – hands sweaty, heart thumping sure fire trucks were going to show up on my front doorstep followed by a police car to haul me away when they realized there was no emergency. It's nice to know that we can dial 911 when we need help but it's important to remember that we're only to dial that number in a real emergency otherwise those who truly need help might not receive it in a timely manner.

Although we should be somewhat hesitant to dial 911 lest we abuse that resource, God doesn't want us to treat his promise of help in the same way. Turning to God in prayer is not to be a last resort; it should be the very first thing that we do when faced with a challenge no matter what it is. We need God's help daily because we are weak both physically and spiritually. The last petition of the Lord's Prayer, “**But deliver us from evil,**” reminds us of this truth. In fact if you're in the habit of praying the Lord's Prayer every day, then you're dialing 911 daily when you speak the Seventh Petition. That's OK. In fact this is what Jesus wants. Let's find out why.

The traditional translation of the Seventh Petition, “Deliver us from evil,” strikes me as a little weak. Rather than “**Deliver us...**” we could pray: “**Rescue** us from evil.” I like that better because it reminds me that there is a sense of urgency in what I am praying. I'm dialing 911, not Papa John's Pizza, because I'm in real danger, not because I'm kinda hungry.

What is the danger we face? Evil. The greatest evil is my own sin and how I often brush it off like it's a bit of dandruff – embarrassing but hardly dangerous. Our sins, however, aren't brushed away so easily. Our thoughtless words pierce hearts and rip a hole that's not so quickly healed. Quips like: “*You're just like your mother!*” “*If you wouldn't be so out of shape...*” “*You didn't know that?!?*” might have been offered in jest, at least that's what we tell ourselves, but they can hardly be described as loving words that encourage. Instead they tear down like a tsunami flattening everything in its path. If left to ourselves, we would ruin all our relationships. We've got a real emergency here!

Thankfully in his mercy God invites us to turn to him for saving. But do you see what you're confessing about yourself when you pray, “Rescue us from evil”? You're admitting that you are weak. You're declaring that you have a problem you cannot fix. Don't pray the Lord's Prayer if you don't believe this. Otherwise you're just going to add the sin of hypocrisy on top of whatever other sins you are guilty of. Let me say it again. Don't offer this petition if you think that you're a decent person who doesn't need to be rescued but only given a few pointers from God on how to live. Contrary to conventional wisdom, a strong Christian is not someone who has his act together; it's someone who realizes that he is not the strong man others think he is. A strong Christian is someone who cries out daily, “Lord, rescue me from my evil!”

The fact that we cannot save ourselves is borne out in how God accomplished his rescue of sinners. He sent his Son who was born as Jesus 2,000 years ago – long before you could help him with his mission. Indeed, even Jesus' Twelve Disciples were of no help. They ran when Jesus was arrested leaving him alone to face the Chief Priests and Pilate. And no one came to Jesus' help when he carried his cross to Golgotha. Where was the couple for whom Jesus had provided wine at their wedding? Couldn't they have at least given Jesus a cooling sip of water? Where were the lepers Jesus had healed? Why weren't they lining the road to encourage their savior? Where was Jairus whose daughter Jesus had raised to life? Where was the Roman centurion whose servant Jesus had healed? Couldn't these men have offered to lighten Jesus' load by carrying the cross? Of course Simon of Cyrene did that but only because he was forced to by the Roman soldiers who just wanted to get the crucifixion over with. Like the mother who bravely rushes back into the burning building to save her children because no one else will, Jesus faced the fires of hell on his own with no help from us or his heavenly Father for that matter. But mark this well, Jesus didn't just risk his life; he *gave up* his life to rescue *rebellious sinners*. A mother might bolt into her burning house to save her children but she wouldn't risk her life to save the arsonist who had set the fire. Jesus did.

If Jesus has already rescued us from the evil of our sins, why do we need to *keep* dialing 911 with the Seventh Petition? We need to keep asking for rescue because we keep drifting back into sin. And like the farmer whose hands are so calloused that he doesn't feel the rope burning as it slides through his hands, we run the risk of becoming so used to our impatience, our wanting to be the center of attention, our grumpiness, and so used to our substance abuse that we don't feel guilty anymore when we commit these sins. Instead we think that this is just part of who we are. It's part of our sinful nature, yes, but like a lead weight tied to our ankles, our sinful nature is always threatening to drag us down to hell. We don't just need Jesus' help once in a while; we need his constant rescuing presence or we'll never make it to the shores of heaven! That's why we need to dial 911 daily.

Besides it isn't just from our sin that we need constant rescuing. The Evil One, Satan himself, never ceases to cause problems for God's people as he did to the Old Testament believer, Job. With the Seventh Petition we're also asking that God would save us from this kind of evil – from bodily pain and mental anguish that would lead us to despair of God's love.

Does God answer this prayer? He does. In fact right now Jesus is preparing a place for us in heaven where there will be no pain or suffering. In the meanwhile, God promises to use the pain for our eternal good (Romans 8:28). Pain, a good thing? Yes! While God loves us just the way we are - sinners with warts and all, he doesn't want us to stay the way we are. He wants us to conform to the likeness of Christ. So just as there is some pain for those who have to wear braces in order to straighten teeth, there is a certain amount of pain we must endure as God seeks to straighten us out according to his glorious will. So with the Seventh Petition we're not praying, "Lord, make my life easy." We're asking, "Lord, if it's necessary that I carry the cross of suffering today, help me gladly bear it until it has accomplished your will."

This brings us to the end of our sermon series on the Lord's Prayer. But what about the Doxology: "For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen"? Aren't we going to have a sermon on that? No. One reason is because the Doxology was not an original part of the Lord's Prayer. It was added later by Christians. It's not a bad addition but a fitting way to say, "Lord, I trust that you have listened to this prayer and will do everything that has been asked." But we express the same thought with the Seventh Petition: "Deliver us from evil." With these words we confess our trust that God is eager and able to help.

In fact I wonder if it wouldn't be better for us just to end with the Seventh Petition. Like Peter's gasp for help when he started to sink in the stormy waters of Galilee, "Lord, save me!" (Matthew 14:30), the Seventh Petition is the exclamation mark of the Lord's Prayer: "Rescue us from evil! Yes, it's an emergency, Lord. If you don't reach down and grab hold of us, we will drown in our sins and Satan's attacks!" Just as Jesus reached down to keep Peter from drowning he reaches down for you with those nail-pierced hands of his – hands which bear the tattoo marks of his love for you. And he will do it again tomorrow...and the next day... and the day after that because there is no end to Jesus' love for you. But neither will there be an end to your need for his rescue. So keep the Seventh Petition on your lips and in your heart. Dial 911 daily as you admit your weakness and trust his greatness. Amen.