

**SERMON – 10/4/22**  
**'Deliver us from Evil'**

Psalm 13:1-6

'Look on me and answer, Lord my God. Give light to my eyes or I will sleep in death and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him" and my foes will rejoice when I fall.' (Ps.13:3-4)

As part of our discipleship journey over these past Sundays during Lent we have been thinking about different aspects of prayer, using phrases from the Lord's Prayer as a framework and various psalms as our guide. We have thought about how we seek to give God His rightful place as we pray 'Hallowed be Your name,' we have looked at asking God for guidance about the right way forward as we pray 'Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven,' we have thought about depending on God for absolutely everything as we pray 'Give us today our daily bread' and we have considered how praying 'Forgive us our sins' must also prompt us to forgive others. Last Sunday we looked at the prayer 'Lead us not into temptation' and this morning we go on from there to pray, 'Deliver us from Evil.'

That phrase in the prayer Jesus taught His first disciples could refer to 'evil' as a concept or indeed to the 'Evil One' the Devil, as the personification of evil and the embodiment of all that stands against God, and I would like to reflect with you this morning on the various ways in which evil might manifest itself in our experience and focus with you on how to stand against it in the spiritual battle, highlighting particularly the part that prayer has to play in that.

So first of all, what are we dealing with when we speak about 'evil'? I imagine that some people are a little hesitant to talk in those terms because we probably think of evil as being something exceptional, something that is outwith the experience of most of us most of the time. Some of you may remember the words of the head teacher of Dunblane Primary School speaking publicly the day after the terrible shooting there in 1996: "Evil visited us yesterday and we don't know why." (Ron Taylor) Perhaps, like me, you have a feeling like that when you watch the news from Ukraine in these days – evil is being perpetrated against the

defenceless in that devastated country and we don't know why. We certainly pray with passion alongside the people of Ukraine, 'Deliver us from evil.' Perhaps, though, we are slower to use the word 'evil' when it comes to actions that are more commonplace, perhaps even happening all around us, and maybe because that is because we don't want to appear judgmental or maybe it's because we don't want to believe that behind the curtains of homes in our own neighbourhood atrocities may be perpetrated.

Children may not be targetted by missiles in our community but there are children and women and men around us who are suffering physical, verbal and emotional abuse at the hands of those they should be able to trust, and that too is evil. The vulnerable are also suffering because of more insidious evils, the structural and social evils that are baked in to this world's way of doing things, where the 'haves' have too much and the 'have nots' have too little when in fact there is plenty to go around. That too needs to be called out for what it is and challenged. It is not of God and therefore it is evil. Lord, deliver us from evil.

"How long, says the psalmist, how long will my enemy triumph over me?" (v.2) Deliver us from evil, Jesus teaches us to pray. But do we? We wring our hands and we weep and wail for those who are suffering but our helplessness needs to remind us that without God we can do nothing and that we need to pray. We certainly wonder about what we can do and we try to do our bit, but do we *pray*? Lord, deliver us from evil.

There are other evils in our world beyond the physical evils of war and disease and abuse that leave the vulnerable suffering. These last two years of the pandemic have been about a lot more than the fight against coronavirus itself, because for all who have been physically ill and died there have been still others whose battle has been in the realm of heart and head. During lockdown, the struggle for many has been with isolation and loneliness and with aspects of mental health that many have never encountered before and for which it has been well-nigh impossible to find appropriate support because of the sheer volume of people who have not known where to turn.

"How long, says the psalmist, how long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart?" (v.2) For the majority in our land who have little or no thought of God day by day, the absence of physical contact with other people has brought home to them the reality of which the Bible speaks, that it is not good for people to be alone. For those of us who *do* have a faith it is yet another reminder of the blessings we know because we are never finally alone and we can always turn to our heavenly Father. 'Deliver us from evil,' Jesus teaches us to pray and I want to encourage you to focus your prayers on those of all ages who are wrestling at the moment with emotional pain and with their mental health. Right here in our own community – indeed within this church family – many are walking through a dark valley from which they need a deliverance that only God can truly give if they are to experience life in all its fulness as Jesus intends. Lord, deliver us from evil.

But that takes us to the third dimension of evil that the psalmist alludes to here, evil in the spiritual realm that most of us shy away from ever thinking about. Last week we made reference to the armour of God, and particularly the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, our best defence against temptation, but in the final chapter of Ephesians where the apostle Paul talks about spiritual warfare, he reminds us that 'our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.' (Eph.6:12) If we are hesitant even to characterise as evil the physical enemies that come against us and against the vulnerable the world over, or to recognise that mental illness and emotional struggles are also evil, standing as they do against the peace and well-being that God desires for all people, then surely we must acknowledge that the Evil One is at work seeking to draw people away from putting their faith in Christ and seeking to sow seeds of doubt in the minds of those who do believe. There is a reality about evil that we dismiss lightly at our peril.

It should not surprise us that when David begins to pray in this morning's psalm he is even wondering whether God is there at all: "How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will

you hide your face from me?" And this is why it is entirely appropriate that when we are praying today's phrase of the Lord's Prayer we should be thinking: 'Deliver us from the Evil One.'

Whatever evils we or others may be wrestling with in the physical or the emotional realm, there is spiritual force behind it all. While the perpetrators of evil in Ukraine are guilty of whatever they have done physically with their own hands, they are not only being egged on by the mind-bending propaganda of their human commanders and the political leaders further up the chain, they are *all* also pawns in the hands of the one who will stop at nothing to try and thwart the advance of God's perfect Kingdom. And how we need to pray with David and with Jesus, 'Deliver us from the Evil One.'

'Look on me and answer, Lord my God, David prays. Give light to my eyes or I will sleep in death and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him" and my foes will rejoice when I fall.' (vv.3-4) If we simply shrug our shoulders in acceptance of the fact that this world will always be beset by troubles, physical, emotional and spiritual, then we are not living as disciples of Jesus, for we need to be engaged in the spiritual battle and to be taking hold by faith of the deliverance God has promised us in Christ until we can say with David in the closing words of the psalm: "I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord's praise for He has been good to me." (vv.5-6)

Let me ask you all today how serious you are about prayer and how ready you are to enter the fray in the spiritual battle. As we will sing in the words of Charles Wesley at the close of the service: "From strength to strength go on, wrestle and fight and pray, tread all the powers of darkness down and win the well-fought day, that having all things done and all your conflicts passed, you may overcome through Christ alone, and stand complete at last." Lord, deliver us from Evil.

### Prayer

Lord, with the psalmist we cry 'How long'? How long will there be suffering in Ukraine, in Afghanistan, in Syria, in Yemen? How long will families struggle to eke out a living in too many parts of the world? How long will people around us here be wrestling with

depression and loneliness and isolation? How long will we ourselves be tempted to give up on our faith in the midst of so many challenges? Lord, deliver us from evil as you deliver us from the Evil One.

Christ be with me, Christ within me  
Christ behind me, Christ before me  
Christ beside me, Christ to win me  
Christ to comfort and restore me  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me  
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger  
Christ in hearts of all that love me  
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger. Amen