

Our Forgiveness and Our Deliverance

Matt 6:7-15

Call: Ps 79:8-9, 13 (NIV)

Scripture Reading (and Sermon Text): Matt 6:7-15 (ESV)

7 *“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 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 this day our daily bread,*

12 *and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

13 *And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.*

14 *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

I. Introduction & Review

This morning we come to our last Sunday in our journey through the Lord’s Prayer, the prayer that according to Tertullian, a church father from the 2nd century, is “a compendium of the Gospel” (Packer, 154). He most likely said that because of petition number 5. Today, we will explore petitions five and six, the last two petitions. Each petition has two phrases, so we will look at each phrase individually.

And, just so you know where we are going this morning, we will look at petition 5, have a time of prayer, then look at petition 6 until we close.

Father, forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

It is one of the boldest petitions we can pray.

II. Forgive Us Our Debts

A. Introduction

Forgiveness. As I’ve been studying this petition, I am reminded of too many times in my life when I have struggled to forgive someone else. My natural instinct seems to always be for

revenge. Driving on the road and someone cuts me off, my natural instinct is to get revenge. When I was seriously playing sports, and someone elbowed me, I didn't forgive them, I elbowed them harder. Revenge works this way. It is always wanting to get back, usually with greater force. It escalates and escalates from an eye for an eye, to a leg for a leg, to a life for a life. As Gandhi has said, if we all live by "an eye for an eye" the whole world will be blind." The only way out is forgiveness" (Smedes, 131).

As I have been preparing for this Sunday, I have been struck at how our culture runs on antagonism and revenge. Look at social media. Look at the political discourse. Look at the reality shows on TV. Look at professional sports. Our culture is so polarized because it runs on antagonism and revenge. And, we need to be careful not to get sucked into it, because the kingdom of God runs on forgiveness.

And, so, we pray, Father, forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

If you remember from our first Sunday in the prayer, we talked about how the prayer is enveloped, with an introduction and a conclusion. Ryan read all those verses for our scripture reading. The introduction was all about not babbling with empty phrases as the pagans do. The conclusion, verses 14 and 15, is a commentary on this, the 5th petition. Jesus thought forgiveness so crucial to life in the kingdom, he added more instruction on it. So, we will bring those two verses into our exploration of this petition.

B. Trespasses, Sins, Debts

As you all know, this petition always messes up our public reciting of the prayer. Are we supposed to say trespasses or sins or debts? In verses 14 and 15, Jesus uses the typical word for trespasses, so many people say trespasses. In Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer, the word is sins, so some people even use sins in this petition. Forgive us our sins, as we also forgive those who sin against us.

The word here in petition 5 in Matthew in the Greek means debt (ὀφείλημα, opheilema). This word does not come from the religious realm. It comes from the realm of money. It means to owe someone something because you are indebted to them, such as owing money on a loan. For those of you who have a mortgage on a house, this word would be used for you being in debt to the bank. You have a duty and obligation to repay the debt.

It should also be noted that the word for forgive (ἀφίημι) also does not come from the religious realm. It comes from the realm of money as well. And it means to cancel, remit or let go of. You could think of it as wiping the slate clean. In a business ledger, you simply erase the numbers.

So, in this petition we are praying something like this: Father wipe clean all of our debt that we owe to you, as we wipe clean all other people's debt owed to us.

C. The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

Now, Jesus uses this very language in chapter 18 of Matthew. Peter comes to Jesus asking him how often he should forgive his brother who sins against him. And, Peter thinks seven is a good number and very righteous to forgive that much. Seven times, Jesus? Jesus says no, 77 times Peter.

Jesus then tells the parable of the unforgiving servant. In the parable, a servant owes an enormous financial debt to his master, something like 10 million dollars, a sum that would be impossible to repay. The servant must completely rely on the compassion of his master to forgive his debt, to which the master inconceivably does. It's unthinkable, but he does. But, then, the servant goes and does not pass on this same forgiveness to a fellow worker who owed him a laughably, small debt of like \$100. The point of the parable is that the experience of forgiveness is transformative and should cause the receiver to pass it on. Forgiving someone else is evidence of being forgiven yourself.

Father, wipe clean all of our debt that we owe you.

D. Our Debt

What debt do we owe the father? It's the debt of obedience. In Romans, Paul calls it "*the obedience of faith*" (Rom 1:5). We are called to trust the Father, which manifests itself in obedience. If we trust God, if we are loyal to God, then we obey his instruction. "Trust and obey, for there is no other way" (Chorus for hymn *Trust and Obey*). And, every time we fall short of this obedience, we rack up a debt. To disobey is to be in debt to God. Yes, we live in the land of debt, not only physically in our country, where one of the crises of our nation is debt, but we live in the land of spiritual debt as well. As Helmut Thielicke says, "All of us have a great mortgage upon our life" (Thielicke, loc 1115).

All we need to do is look back over the sermon on the mount to see how great this mortgage is. Just before his teaching on the spiritual disciplines, Jesus teaches the fulfillers. In the fulfillers, Jesus says, "21 *You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'* 22 *But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment*" (Matt 5:21-22). He says, "27 *You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'* 28 *But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart*" (Matt 5:27-28). He says, "43 *You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'* 44 *But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven*" (Matt 5:43-44).

Every time we fail to live up to life in the kingdom puts us in debt. Yes, we live in the land of debt! Do you see why this is such a bold petition?

Father in heaven, creator and judge, cancel all our debts! Father, wipe the slate clean!

And, wonder of wonders, he does! He wipes the slate clean. This is the Gospel. Here is the Good News.

E. The Good News

Psalm 103 says this,

*10 He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
12 as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us."*

And, we say, just like that? We ask and God does it just like that?

It can't be that simple can it? I mean, what if I walk into my bank right now and ask them to cancel my mortgage? I am sure that will not happen. But, God will? (Johnson, loc 1300).

Yet Paul says in Colossians:

13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross" (Col 2:13-14).

Whatever we owe, Jesus paid it all at the cross. That's the Gospel. Someone has said, "He came to pay a debt he did not owe because we owe a debt we could not pay" (Anonymous).

That's the Good News!

"...As we also have forgiven our debtors."

III. As We Also Have Forgiven Our Debtors

A. "As"

What does Jesus mean by "as"? Does he mean because? Does he mean to the degree? Does he mean simultaneously? In verses 14-15, Jesus' commentary on this petition, Jesus seems to make our forgiveness conditional on our forgiving others. Martin Luther took this at face value that there was a one-to-one correspondence between our forgiveness of others and our being forgiven by God.

This is one of the hardest things Jesus has said, and for me, the key is found in the parable of the unforgiving servant. God is obviously the master who has forgiven an enormous debt of his servant. This debt is far, far greater than any debt between two people, yet he forgives. So, if I, the servant, am unwilling to forgive others then I have no clue what has been done for me. I do not understand the cross. I do not understand the Gospel. And, I cannot pray this petition with

integrity. In other words, it is an illegitimate petition to ask for mercy when we refuse to offer it to others. *Father forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.* We cannot pray it authentically because our heart is divided. Revenge and bitterness continue to consume me if I can't forgive the other person, and a revenge-seeking heart can't genuinely ask for his forgiveness. It is a disingenuous request. I think Adolf Shlatter says it best when he says, "There is no serious prayer for forgiveness except on the lips of a forgiver" (Bruner, 310).

Now, we all know forgiveness is very hard work. But, forgiveness is part of the kingdom life, and forgiveness brings freedom. As Lewis Smedes said, "To forgive is to set the prisoner free, and discover the prisoner is you" (Smedes, 133). We never look more like our heavenly Father as when we forgive.

"Father in heaven, forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

B. Forgiveness Exercise

At this time, I want to lead you in a forgiveness exercise.

- "I invite you to close your eyes, bring to mind a person you are having a hard time forgiving, maybe a person who really causes you difficulty, a person who rubs you the wrong way.
- Now, just in your mind, I invite you to tell the Father the person's name. And I invite you to tell the Father exactly what this person did to you. Be honest and specific.
- Now tell the Father what you would like to see happen to this person. Do not be afraid because he knows what is in your heart even if you do not tell him. Tell him how you want to see this person punished or hurt as you were hurt.
- Now imagine standing at the bottom of a hill. On top of the hill is a cross. Jesus is hanging there. He invites you to come up the hill. You do so. What do you want to say to him? Look into Jesus' eyes, and tell him how hard it is to forgive.
- And now, I'm going to invite you to do a very difficult thing. As an act of your will, go back down the hill and invite the person who hurt you to come back up the hill with you. Bring that person to the foot of the cross. Look up at Jesus, and pointing to that person, as an act of your will say, "Jesus, in the same way you have forgiven me, grant me the strength to forgive this person; grant me the strength to wipe the slate clean." And hear Jesus say, "I will. Blessed are you. You are never more like me than when you forgive." (Johnson, loc 1374).
- Amen

(At this point in the service, the worship leader sang the chorus to "Jesus Paid It All.")

*Jesus paid it all,
All to him I owe,
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.*

Now, we move to our last petition of the prayer:

“And, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

IV. Lead Us Not Into Temptation

A. Introduction

Moving out of a bit of a heavy portion of the service, let me lighten the mood a bit. There are some funny stories about how people have mis-translated this petition. One young boy said he thought he was praying for his little sister to get into trouble, so he always thought he was praying “Lead a snot into temptation.” Meanwhile, a lady thought the second phrase was always, “but deliver us from email.”

Martin Luther is said to have gone to sleep praying the 5th petition and woke up praying the 6th petition. Which makes sense, right? At the end of our day, as we reflect on our day, we pray the 5th petition, because we realize forgiveness for our failings of the day is what we need, and then also to forgive others. In the morning, as we consider the new day, we realize we need protection and deliverance to get through the day. I have found myself doing this over these last few weeks.

B. Test / Temptation?

Many of you have talked to me about looking forward to this day and exploring this petition. As with petition 5, this is also a difficult one to understand. As repeated in English, this petition raises all sorts of questions. Father, lead us not into temptation. James tells us very clearly that God does not tempt anyone. He says, *“[13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one](#)”* (James 1:13). So, the main question is, why are we praying for God not to lead us into temptation when it is not in his nature to tempt us? How are we to understand this petition?

Well, to begin with, it helps to know that the Greek word behind “temptation” here is “peirasmos.” You don’t need to remember that word, but what you do need to know is that this word “peirasmos,” refers to both testing and temptation, two very different things. Tests are meant to prove and improve someone’s faith and character. A temptation is meant to entice a person to sin, to cause someone to fail.

And, here, we need to see the whole petition: lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

V. But Deliver Us

A. Introduction

Some commentators break up this petition into two petitions. That is not the right way to look at this petition. Why? Because the second phrase interprets and clarifies the first, and the conjunction “but” ties the two phrases together.

B. The “Evil” One

Within this second phrase, we also need to take note of the word “evil.” When we recite this phrase, we say, “But deliver us from evil.” However, Jesus uses the definite article here in the Greek. It’s actually “the evil.” And, when he uses the definite article for evil, he is speaking of the evil one, Satan, his adversary, the one who is trying to destroy him and every person who follows him. Jesus, here, is not referring to some general evil out there. He is referring to Satan, the evil one.

Why is this important? Because that second phrase is clarifying the first and, here’s the key, the evil one is constantly trying to turn tests into temptations. That’s what is going on here. We have to read both phrases to understand what is going on.

C. God Does Test

God does test. God doesn’t tempt, but he does test. God gives us trials in life in order to prove and improve our character and our faith. They are not intended for us to fail. They are designed to strengthen us for his service, to strengthen us to participate in his kingdom coming to earth. The Psalmist even requests that God would test him, “[2 Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and my mind](#)” (Ps 26:2). The Bible is full of examples of God testing his people. The story of Job is an extreme test. Abraham is tested to the limit with his son Isaac (Gen 22). The Israelites are tested in the wilderness. Many times throughout the wilderness story, the text says that the Lord is testing them to prove and improve their trust of him (Ex 15:25, 16:4, Deut 8:2).

If we look at the two most famous testing stories, Adam and Eve in the Garden and Jesus in the wilderness, we will see more clearly what is going on. Adam and Eve are tested in the Garden. They have the tree of knowledge of good and evil before them in the garden. Will they trust God and refuse to eat from it or not? Well, what happens? The evil one sneaks in and turns the test into a temptation. He says, “[Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’](#)” Eve then misquotes God saying among other things, “[‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’](#)” The evil one responds by saying, “[You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil](#)” (Gen 3:1-5).

What’s going on here? Satan is sowing seeds of doubt in the first humans. “God isn’t as good as you think Adam and Eve. He really isn’t a good, good father. He is trying to hide something from you. He’s not telling you the whole truth.” This is Satan’s main strategy in turning a test into a temptation. He wants to sow seeds of suspicion against God, in the hopes that we will fail. He intends for us to fail, and Adam and Eve do fail.

Then, the second Adam, Jesus, is baptized and when he comes up out of the water, God says, “[This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased](#)” (Matt 3:17). Jesus is then led out into the wilderness, and Satan says to Jesus, “[If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread](#)” (Matt 4:3). In other words, “Jesus, if you really are his son, he

wouldn't have you out here in the middle of nowhere? Jesus, if you really are his son, and if he is such a good father, why are you in a desert-like place? No good father would put their son in a wilderness. Come on Jesus, wake up! He's not a good father."

Ever hear those words in your head? The evil one trying to get you to doubt the Father's goodness, trying to get you to think the Father has let you down. A good father wouldn't give you such a difficult week would he? He calls you a daughter, and then you lose your job? He calls you son, but what about all of these health problems? Come on. He's not so good. Why do you trust him, your life is so hard.

And, we pray, Father deliver us from the evil one.

Well, Jesus, the second Adam, of course, doesn't fall for it. *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive* (1 Cor 15:22).

God tests his people, intending the test for good, and the evil one is constantly trying to sneak in there, turn the test into a temptation and destroy us.

In the end, this petition is a recognition that we are frail creatures in need of dependence on Jesus and the Spirit to help us. Dallas Willard captures this well, "This petition expresses the understanding that we can't stand up under very much pressure... It is a vote of "no confidence" in our own abilities. As the series of petitions begins with the glorification of God, it ends with acknowledgement of the feebleness of human beings" (Willard, 265).

VI. Conclusion

So, how can we word this petition that will help us in English? Following Darrell Johnson, I think it could be worded this way, "Father, we are frail creatures and cannot handle much pressure. So, as you lead us to the test, do not let the test become a temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, rescue us from the evil one, and strengthen our faith" (Johnson, loc 1414).

Amen.

VII. Benediction

Now, receive this benediction –

- Go in the assurance that your heavenly father is always good.
- Your heavenly father is always faithful.
- Your heavenly father is always on the throne of the universe.
- Your heavenly father always loves you.
- Your heavenly father is always present.
- For he has promised you that he will never leave you or forsake you.
- Go in this assurance.
- Amen.

Resources

Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Christbook: Matthew 1-12*

Darrell Johnson, *Fifty-Seven Words that Change the World*

Jl Packer, *Growing in Christ*

Lewis Smedes, *Forgive and Forget*

John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*

Helmut Thielicke, *The Prayer that Spans the World*

Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*