

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
October 18 & 19, 2014
John Crosby
This Day: Be Delivered
Matthew 6:13**

[Skit performed.]

Usually we play music in our offering. This is a different one of the arts, employed in worship to try to draw us into our theme for the day. We prayed earlier,

¹³ And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.

Temptation for children is a joke. It's a fun little thing. As we grow, not only do the odds get higher, but the temptations become more difficult. The adult version of a marshmallow test is just to show that we become the choices we make. I'll say that several times. We *become* the choices that we make.

I think there is no way to have this conversation today without sounding like the most important part of life is invisible. We live in a world where we see, measure, touch, feel, and hear all day long. Today we are considering the premise that the most important part of your life is unseen, that there actually are spirits in the air, that there actually are powers that would lift you up or destroy you. We are saying they are beyond our sight, but hard at work, and that somehow they are the most important thing happening in your life.

If you are here and you aren't sure about God, I completely understand, but we are starting with the premise that there is a God, even though we can't see God, and there is an enemy to God as well. The Lord's Prayer begins by glorifying God.

⁹ Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
¹⁰ Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as *it is* in heaven.

But the way it ends acknowledges that we are feeble human beings. We can't even feed ourselves.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.
¹² And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.

We can't go an hour without messing up and so forgive us as we forgive those who have messed against us. And then this is the way that the prayer ends.

¹³ And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.

I say this is the way this prayer ends because in your Bibles you will see that this is where the prayer ends. The early church added on

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen [Matthew 6:9-13].

Which is great. It is a good reminder that the God at the beginning is the God at the ending. This is the prayer that Jesus taught and it ends with these three reminders: that we are weak; give us our bread; and we are fallen, forgive us. We are temptable. Lead us away from temptation and deliver us from evil. At the end of the prayer, the temperature goes up because it becomes clear that things are not right in this world. It is as if somebody somewhere has organized things against God and we are caught in the middle and are being forced every day to choose which way to turn. We are being warned here.

Would you do me a favor, please? Would you pull out the Bibles that are in the pews in front of you? Turn to the Matthew 6. That comes after the Sermon on the Mount. We're going to look at Matthew 6, verse 13 today. Jesus has been talking about prayer and now He models prayer.

¹³ And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.

In this short verse, I think there are three big words. If they are not yet circled in your Bible, would you pull out a pen or pencil that you have or get one from the pew and circle these three words? Circle the word *temptation*, obviously, circle the word *deliver*, and then circle the word *evil*. I think for us all to understand those three words, I'd like to come at it backwards. I'd like to start from the ending—with evil. With Halloween coming, that's a natural, right? The TV has never been more filled with shows about goblins and zombies and vampires and all that kind of stuff. I am not kidding you, I looked for a long time to find a G-rated Halloween picture that included some goblins, spooks, ghosts, and scary stuff. Most of it was just way too non-sanctuary friendly. Evil is portrayed everywhere around us in these fantastic scary ways.

When evil is everywhere, evil is nowhere. If you say it's everything, then it becomes nothing, so for just for a second, let's talk about what is evil and how do we respond to it? In the Bible, evil falls into two different categories. Evil is wickedness against one another: murder, theft, adultery. Those are seen as evil. Then the other way that evil is shown in the Bible is as resistance to God: idolatry, blasphemy, and turning away from God. Jesus says it's a life-and-death choice. Remember, we become our choices. In John 10, Jesus says,

10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly [John 10:10].

There are two paths here. "The thief will lead you down this path and I will lead you down that path, and on the one path is stealing and killing and destruction, and the other is life with all of

its abundance.” So evil is a force that is opposed to God and wickedness leads to death, both spiritual and physical. So then, I guess, what is your answer to evil? What is your response?

The first answer is the head-in-the sand approach. You can pretend evil doesn't really exist or that if it does, it doesn't really matter. “Yes,” we say, “people do silly things sometimes, but if we all try a little harder, it'll work out all right.” That's like saying when the house is on fire, “Yes, it is getting a little warm, but if we all take off a layer of clothing and drink more iced water, things will be just fine.”

The second answer is to see it all over. Once you realize that there is such a thing as radical evil, that it is much more powerful than you, you can either become evil yourself or become paranoid, seeing demons behind every bush.

The third answer is self-righteousness, “Lord, thanks that I am not like him or like her. Yes, evil is out there all right but we are okay, not really bad, or at least above evil. We make it a relativity game. What is your answer to evil? For too many of us, it's to make a joke out of temptation. What's the answer of Jesus to people in this prayer? The answer comes as a daily reminder when we pray the Lord's Prayer. He says,

¹³ And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.

What we are saying is that the answer to evil is to be delivered from it, to be saved from it. You can't fight it. You can't beat it. It's bigger than you are, stronger than you are, faster than you are. It'll catch you at the end. The only thing you can say is, “God, help me. God, save me.” “Deliver us from evil.” Christians, that is, those who follow Jesus, those who pray the prayer of Jesus, are the ones who ask to be saved. Christians are the ones who ask to be delivered. When we pray to God to deliver us, we are not asking for a new spiritual insight. We are not asking for some way to feel good about ourselves or something to put zest into our lives, but people often make that mistake. Salvation in 21st century American churches often is a helpful solution to everything that's going wrong in your life. “Are you lonely? Well, come to Jesus and get that fixed.” “Are you broke? Come to Jesus and He will make your life rich.” “Are you confused? Join the church and find all the answers.” What does Jesus say?

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So apparently for Jesus, salvation is not the resolution of all our problems. In fact, praying this prayer is the beginning of problems we would never have had had we not met Christ and enlisted with Christ's people. The forces of evil do not relinquish their territory without a fight, and in being saved, God's newly won territory is you. You become a virtual battleground. For the rest of your life, there will be a war between good and evil in you. In praying to God, we acknowledge that God is greater than any foe. When we ask God to deliver us, we say that the battle is still raging inside us. When we pray for deliverance, we admit we don't have the resources on our own to resist evil.

That's what I like about Jesus. He's so honest. He knows me real well. He knows that I mean well and I don't do well. He knows you and He knows your good intentions and your bad execution. Jesus knows that about us and He loves us. Jesus says, “The powers that be are

powers over our lives.” Jesus gets this like nobody else. In our weakness, we reach out. Only in admitting our weakness is there deliverance. Isn’t that how Alcoholics Anonymous puts it? People who have gone into Alcoholics Anonymous or Drug Addicts Anonymous do a 12-step program. They get this. They say at the very beginning, “We admitted we were powerless over our addiction, and that our lives had become unmanageable.” We were unable to beat it. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. Do you know what that says? It says, “Deliver us. Save us from evil.” Reaching out to a power greater than ourselves first means putting ourselves in a group of people who are honest enough to say, “I need more than help. I need to be saved.”

We need to be in a group of people where we can tell the truth about ourselves, confess, and ask for company to resist trials. One of the great things the AA movement has taught the church is not to do it alone. The idea of a sponsor is that there is somebody available 24 hours a day, seven days a week so when you can feel it coming, when you can feel it getting stronger, you pick up the phone and the two of you together get through the episode. That’s the church! “Deliver us from evil” keeps us from thinking of ourselves as spiritual heroes. You are not a spiritual hero. Your war cry should not be “Come on, bring on temptation. Let’s see what you got.” Flee from temptation! “Lead us not into temptation.” Our war cry in “Deliver us from evil” is save me, protect me, guide me. “Deliver us from evil.”

Let me just close with a couple minutes on temptation because temptation is where we all live. “Deliver us from evil” shows that evil is present in the room and temptation shows that evil runs through every human heart. That’s Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the Christian who was in the Russian prison camps. He says,

Evil cuts through the heart of every human being.

Evil runs through every human heart and evil is where temptation comes from. Jesus knew all about temptation. It marked His life right from its public beginning. Remember when Jesus gets baptized? He is given this mission and goes away to wrestle with what it all meant and met the Devil. I don’t want to sound Sleepy Hollowish, that kind of devil, but I’ve got to tell you, I think temptation is wrestling with the Devil. That wrestling is a series of choices, which like all real rejections of real temptation, must have felt like cutting off a hand or plucking out an eye. That’s why Jesus uses those images later on. Temptation is what will draw you away from God. It is not about having a slice of Patticake. It’s not about a marshmallow. It’s about, will I be further from God or closer to God after I get through this? I believe that temptations are custom made just as you are custom made.

I decided to use the marshmallow thing, but I don’t like marshmallows. Not a problem for me. I feel pretty self-righteous there. Temptation for me is like a good book on a Friday afternoon when I’m supposed to be getting the stinking sermon done and I have just gotten to the good part. Temptation is reading just one more chapter and then one more chapter and then I’m almost half-way through but I stop. There is another part of me that is saying, “John, what you are supposed to do on Saturday night and Sunday morning is literally life-and-death important. Put down the damnable book.” Okay, well, we’re clear on that but maybe just one more chapter. I want to see how this thing . . . Temptation is custom made.

What are some of the most common temptations you think are there to pull us away from God? What are some of the most common temptations that human beings face? Anybody? *Food?*

Absolutely! Especially Patticake, at \$4.95 a slice, not that I know. *Sleep*. We're either sleeping too much or cheating sleep. Either way. Absolutely. What else is a temptation? *Money*. Exactly. Not just making money. That's not the bad thing, but what do you do with the money? What do you do to get the money? How much of the money do you keep? *Overscheduling*. Putting too much into your life so that you're not living it. *Greed*. It's not how much I have; it's how much I choose to hold onto. *Family*. You can either be tempted to ignore your family—I'm providing for them, I need to stay at work—or you can turn your family into a god. I've got to tell you, there is nobody on Planet Earth who can get me angry faster than my youngest daughter. She knows every button to push. I wrote down *lust*. I wrote down *gossip*. I wrote down *cheating* and next to cheating, I wrote down, not working your best at work. I put down *lying*. I think we're a bunch of liars. I put down *theft*. I put down the classic, *money, sex and power*. I put those down as the common temptations that face us all but since I have come to believe that temptation is custom-made, some of them are more subtle. Some of them are just for you.

See if any of these are a temptation for you. Are any of you tempted to *not to do your best*? When you have a choice, are you just going to put in your time or are you going to do it great? How many of you are tempted by *faking it*? Pretending that all is well, pretending that you know the answer. You come to church. You show up. In our house, we call this a great temptation, how many of you are tempted *not to tell the last 10 percent*? You're in a in a difficult conversation and it's going well and you're just about to get out clean but you know there is something else that you should say. But if you say this thing, that last 10 percent is going to be the next 50 percent. The only way you will get to the bottom of it is if you tell the last 10 percent. I am constantly tempted because of my aversion to conflict and my desire to be liked not to tell the last 10 percent.

I don't want you to raise your hands for this. How many of you are in a store and see a certain person coming toward you and you duck down the other aisle? *Avoiding*. How many of you have been tempted to *use somebody else's work*, somebody else's words, somebody else's opinion, as if it were yours? How many of you would say it's a temptation to make the choice to *respond with anger and brutal words* rather than with gentleness and kind words? It's not just getting surprised and the first thing that comes out of your mouth is uncontrollable, that happens, but are there many times when you are gradually getting into the fight and your words are getting stronger, and they also get meaner? That's a temptation. The last subtle one I put down is something I am sure nobody in the southwest corridor of Minneapolis ever knows about, are you ever tempted to *try to look better than*? To look better than this person, whether that is an appearance or work or smarts or whatever? It is sometimes the subtle temptations that are the hardest.

My small group has read *The Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis a couple of times over the years. The senior devil says to the little devil,

You will say that these are very small sins;

very small temptations,

and doubtless, like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report spectacular wickedness. But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy.

That's God.

It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards

playing cards,

if cards can do the trick. Indeed, the safest way to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.

What's the result when we give into temptation? They become our choices. When we give in, there is damage to our relationship with God. There is damage in our relationships with other people. When we give in to temptation, when we take this route, we miss out on the road not taken. In going the other way, we miss out on all the things God can now never show us because we chose to go the other road. We experience the road to death instead of the road toward life.

I feel like this is an important lecture. It does not become a sin unless you have the moral courage to close your eyes for 30 seconds, just 30 seconds, and say, what is the one temptation that jumps to my mind right now? Just personalize it. I'll do that same thing. Personalize it. What is that one temptation that came to your mind right now? If you need help and nothing came to your mind, please come and see me. I've got a good idea what your first temptation is. You're in denial. The apostle Peter says,

8 Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour [1st Peter 5:8].

It's a battle going with little pieces of marshmallow. How are you going to respond to temptation? What the Bible says is that we are to flee. That means we have to recognize when it's coming and look for another door. Flee! The second thing that the Bible says is that we are to share what troubles us or causes us to stumble. Over the years I have said that I have had temptations that I did not fall to because I had, for once, the courage to share with a friend. "Money is tight. I am tempted to cheat on my expense account. Would you help me with that?" I felt stupid. I felt embarrassed. I felt small saying that. I feel safe now because somebody else knows my temptation. We are to flee and we are to share it with that person who can pray with us and for us. Then at the end we are to pray, "Lead us not into temptation. Deliver us from evil."

Could I give you one last thought here? As we pray to be led from temptation and delivered from evil, many of us find that God has a role to play for us in the battle against evil. I believe that you, retired people, may have a more important role to play than you ever had in the battle against evil. I don't know what it is but I believe that God has appointed you to push back against the princes of darkness. It may be something that is across the world. It may be that you have discovered that there are hundreds of thousands of children in forced labor camps in India and giving to the International Justice Mission can get them out. You are opposing the forces of evil. It may be that you are called to be involved in a campaign. It may be that you are called to go downtown and tutor. It may be that you are being called to do something that will deliver someone from evil across the city. But it also may be that you are being called today to look across the street at broken relationships, seeing the Evil One divide and dishearten and keep people from the Savior, and God wants you to help deliver someone from the Evil One. We will

close the service with prayer. We thought it helpful this time to not have me pray or pray alone but to ask fellow temptees, fellow experts in temptation, to pray for us and with us so let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we, Your children, uniquely made by You, come to You. You know everything about us. You know the areas in our lives where we will need Your power and Your guidance so we pray, God, that You would continue to bring to mind these things that have come to mind this morning. That You would open our eyes to the ways we need You. Lord, we are promised a way out so help us to see when You are providing that way. Help us to look for that way and to avoid the temptation that is taking us down the wrong road.

God, we are a community of wealth, a community of achievers, a community of power and it is tempting to rely on those things. When we pray for You to deliver us from evil today, we are asking to be saved by the power of Jesus. Remind us that there is nothing You cannot help us overcome, nothing that You cannot forgive.

Lord, as we see evil in ourselves and around the world, remind us that we stand in victory in the shadow of the cross, delivered and saved, Lord, by Your grace. Help us to go out into this world and be bearers of that hope, to plant signposts of Your Kingdom, love, justice, mercy, kindness, and forgiveness.

You tell us that we become our choices, Lord God. We ask You today, we pray to You today, to help us with those choices. I pray that You will give us eyes to see the Evil One's approach, whether it comes in a TV commercial or an argument or a decision on how to spend our money. As Your Word says, I pray that we will resist the Evil One for then he will flee from us. We know he will return another day, but for today, we have received forgiveness and the hope and assurance of Your love forever. In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Spirit, we praise You. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.