

Sermon for March 18, 2018 – Lent 5

2 Timothy 4:18 (EHV)

Theme: The LORD rescues you . . .

- 1) *By preventing evil*
- 2) *By making it serve your eternal good.*

The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (EHV)

Throughout the ages Christians have asked the LORD to “deliver us from evil.” And yet - from state sponsored persecutions in North Korea and terrorist bombings in Egypt, to disgruntled, lone gunmen in the US – Christians throughout the world face all sorts of evil against their body and soul.

But why? If God commanded us to pray “deliver us from evil,” shouldn’t we Christians expect to live in peace and safety – free from the fear of persecution, danger or disaster?

Well, in a manner of speaking, yes, we do. Every Christian – even in the midst of all the dangers that threaten our body and soul - lives in peace and safety. How so? Because God has given us an eternal hope that, no matter what evil we face on this earth, we can be sure that the LORD will somehow use it for our good.

With the apostle Paul as our guide, let us learn how the LORD answers our prayer to deliver us from evil, under the theme: **The LORD rescues you.** 1) *By preventing evil.* 2) *By making it serve your eternal good.*

Part One: By preventing evil.

The seventh petition of the LORD’s prayer reads: “Deliver us from evil”. As with the other petitions, we are not merely praying for ourselves, but for all Christians throughout the world: that the LORD rescues us all. From what? From every evil – regardless of the kind or source – that threatens our body, soul, property, reputation or any other good and gracious blessing God has given us to his glory.

And this rescue usually comes in one of two different ways: on the one hand the LORD may prevent evil from even beginning. On the other hand, if the LORD does allow evil in our lives, he makes sure that it somehow serves the believer’s welfare.

Make no mistake, God is actively curbing evil in the world. I know, whenever some horrific event happens (like the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas Highschool last month) some people will

say: “So where is your loving God, who curbs evil? Why didn’t he protect those poor, innocent children? It sure doesn’t look like the LORD is doing a good job at being God!”

To that, I would respond: The LORD doesn’t have to do anything for us. If God were to give us all what we truly deserve, he would have to immediately damn us all to hell. We have no right to demand anything from him. We, humans, are the ones messing up this world through utter selfishness and unbelief. The evil you see happening all around us is a result of human sin! The human heart is corrupt beyond comprehension. Truth be told, the LORD is mercifully restraining all sorts of evil from happening around us every day. I can only imagine the pain, misery and bloodshed that would surround us if God were to completely remove his protective care – letting the devil and his allies do whatever they want with us.

But God does actively curb and restrain all sorts of evil – not because we have any right to demand such protection from him, but for his mercy’s sake. He does this in all patience: wanting the people of this world to take the opportunities he gives them to acknowledge their sins and repent – looking to Jesus alone for the forgiveness, life and salvation they so desperately need.

Yes, the LORD is always actively involved in restraining all sorts of evil. He wants us Christians to know this and have peace. This, then, is the first reason he commands us to pray this petition: that we may trust him and live unafraid of any evil that might come into our life. He wants us to confidently confess with the apostle Paul: *The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.*

Part Two: By making it serve your eternal good.

But what if the LORD actually allows some sort of evil in our lives, what then? For example, I am sure that the parishioners of First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs prayed “deliver us from evil” many times – confident that God would keep his promise – only to have many of their family and friends gunned down during a service last November. How did the LORD deliver these Christians from evil?

The same way that the LORD delivered the apostle Paul, when he wrote the words of our sermon text. You see, Paul did not have an easy life on this earth. Listen to his list of evils he experienced as a minister of the Gospel. He wrote to the Christians in Corinth” [I have] *been in prisons more often, been whipped far more, and I’ve been close to death many times.* ²⁴ *Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.* ²⁵ *Three times I was beaten with rods. One time I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day on the open sea.* ²⁶ *I have often been on journeys, in danger from rivers, in danger from robbers, in danger from my own people, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the wilderness, in danger on the sea, in danger among false brothers.* ²⁷ *I have worked hard and struggled. I’ve spent many sleepless nights. I’ve been hungry and thirsty. I’ve gone without food many times. I’ve been cold and lacked clothing.*¹ And yet, in spite of experiencing all these evils, Paul confesses that the LORD delivered him through it all so that he could accomplish his calling of sharing the Gospel.

But now Paul sat in a Roman prison – facing certain death. He thanks the LORD for delivering his life to this point – allowing him to proclaim the Gospel to his captors. Understanding that his execution is imminent, he writes: *The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.*

But how could Paul mean this if he knew that he was going to be killed? Paul could mean it because he knew that there was a greater danger facing him than being executed by the Romans: the danger of dying as an impenitent unbeliever and being sent to hell as an enemy of God. To this end the devil, world and Paul’s sinful nature were constantly working: trying to get him to fall into sin and/or despair of Christ for forgiveness. This was the greatest evil that threatened him. This is also the greatest evil that threatens us.

But the LORD had already rescued Paul from this evil by sending Jesus into the world to win the righteousness we need to stand before God. How? By living the life of perfect obedience to His law in our place. Jesus then took all our sins upon himself, and suffered and died for them on his cross in order that we might be forgiven. On top of all this, the Lord sent the Holy Spirit to awaken and strengthen faith in Paul’s heart to receive this salvation. Working through the Gospel, the Holy Spirit kept Paul looking forward to the eternal joys of heaven that Christ won for him - not allowing anything to prevent him from receiving it.

And what the LORD did for the apostle Paul, he also does for us. More than our earthly ease, comfort and safety, God desires our eternal salvation. And to that end he is always working – even when He allows earthly evils in our lives – as the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write in our first lesson: *“all things work together for the good of those who love God.”ⁱⁱ . . . [Nothing] in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”ⁱⁱⁱ*

For this reason, we don’t have to be scared of all the bad things that are going on this world: church shootings, school shootings, possible war with North Korea or any other danger, catastrophe or disaster. God will keep his promise to rescue us from every evil work of the devil, world and sinful flesh. He will fulfill in our lives the promises recorded in Psalm 91:

⁵ You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, ⁶ nor the plague that prowls in the darkness, nor the pestilence that destroys at noon. ⁷ A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. ⁸ You will only observe it with your eyes. You will see the punishment of the wicked. ⁹ Yes, you Lord are my refuge! If you make the Most High your shelter, ¹⁰ evil will not overtake you. Disaster will not come near your tent. ¹¹ Yes, he will give a command to his angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways. ¹² They will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”^{iv}

And if the LORD, in his wisdom, does allow an earthly evil to befall you that claims the life of either you or a loved one? Understand that the LORD even turns death into a blessing for the believer, as the prophet Isaiah writes: *“The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. ² Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.”^v* This was true, not only for Isaiah, Paul or all the other prophets and apostles who were martyred, but

also true for the believers who died in the church shooting in Sutherland Springs TX. It is true for every Christian – regardless of how they die. From cancer to car accident, believers always find rest as they lie in death.

This truth gave Paul the courage to confess: *The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.* So that our faith might be strengthened in this truth, God encourages us to pray: “deliver us from evil” – for as we pray this petition, we put our hope in the living God who loved us so much, that he gave his only begotten Son to save us. ³² *Indeed, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also graciously give us all things along with him?*^{vi}

For this reason, dear Christian, don't let all the reports of evil on the earth make you scared. Remember this petition of the LORD's prayer. Remember God's promise to rescue you from every evil by either preventing it from happening or making it serve your eternal welfare. The Lord will always do one of those two things for you in Christ. Why? Because he loves you. Remember this every time you pray the LORD's prayer, confessing in your heart with St. Paul: *The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

ⁱ 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 (EHV)

ⁱⁱⁱ Romans 8:28 (EHV)

ⁱⁱⁱ Romans 8:39 (EHV)

^{iv} Psalm 91:5-12 (EHV)

^v Isaiah. 57:1-2 NIV84

^{vi} Romans 8:32 (EHV)