

Lord's Prayer 3: THE TIME OF TRIAL

Psalm 121; Luke 11:1-4 [MW20-32]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai, Sunday 30 August 2020

“Save us from the time of trial” - save us from the time of trial

- notice anything about that and our gospel reading?
those words aren't in the gospel reading!

There are two versions of the Lord's Prayer in the Bible

- Luke chapter 11 and Matthew chapter 6
perhaps there's another version too, more about that later

However this is part of the Lord's Prayer as it has come down to us

- here it is as I first learnt it [Slide 1]
“lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”
- “lead us not into temptation” ... you all okay with that?
no questions, no problems?

I remember looking at this picture - and I got the picture all right!

- the boy is tempted to steal some of the fruit
the girl is trying to restrain him
- this picture actually had great meaning for me
I could quite literally put the whole thing into practice

Everyday when I walked to Mahora School in Hastings, on the corner of Grays Road and Duke Street was a big house with a white fence. Over the fence hung a Chinese gooseberry bush (that's what they were in those days, not kiwi fruit). I watched the Chinese gooseberries growing and I just had to have one. They were kind of 'exotic', I'd only tasted them a couple of times and I thought they were delicious. So one day, on my way home, I made sure no one was looking, picked one and ate it. Forbidden fruit is not sweeter! It wasn't ripe and tasted awful!

I looked at this picture and prayed for years: lead us not into temptation

- then one day it struck me, what are we actually saying?
“Our Father which art in heaven ... lead us not into temptation”
do we really mean that?

Matthew 6:13 says in the CEV: keep us from being tempted [Slide 2]

- NRSV has: do not bring us to the time of trial
The Message is way out with: keep us safe from ourselves and the devil

The version in our Prayer Books says: save us from the time of trial [Slide 3]

- just after we had begun using these 'new' prayer books
a parishioner in Gisborne challenged me:
- should we be asking to be excused from the trials and hardships of life?
isn't that what Christian life is all about: enduring not avoiding?
- after all Jesus did not avoid suffering, hardship, death
are followers of Jesus to be excused the hardships of life?

Here's something I discovered in my reading about The Lord's Prayer

- the Lord's Prayer is included in John's Gospel
John chapter 17 is in fact an 'expanded version' of the Lord's Prayer
- we can check the meaning, intention, interpretation
of the sections of the Lord's Prayer by comparing them with the prayer in John 17
- this is the prayer Jesus prayed with his disciples at the last supper
so we know it's going to be important stuff

What we are particularly interested in is verse 15:

Father, I don't ask you to take my followers out of the world, but keep them safe from the evil one

Jesus' followers are not to be rescued from danger and risk

- that's part of living in the world

however Jesus does ask that his followers be kept safe and not destroyed by disaster

An early Latin writer, thinking he was quoting the words of Jesus, wrote:

a person who has not been tempted may not enter the kingdom of God [Slide 4]

Trials, suffering, stress, difficulties are the norm

- we are not asking to avoid this

we are asking not to be destroyed by disaster

- what might this 'disaster' be?

being corrupted by evil, losing our faith, not knowing what God wants us to do ...

Perhaps this French version preserves the original wording even better

- "allow us not to succumb to temptation"

strengthen us so we do not succumb to temptation [Slide 5]

William Barclay, in his Daily Study Bible series writes:

"Tempt" is perhaps better translated in the New Testament as "test". Tempting is not so much seeking to seduce a person to sin as testing their strength, loyalty and ability for service.

The Old Testament records how God tested the loyalty of Abraham

- by seeming to demand the sacrifice of his only son, Isaac

in the King James version we read:

and it came to pass that God did *tempt* Abraham

- God was not trying to make Abraham sin

rather God was *testing* Abraham's loyalty and obedience

- much later, in the New Testament we read:

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be *tempted* by the devil

- the Holy Spirit is not a partner in trying to compel Jesus to sin

again the sense is that of *testing*

Temptation then is not necessarily designed to make us fall

- rather to make us stronger, better

temptation is not designed to make us sinners

rather to make us good

- we may in fact fail the test, but we are meant to emerge stronger and finer

If metal is to be used in a great engineering project

- it is tested at stresses and strains far beyond those it is ever likely to have to bear

so are people tested in the service of God

Jesus himself knew all about the time of trial, about testing, about suffering

- yet in the garden of Gethsemane, in the darkest hour

Jesus prayed: "Not my will but Yours be done"

and those words are linked to a triumph

- whatever in our individual and corporate lives we meet of trial and testing

we know, as Jesus knew, nothing can touch us of which our Father is unaware

If we pray “save us from the time of trial”

- out of a desire for an easy life as Jesus’ followers
we act wrongly
- however if we pray out of a sense of our own weakness
an awareness of our shortcomings ... that is an entirely different matter

The Christian life is not salvation *from* evil and difficulties

- but salvation *through*
through illness to health
- *through* suffering to a new spiritual understanding and power
through the cross to resurrection!

So perhaps it would be better to pray not ‘save us’ but ‘help us’ in the time of trial

- or to expand this petition we might paraphrase: [Slide 6]

Our Father ... do not allow us to be subjected to any ordeal that will overwhelm us –
if we must face it, give us strength to endure and to remain faithful

Again, as with the other petitions we have looked at

- when we pray these words it is clear, plain, crucial
that we must do something about it ourselves
- firstly by keeping or putting ourselves in appropriate places
not engaging in activities or mixing with people
- or going to places where we may be led astray
I’ll leave you to ‘fill in the blanks’
- secondly by maintaining a ‘healthy personal distrust’
not feeling secure in our own human strength
- even accomplished skaters should avoid thin ice! [Slide 7]

A visitor to Victorian essayist and historian Thomas Carlyle’s birthplace in a village in Scotland, found himself deeply stirred by the books and papers displayed there. As he was about to leave, he confessed he could have spent hours reading them. “Yes,” said the old caretaker, “many a good hour I’ve spent reading those letters when I should have been working.” Then after a pause she added, “I haven’t much time now, so when I come up here to dust, I just leave my specs downstairs.”

[Slide 8]

Lead us not into temptation

Save us [from] in the time of trial

To draw this short series on the Lord’s Prayer together and conclude

- a ‘dialogue meditation’
“The Lord’s Prayer” for two voices

We are to be bold to pray The Lord’s Prayer – because Jesus told us to

- we are to say it together
we are to say it with him
- this Great Prayer covers in scope our entire life
the present, the past, the future
- Amen

Person: Our Father ...

God: Yes?

Person: Don't interrupt me! I'm praying.

God: But you called me.

Person: Called you? I didn't call you. I was praying. Our Father in heaven...

God: There, you did it again.

Person: Did what?

God: Called me. You said, "Our Father in heaven." Here I am. What's on your mind?

Person: But I didn't mean anything by it. I was, you know, just saying my prayers for the day. I always say the Lord's Prayer. It makes me feel good, sort of like getting a job done.

God: All right. Go on.

Person: Hallowed be Your name...

God: Hold it! What do you mean by that?

Person: By what?

God: By "hallowed be your name"?

Person: It means...it means.... Good grief! How should I know what it means? It's just part of the prayer. *(pause)* By the way, what does it mean?

God: It means honoured, holy, wonderful.

Person: Ah, that makes sense. I never thought about what hallowed meant before. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

God: Do you really mean that?

Person: Of course! Why not?

God: What are you going to do about it?

Person: Do? Nothing, I suppose. I just think it would be rather good if you got control of things down here the way you have up there.

God: Have I got control of you?

Person: Well, I go to church.

God: That isn't what I asked you. What about that bad temper? You've really got a problem there you know!

Person: Stop picking on me! I'm just as good as some of those hypocrites down at the church!

God: Excuse me, but I thought you were praying for my will to be done? If that is to happen, it will have to start with the ones who are praying for it. Like you, for example.

Person: Oh, all right! I guess I do have a few hang-ups. Now that you mention it, I probably could name some others.

God: So could I.

Person: I haven't thought about it much until now, but I really would like to cut out some of those things. I really would like to know how to be free.

God: Good! Now we're getting somewhere! We'll work together, you and I. I'm proud of you!

Person: Look, Lord, I need to finish this up. It's taking a lot longer than it usually does! Give us this day our daily bread.

God: Many of my children are hungry. Physically and spiritually hungry. What are you doing about it?

Person: Hey! Wait a minute! I was praying nicely and you start rocking the boat!

God: Praying is a dangerous thing. You could end up changed, you know. You called me, and here I am. I'm very interested in the next part of your prayer. *(Pause)* Well, go on!

Person: I'm scared to...

God: Scared of what?

Person: I know what you'll say!

God: Try me and see.

Person: Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

God: What about Dave and Dulcie Doolittle?

Person: See! I knew you would bring them up! Why, Lord they told lies about me, and they cheated me out of some money. I swear that I'll get even with them.

God: But your prayer. What about your prayer?

Person: I didn't mean it.

God: Well, at least you're honest! But it's not much fun carrying around that load of bitterness inside, is it?

Person: No, but I'll feel better as soon as I get even! I've got some plans for those Dolittles!

God: You won't feel any better. You'll feel worse. Revenge isn't sweet. Think of how unhappy you really are. But I'll change all that.

Person: You will? How?

God: Forgive the Dolittles. Then I'll forgive you. Then the hate and sin will be their problem and not yours. You may lose the money, but you will have settled your heart.

Person: It doesn't sound easy, but deep down, I know it would be worth the effort. Thank you, Lord, for helping me work through this. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

God: Good! I'll do that. Just don't put yourself in a place where you can be tempted. And remember to keep in touch with me during the day.

Person: For Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever.

God: Do you know what would bring me glory? What would really make me happy?

Person: No, but I'd like to know. I want to please you and be one of your followers.

God: You just answered the question.

Person: I did?

God: Yes. The thing that would bring me glory is to having my people, people like you, truly loving me. And I see that happening to us. There's is no telling what we can do together.

Person: Right Lord, let's see what we can do together!

God: Yes. Let's see.