

105-106 “Forgive Us Our Debts, and Lead Us Not into Temptation” December 22, 2013
Job 7, Psalm 44, Luke 1:57-80

Why does Jesus teach us to pray,
“Lead us not into temptation.”

There are some who would say that there is no reason to pray this.
After all, God would never lead someone into temptation, would he?!

Job would beg to differ!
Sunday evening, as we go through the book of Numbers,
we are remembering Israel’s rebellion in the wilderness.
It can be really easy to read those stories
and conclude that trial and difficulty is always a ‘judgment’ –
punishment for sin.

That’s what Job’s friends say.
They see what happened to Job, and they conclude that Job must be guilty.

But Job protests his innocence.
And Job is right.
That’s what God says to Satan –
“Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth,
a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?
He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against
to destroy him without reason.” (Job 2:3)

The story of Job reminds us that sometimes God *does* lead us into temptation.
The story of Job also reminds us that just because God leads us there,
does not mean that we have a good excuse for sin!

That’s why I like the way our catechism puts it:

Q. 106. What do we pray for in the sixth petition?

A. In the sixth petition, which is, *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*, we pray that God would either keep us from being tempted to sin, or support and deliver us when we are tempted.

When we pray “lead us not into temptation,” we ask that God would deliver us from evil.
It’s not that evil will never assault us – but that when it does,
we pray that God will support and deliver us!

And that’s what we sing about in Psalm 44.
Psalm 44 is a song of the innocent sufferer.
It is a song for the persecuted church – who lives in the midst of trial and temptation –
but who trusts in the LORD for support and deliverance from evil.

Sing Psalm 44
Read Luke 1:57-80

“What Then Will This Child Be?” John’s Calling and Yours (1:57-66)

Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son.

All of Elizabeth’s neighbors and relatives gathered,
as the custom was,
to rejoice at the birth of a child.
But this time the rejoicing was even greater,
because *the Lord had shown great mercy to her*
in giving her a child in her old age.

And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child.

This was a major event in the life of a Jewish family.
The circumcision of a son was the sign that God had been faithful to *his* promise
in continuing the holy seed,
and now God was claiming this little boy as *his* seed and heir.
The promises to Abraham were passed on from generation to generation
through the sign of circumcision.

The eighth day was significant.

The creation week was seven days.
God had called Adam to rest on the seventh day,
as a picture of God’s own rest that he took on the seventh day of creation.
But Adam had failed to enter God’s rest.
Adam had sinned against God,
and now the only way for man to enter God’s rest
is if there is a new creation—
a new creation that looks forward to another day,
an eighth day!

And so the sign of the new covenant that God established with Abraham
was sealed with the shedding of blood on the eighth day.
—the shedding of the blood of the seed of Abraham!

Every son of the covenant was circumcised on the eighth day:
the flesh of his foreskin was cut off as a sign
that man can now only enter God’s rest through the shedding of blood,
the shedding of the blood of the seed of Abraham.

And so they came to circumcise the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth.
And this was reason for a party—a celebration of God’s covenant faithfulness!

It had become a Jewish custom to name the child at his circumcision,
and so they would have named him Zechariah after his father,
but (Zechariah himself still being mute from the curse of the angel Gabriel),
Elizabeth answered for him,
“No! He shall be called John.”

Since John was not a common name in the family,
they inquired of Zechariah,
who asked for a writing tablet and wrote down:
“His name is John.”

*And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed,
and he spoke, blessing God.*

It says that fear came on all their neighbors.

In other words, the neighbors realized that God was doing something here.
*And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea,
and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying,
‘What will this child be?’
For the hand of the Lord was with him.*

What will this child be?

Everyone marvels – everyone is talking about this baby.

John’s birth was quite extraordinary.

His mother, Elizabeth, had been barren and now was quite old.
His father, Zechariah, was a priest, serving in the temple,
where he had seen an angel who delivered the message of his son’s birth,
and then, when Zechariah did not believe the message,
struck him mute until John was born.

And when his lips are loosed,
Zechariah says, “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways...”
This would cause quite a stir in the hill country of Judea.

What about you?

What will you be called?

Did anything like that happen when you were born?
Probably not.
If John is such a remarkable figure–
such a unique figure–
then why would I compare you with him?

In Luke 7 Jesus speaks to the crowds about John.

“What did you go out into the wilderness to see?
A reed shaken by the wind?
What then did you go out to see?
A man dressed in soft clothing?

Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in king's courts.
What then did you go out to see?

A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

This is he of whom it is written, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way before you." (Luke 7:24-27)

Jesus confirms what Zechariah says about his son.

John is a prophet—and more than a prophet.

He is *the* herald of the Messiah.

And so Jesus says,

"I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John."

John is the greatest prophet—he is the greatest man who had ever lived,
because he has been given the highest calling:
to prepare the way for Jesus.

Children, what will you be called?

John was called "prophet of the Most High" –
what about you?

Jesus says that you will be called "greater than John."

Because Jesus goes on to say,

"Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." (Luke 7:28)

You are greater than John!

John's father tells you why.

The Song of Zechariah explains why the greatest of the prophets
is still less than the least in the kingdom of God.

And the answer is all about two things:

- 1) forgive us our debts
- 2) and deliver us from evil

John, together with all the OT saints, received salvation in anticipation of what Jesus would do.

He participated in the forgiveness of sins through the shadows of the animal sacrifices,
and the priestly ministry in the temple.

The light that shone upon John was reflected light,
the fading glory of Moses' face

as he had caught a glimpse of the heavenly glory at Mt. Sinai.

And John was given the honor of being the great prophet who would declare to all Israel
that the dawn was at hand,

the dawn in which the glory of God would be revealed anew:

no longer the fading, reflected glory in the face of Moses,
but the glory of God himself, revealed in the face of Jesus Christ.

"And we beheld his glory, the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

The OT saints had their sins forgiven through the blood of Jesus,
just like us.

The OT saints were delivered from evil by the Holy Spirit,
just like us.

But they did not see what you see.

They saw the glory of God from afar,
as the Spirit of God descended upon the temple in Solomon's day.

You see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ—
not the fading glory of Moses,
but an unfading glory—in which you, too, now participate.

The reason why you are greater than John
is not because you are inherently *better* than John.

It is simply because
John got to say, "God will do this."
You get to say, "God has done this!"

So let us look at how Zechariah's prayer teaches us about these two things:

- 1) forgive us our debts
- 2) lead us not into temptation

The fifth and sixth petitions of the Lord's Prayer are bound together:

"Forgive us our debts" points backward to the past,
while "deliver us from evil" looks ahead to the future,
but both are dealing with the basic theme of redemption and deliverance.

Q. 105. What do we pray for in the fifth petition?

A. In the fifth petition, which is, *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*, we pray that God, for Christ's sake, would freely pardon all our sins; which we are the rather encouraged to ask, because by his grace we are enabled from the heart to forgive others.

Q. 106. What do we pray for in the sixth petition?

A. In the sixth petition, which is, *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*, we pray that God would either keep us from being tempted to sin, or support and deliver us when we are tempted.

Zechariah's song, however, deals with these two petitions in the opposite order.

Verses 68-75 is all about deliverance,
while verses 76-79 focus on forgiveness.

There are two parts to the Song of Zechariah.

Indeed, there are only two sentences in this song!

- 1) the first sentence blesses the Lord God of Israel for doing what he has promised
- 2) the second sentence speaks of what God will do through John.

1. Lead Us Not into Temptation, But Deliver Us from Evil (1:68-75)

a. God Has Done What He Promised

When we pray “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”
we are basing our prayer on what God *has done* in Jesus.

You can see the language of deliverance all through Zechariah’s first sentence:
he has visited and redeemed his people...
he has raised up a horn of salvation...
that we should be saved from our enemies...
to show the mercy promised to our fathers...
to remember his holy covenant...
that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies...

Zechariah’s song puts everything in the past tense.
He blesses God because God has done all that he had promised
by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old.

In Jeremiah 23, Jeremiah spoke of the restoration from exile,
*Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD,
when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch,
and he shall reign as king and deal wisely,
and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.
In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely.
And this is the name by which he will be called: The LORD is our righteousness.*
(Jer 23:3-6)

Zechariah blesses the Lord, because he has done what he promised.
Jeremiah had said that when God restored the exiles,
he would establish David’s son as king.
Jeremiah had said this nearly 600 years ago.
Israel had been restored to the land more than 500 years ago.
And no Son of David had ever sat on the throne in Jerusalem since.
And for 400 years there had not even been a prophet to tell the people what God was doing.

Now Zechariah has had Mary staying in his house for the last three months.
Quite possibly, when he sings this song,
she is sitting on the opposite side of the room with the women.
This virgin, who is about to marry Joseph, the son of David,
carries the righteous Branch in her womb.

That’s why Zechariah can say:
He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.

With the incarnation of Jesus –

with the Lord of glory now dwelling in the womb of the virgin Mary,
Zechariah can say that God has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David.

Because when the Word becomes flesh, salvation comes to his people.

What will this Son of David do?

- 1) he will deliver us from our enemies (verse 71)
- 2) he will lead us in serving God without fear in holiness and righteousness (verse 74-75)
and all this because in him God will fulfill his covenant with Abraham.

What was the covenant with Abraham?

What did God promise to Abraham?

Children, do you remember the three things that God promised to Abraham?

Land

Seed

Blessing to the nations

And the point of these promises to Abraham was so that

*we might serve God without fear,
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.*

This is what Israel was called to do at Mt Sinai.

This is what Israel failed to be both in the wilderness, and in the land.

And so God had established his covenant with David,

so that the faithful king (the son of David) would lead the people
into the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham.

But David and his sons also failed,

and Israel went into Exile.

That is why Zechariah looks at this girl who bears in her womb the Son of God,
and he sees the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham in her –

with the result that the people of God will serve *him* without fear.

And so we pray,

lead us not into temptation – but deliver us from evil.

b. How Should We Respond to This Great Deliverance?

Jesus is the Son of David who delivers us from our enemies

so that we can serve God without fear.

When temptation comes, you need not fear –

because Jesus has defeated the evil one.

Jesus delivers us from fear!

When temptation comes, do not fear,

because Jesus has triumphed over the tempter!

He will support and deliver you in temptation's hour.

2. Forgive Us Our Debts, as We Forgive Our Debtors (1:76-79)

a. God Will Do What He Has Promised

In verse 76, Zechariah turns from Mary to his infant son and says,

*And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins.*

John is the one who will prepare the way of the Lord (Isaiah 40; Malachi 3).

This is the Elijah who would come and call the people to repentance
before the coming of the great and terrible Day of the LORD.

John will come preaching, “repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand!”

Israel had sinned against God.

The house of David had sinned against God.

You and I have sinned against God.

How will God bring about the forgiveness of sins?

The animal sacrifices of the OT were insufficient.

How can the blood of an animal truly pay for our sins?

We deserve death!

The wages of sin is death.

John must go before Jesus to prepare his ways

to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins,

Why?

How can John proclaim that the forgiveness of sins is here?

Because of the tender mercy of our God,

whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high

to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the way of peace.

John’s message is the message of the forgiveness of sins,

and this message is spoken of in terms of light dawning in the darkness.

Have you ever experienced darkness?

I don’t just mean the darkness of night.

I mean the blackness—the utter darkness—of being isolated from God?

Your prayers go up—and are met with total silence.

There is a chasm before your feet,

a gulf of emptiness ready to swallow you up.

You know that there is light somewhere—

but you also know,

with a sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach,

that *you* cannot find that light.

That is the darkness—the shadow of death—of which Zechariah speaks.
A darkness that we cannot escape!

It is a darkness that only God can illumine.
When you walk in the valley of the shadow of death,
when you sit in the utter darkness of sin and misery,
there is nothing you can do to escape it.

Israel had been sitting there for nearly 600 years.
And now Zechariah says that his son, John,
would be the voice that would call people to repentance,
preparing the way for the one who would illumine the world.

As the gospel of John says,
*John came as a witness, to bear witness about the light,
that all might believe through him.
He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.
The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. (Jn 1:7-8)*

Because of Jesus, you need not sit in that darkness.
For the Light of the world has dawned in our Lord Jesus Christ.
The sunrise has come,
and the glory of the LORD has been revealed.
If you are sitting in darkness,
and in the shadow of death,
then hear the Word of the Lord,
and open your eyes and see!
Because the Word became flesh and dwelt among us!
In the tender mercy of our God, the Light of the World has come.
And he is the one who guides our feet into the way of peace.

John is unique in his call to be the one who goes before the Lord,
preparing the way of the Lord.
But his message—giving knowledge of salvation in the forgiveness of sins—
is the message that every preacher must proclaim!

b. The Way of Peace

Zechariah concludes by saying that when the light dawns on the people of God,
he will “guide our feet into the way of peace.”

When Jesus teaches his disciples the Lord’s Prayer,
he speaks of this way of peace:
“Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”

Q. 105. What do we pray for in the fifth petition?

A. In the fifth petition, which is, *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*, we pray that God, for Christ's sake, would freely pardon all our sins; which we are the rather encouraged to ask, because by his grace we are enabled from the heart to forgive others.

Jesus says explicitly in Matthew 6 that if you do not forgive your neighbor,
then neither will God the Father forgive you.

Jesus says,

“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,
but if you do not forgive others their trespasses,
neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Mt 6:14-15)

If you are unwilling to forgive others,
then you should not expect God to forgive you.

I understand that this is hard.

There are some things that people have done to me –
where I just don't want to forgive them!

The first thing that we need to see is that forgiveness is *not* saying “that's okay.”

Sin is *not* okay.

When you forgive someone, you are saying,

“What you did was wrong.

It was a grievous sin against God and against me.

But because I know that *I could never stand* before a holy God,

if he did not forgive me for my sins,

therefore, I will forgive you and not hold your sin against you any more.”

In other words, because I want to be forgiven,
therefore I will forgive you.

The other thing is that there are two parts to forgiveness.

The first is the disposition – or desire – to forgive.

You can (and should) have this disposition towards forgiveness
regardless of whether the other person is repentant.

The second is the transaction of forgiveness –

but this requires the other person's action.

Both are crucial –

but only the disposition is up to you.

Let's say someone has sinned against you –

and they refuse to repent.

Can you forgive them?

With respect to your disposition – yes –
you are ready and willing to forgive –
you are eager to forgive –
for all practical intents and purposes you have forgiven them –
except one thing:
they haven't repented.

The transaction of forgiveness has not been processed.

Think of it this way,
when you were lost in your sins –
when you were alienated from God –
were your sins forgiven?

In one sense yes – God's disposition toward you was gracious and forgiving.
But you had not yet repented of your sin.
You had not yet believed on the name of Jesus.

The transaction of forgiveness had not yet been processed.

Indeed, Jesus says that this continues throughout the Christian life:
“if you do not forgive others their trespasses,
neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Mt 6:15)

If you will not forgive others,
then God will not forgive you.

As we pray with Zechariah,
we thank God that Jesus is the Son of David.
He is the one who brings to fulfillment all that God promised to Abraham.
He is the Promised Seed who has received the Promised Inheritance.
And in him, the blessing of Abraham has come to the Gentiles.

The light of the world has dawned in Jesus Christ.
So do not live any longer in darkness.
Do not walk in the way of folly,
but come serve the Lord without fear!
Walk before him in holiness and righteousness,
because your sins are forgiven!
And he will guide your feet into the way of peace.

Amen.