

# **PRAYER: The First Step In Reaching Our Community**

## **SERMON 6**

### **"Deliver Us From Evil"**

How many of you remember a movie called *The Wizard of Oz*? Of course, you remember Dorothy from Kansas and her little dog Toto, and the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion. They traveled together to meet the all-powerful wizard of Oz.

But Dorothy's adventures in Oz were not without problems and pain. She met the evil Wicked Witch of the West. Poor Dorothy was locked up by the witch in that castle. And the witch threatened to kill Dorothy and her little dog, Toto.

I have to be honest. That witch still scares the heck out of me even now!

For us, when life gets hard, when crisis hits, when things are at their worst, we might feel like Dorothy locked up in that castle. But Dorothy's troubles turned out to be just a dream. Ours are not. We cannot just click our heels and magically go home. Our pain is very, very real.

Recent events in our nation have brought this home to us. People are getting deathly sick from a fast-spreading virus. Too many are dying. Its not just off in a far away country anymore. It's here. It's in our community. We are all ordered to help stop this deadly threat by sheltering in place. Its affected every one of our lives.

To make things worse, some of the children at home have no food there. Being home is not a place of shelter for some people, but a dangerous place because of violence in the house. Many have lost jobs and don't know how they will keep a roof over their heads. Many of us are afraid of what the future might bring.

Some people – maybe you – were already dealing with very serious illnesses. In this community are teens already troubled. People already battling addiction.

I can't help but ask the question you may be asking right now... *Why? Why? Why would a good and loving God allow for so much pain and suffering?*

*Why does this happen? If not a health crisis this season, then it's a crazed gunman last season or a tornado next season.*

*Why does illness strike some people and not another person?*

*Why do flood waters take one family's house but not a neighbor's?*

*Why? Couldn't God stop it? Does He not know? Or does He not care? Why doesn't God do something?*

No one has a perfect answer for these questions, but God does tell us some surprising and hopeful things. So today, I am going to turn to the Bible, because it has proven to be true, to be God's Word to us. I'm not just going to share my personal opinion. You something certain – something you can hang on to.

Now, before I share the heart of what God has to say, we have to first get clear on what we mean by some of the terms we use. Let's talk about the difference between evil and suffering.

Evil is a person. Evil is within a person. Evil is a gunman in a Las Vegas hotel firing more than 1000 bullets into a crowd, killing 58 people and wounding 850.

Evil is personified in Hitler and his followers who systematically murdered entire populations on an industrial scale.

Suffering, illness, injustice – the grieving families, the shattered lives -- these are the results of Evil. These are the evidences that Evil is real, and is in this world of ours.

Evil began with a person, the Devil, or Satan. Yes, we believe in the Devil, because Jesus Himself spoke plainly about him. The Devil is a real being, alive and working in our world today. And he's got help. He recruited angels to his cause. They are demons. They are real also, and they are many.

When Jesus teaches us to pray, "Deliver us from Evil," ancient translations read, "Deliver us from the Evil One" – from the devil, all who follow him, from all the suffering he causes.

Martin Luther said that when you pray, "Deliver us from evil," you are asking your Father in Heaven to keep away from you,

**"... Whatever evil may happen to us under the devil's kingdom - poverty, shame, death, and, in short, all the agonizing misery and heartache of which there is such an unnumbered multitude on the earth. For since the devil is not only a liar, but also a murderer, he constantly seeks our life, and wreaks his anger whenever he can afflict our bodies with misfortune and harm. Hence it comes that he often breaks men's necks or drives them to insanity, drowns some, and incites many to commit suicide, and to many other terrible calamities. Therefore there is nothing for us to do upon earth but to pray against this arch-enemy without ceasing. For unless God preserved us, we would not be safe from him even for an hour."** ~ Dr. Martin Luther.

The Large Catechism.

Luther is saying that all the suffering in this world – and there is a LOT of it – comes from the work of the Evil One.

So friends, if I had to boil it down into one sentence, what God says about all the pain and tragedies, it might be something like this... ***Suffering, or at least the vast majority of suffering, is the natural result of evil.*** It's the natural result of evil.

Evil is personal. And evil is within every person – in every human heart. That's what we call SIN.

You see, the Bible teaches that God did not want or intend for suffering to be part of our world. **God created us to live in** what the ancient Israelites called **shalom**. *Shalom* meant **perfect harmony and perfect wholeness** throughout creation. There was no greed, there was no envy, there was no hate, there was no violence, and loving God and loving others came just as naturally as children laughing.

The Bible also teaches that God created human beings with free will. People can choose whether to continue to live God's way, in this way of *shalom*, or choose own way – a way without God and His *shalom*. The Evil One – the Devil – came to the first people, Adam and Eve. He lied to them, to get them to sin, because his intentions are all evil. When Adam and Eve believed the Devil's lies, when they chose to disobey God's way, it didn't just result in a moment of inner guilt and shame; it began the complete collapse of *shalom* in all of our world.

When Adam and Eve turned from God, every last part of creation was corrupted. Every part of our world is now in the chain-reaction brought on by the Evil One. What used to be God's perfect-shalom-world, is now a broken, ruined world.

The Bible doesn't just talk about, but shows us, the transition to a sin-corrupted world. Adam and Eve start to argue and fight in their marriage. They are afraid of God. They are full of shame. One of their sons kills another of their sons. There is vengeance between entire families.

You see, sin is why people struggle to be patient. It's why we desire to possess what belongs to our neighbor. It's why we enjoy talking about others behind their back, wishing them harm sometimes. Sin is why millions of people starve while others live in plenty. It's why nations fight wars over things like oil rights and water. It's why some people are forced into a life of slavery so that others can profit from selling them.

Sin is so far reaching in its effects that it even corrupted our genetic makeup. This is the ultimate reason why some people are born with genetic predispositions to disease and others are not. This is the Bible's answer to why a virus that mutated to become covid-19 and is killing people world-wide because we have no natural immunities to it. The entire natural world has been corrupted.

Sin is also in the church. It's why the church doesn't always look like Jesus. Christians who live in this world are still sinful – forgiven, but sinful. Sin is inside every human heart. Yours and mine.

Suffering, and sickness is normal in this world. Jesus said wars, disasters, and plagues would continue to the end of history.

This means that **Suffering is not God's punishment for sin, but the consequence of sin.** When you experience pain it does not mean God is somehow mad at you. You get sick and another person doesn't because God is punishing you for something you did. God is not a 2-year-old who throws temper-tantrums and hits back.

If you hit your thumb with a hammer, you're going to feel pain. The pain isn't a punishment for your mistake. The pain is just a natural consequence of hitting your thumb with a hammer.

God told the Adam and Eve, **"If you eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil,"** if you go your own way into sin, **"you will surely die."** The death that God said would come is a result of sin -- not a punishment. It's just what would happen.

You see, the real result, the consequence for sin is that we are left to live in it. God said, **"In pain, toil, and frustration you will live, work, and raise your families."** In other words, life outside the garden is going to be hard. Life outside the garden is going to hurt. I wish I could tell you different, but life is hard, and our lives so often hurt.

God DOES punish sin. But God in His grace, He doesn't put the punishment you deserve on you. He put it on His innocent Son, Jesus, when He died on the cross for you. He bore our transgressions. He suffered our sin.

Jesus Himself flatly rejected the notion that tragic deaths or natural disasters were to be viewed as God's judgment. One day Jesus has heard about two deadly events. A group of Galileans had been killed by one of the Roman governors, and a tower had fallen, killing a number of innocent people. Then Jesus said about those things, **"Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?"** In other words, did they suffer more because they were more sinful?

Jesus says, **"I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." "Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?"** In other words, did

this tragedy occur because they somehow deserved it? Jesus says, **"I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."**

Today, do disasters happen because some people are more sinful than others? Jesus says, **"I tell you, no!"**

So why do some get cancer and others don't? Why do some die young or live injured by a car accident, and others can smoke and drink and live past 100? Why do some only get sick, then recover, but others die? The answer is: ... We don't know. I don't know. No one knows. But here is something I DO know and can tell you... *Those things are not directly related to God's punishment.*

The writer of Psalm 130 wrote, **"If You, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?"** Who could stand? You? Me? Well the answer is of course, no one could. None of us are innocent, so none of us can cry "Foul!" when we suffer. So, isn't it great Jesus came to give His life to put an end to this painful cycle of sin we are all caught up in. Jesus came to restore God's *shalom* on earth as it is in heaven.

That's what the Bible says about suffering in our world. You may or may not like that answer. But Atheism does not have a better answer. Atheism says we live in a world without God, and suffering is meaningless and random. This means that illness and death are just natural. It means, if you feel compassion or if you feel moved to help the suffering – like people with the coronavirus – your compassion is just a delusion you made up in your mind. Why should there be compassion? Why should anyone care? If there is no God, suffering doesn't matter, and helping those who suffer is not morally right or wrong – It just doesn't matter.

You see, so much suffering in our world may lead us to question what in the heck God is up there doing! Still, the fact that down in our hearts we know something is wrong is some of the best evidence that God exists. When we hear six million children die every year because of hunger; the fact that down in our guts we just know, "That cannot be right," -- that is some of the best evidence there is for a God who created a world where children *should* thrive, and *no one* goes hungry.

The God of the Bible is unlike any other faith or philosophy because **when you see people suffer, our God wants you to be mad, because He is mad at suffering.** Pain and injustice and sin have messed up His *shalom* world. He wants you to get angry. See, the writers of Scripture didn't spend their time trying to explain evil. Instead, they grieved over it. They raised their fists and cried out, "God, where are You?" Maybe you've prayed that prayer. Maybe you know that anguish today.

Psalm 56:8 says, **"Record my misery; list my tears on Your scroll—are they not in Your record?"** In that day, people would actually collect and save their tears as a way of saying, "We will not forget. We will not forget."

The Bible tells us that God actually grieves when we suffer too. **God suffers with us.** God has been saving and collecting your tears. He has not forgotten a single prayer you've prayed, a single tear you've shed.

The life of Jesus shows us that, unlike any other God, our God suffers with us. God suffers with us. The heart of Christianity is not a God who goes about trying to explain suffering; it's a God who shares it. Just look at the life of Jesus. He lived in poverty. He was betrayed by His friends. He was falsely accused, brutally tortured, unjustly executed. God loved us enough to come into our world and be with us in our pain.

Jesus' pain – His suffering and death, brought a wonderful result. By suffering, He won forgiveness and the way to life forever in heaven with Him – an eternal life without tears or pain or sickness or death.

Because of the cross, evil is running out of time. The days of sin and death are numbered, and one day they will be no more. This promise is not just a dream. It was sealed at an empty tomb 2,000 years ago when a risen Savior came and gave His life for our broken world.

German artist, Moritz Retzsch (1779-1857) is best known for his painting titled, *The Chess Players*. The painting shows a young man playing chess against the devil, and the young man's guardian angel looks on. The devil's fiendish smile and the terror and sadness on the faces of the young man and the angel, and the situation on the chess board, all appear to say that the game is lost. The devil has won.



In 1861, a respected chess player, Paul Morley, noticed a copy of the painting. Morley quickly set up a chess board exactly like the one in the painting. Morley, the chess master, discovered that in just two moves the devil would be defeated.

Evil may seem to get the upper hand at times, but it never has the last move. The winning moves have already been made. Jesus has made a loser of sin, death and the devil.

Evil is on the clock, and one day suffering will be out of time. Death will have no more sting. One day there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, and the Bible says that God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. *“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”* Revelation 21:3-4

This is our hope. It is our only hope. Jesus is our only hope, and He can be your hope right now, this day, no matter what it is you face.