

## The Prayer of Daniel

Daniel 9:1-27

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As we continue our study of the great prophecy of Daniel, I'd remind you again that in the first six chapters of Daniel, we saw somewhat of a spiritual biography of this man as he was placed in crisis after crisis, and as he responded by the strength of God's grace in such a way to honor the Lord. And we've already said that when you move from Daniel 6 to Daniel 7 the scene changes a bit. It's not unlike the book of Revelation where the first eleven chapters of the book of Revelation focus on the war between the church and the world, and then the second half of the book focuses on that which is under and behind that war between the church and the world. That is, the war between Christ and the beasts. So also in Daniel, behind the spiritual biography of Daniel in the first six chapters of the book from Daniel 7 to Daniel 12, what we really have is an account of what is behind the biography of Daniel. The spiritual experiences behind a public ministry and a backdrop of a greater and a larger work of God.

This entire book is about the blessings of knowing God. Daniel is one of our great biblical models for what it means to know God. We talk about knowing God a lot, and most of us, I would think, would say that we want to know God. And if you want to know what a person looks like who knows God, Daniel is a good example of that. He was resolute; he was a man who loved God's word; was obedient to Him. He was a man who stood against the trends of the culture in his own day. He was a man of prayer; he was a man of godliness. This is a man who knew God and knew the blessings of knowing God, and he provides a wonderful picture of what it means to know God, because Daniel was a man of prayer and because prayer reveals something very deep about us that perhaps nothing else in the Christian life reveals.

Daniel 9 also reveals to us Daniel in a way that no other passage in the book does. It's one of the longest prayers in the Bible that's recorded. And I want to invite you to look with me at Daniel, chapter 9, beginning in verse 1:

### Daniel 9

*Father, this is a great passage and were we to spend many weeks in it, we could not exhaust its riches. But as You have meant Your word for our edification, we ask that You would apply this truth to us that we might know You, that we might*

*know You better, that we might love You more, that we might be conformed to the image of Your Son, that we might appreciate the greatness of Your grace, that we might realize what it is to pray in the scriptural matter, that we might live for Your glory. We ask all these things in Jesus' name, Amen.*

Daniel was a man of prayer. That has already been stressed in this book in Daniel, chapter 2, verses 17 and 18. It became apparent to us that Daniel was a man of prayer and it was also apparent to us in Daniel, chapter 6, in that great story of Daniel's faithfulness in prayer. Daniel prayed in times of crisis, but he also prayed regularly. And Daniel's awesome prayers in time of crisis actually reflect the regularity of his discipline in prayer. Those awesome prayers which he lifted up in crisis flow out of, they are the expression of, his regular practice of prayer. John Owen once said, "What an individual is in secret on his knees before God, that he is. No more, no less." If that is true, then we are seeing what Daniel was like in this prayer, and by the grace of God it is a beautiful sight, for Daniel shows us what a man of God looks like. Daniel, in Daniel 9, has recognized that the people of God are at a critical point in their history. He's been studying the book of Jeremiah, and he has discerned that the time of the exile is drawing near. And that realization grows out of his study of scripture and his regular practice of meditating upon scripture and prayer and surely there is a message in that for us.

If Daniel's keenness of prayer flows from his study of the word, his meditation on that word and his regular practice of prayer, how much more ought we to be in the pattern of study of Scripture and meditation on its truth and regular prayer. Sinclair Ferguson has said, "Prayer is an expression of what we know of God and ourselves. In public we may successfully disguise the truth about ourselves but not in private prayer or in the lack of it." What do we look like in private, in secret, on our knees before God? If we are there, no less and no more than what we are, what do we look like? Daniel's prayer teaches us about the nature of true prayer and it calls us to true godliness. And I'd like to look at two or three things that we learn about prayer and about our God in this passage tonight.

### **I. True prayer is grounded in the word of God.**

The first thing I'd like you to see you'll note in the first three verses. In those first three verses we learn something about the context and the content of true Christian prayer. In fact, we learn that true prayer is grounded in the word of God. Look at those words again: "In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of Chaldeans. In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years."

Now Daniel had been used by God as a prophet. God has revealed revelations

to Daniel and yet Daniel is studying the Scripture. Daniel desires his heart and his mind to be informed by the Scripture. He does not despise the other prophets. He desires to be conformed to God by being conformed to His word. Listen to what Matthew Henry says: "Though Daniel was himself a great prophet and one that was well acquainted with the visions of God, yet he was a diligent student of the Scriptures and thought it no disparagement to him to consult Jeremiah's prophecies. He was a great politician and prime minister of state to one of the greatest monarchs on earth and yet could find both heart and time to converse with the word of God. The greatest and best men in the world must not think themselves above their Bibles." We live in a hectic world. We talk about our hecticness all the time. Do we have time for God and for His word? Do we have time for prayer? None of us are doing work more important than Daniel. And yet Daniel had time for God, for the scriptures and for prayer. What a lesson there is for us in that.

Notice also that in verse 2 we are told that Daniel, while he was reading Jeremiah, discovered that by his calculations the exile should be ending soon. He had been studying Jeremiah 25, verses 11 and 12, which told the children of Israel that from the time of the exile there would be seventy years in captivity and then there would be a return.

But his response to that is absolutely startling. If you and I had heard that the exile was soon to be coming to an end, perhaps we would have called for a party in the streets. Gather together all the exiles and let's celebrate the fact that God is going to liberate us. Daniel's response to reading that and to discerning the times is to go the Lord in prayer.

And I want you to see in these verses what we learn about what Daniel knew about God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Because God had promised a specific end to the captivity, Daniel felt the responsibility to pray that God would do what He had promised. Now, unless you believe in the sovereignty of God and unless you believe in what the Bible says about how God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, and how they go together, that makes no sense. God says He's going to do thus and such. Why in the world would you bother praying about it? Because that is how God desires us to respond to the promises of His word. And Daniel, because he prays for God's will be to done -- basically his prayer is what? 'Thy will be done. Do as You said, O Lord, establish Your kingdom. Just as You have said in Your word.'

Because he prayed that prayer, his prayer becomes an instrument of God's activity on earth. Those of us who were privileged to hear John Blanchard preach will remember that vivid illustration he gave of prayer, borrowed from C. H. Spurgeon who said that "Prayer was like the homing pigeon. It begins in the heart of God. It is sent out and it lands in the heart of God's people who then send it back to the heart of God." That's how all Christian prayer actually works. God moves His people to pray by His word, in accordance with His word, the

content of the promises of the word. His people grasp that in their hearts, and they lift that prayer back up to God. It has come to them from God and they send it back to God just like the homing pigeon.

And so this prayer, you will see, will have a great similarity to the prayer that the Levites were going to be praying in Nehemiah, chapter 9, verse 5. Could it be that Daniel's prayer started a pattern and a tradition of prayer that continued into the time of Ezra and Nehemiah? That the people of God patterned their prayers after Daniel? That's so often how God works, doesn't He? He sets one person praying who faithfully prays according to Scripture, and that becomes the seed of revival that spreads among God's people. Perhaps you are that one person that God is setting to prayer tonight. That one person whose prayers will be used as an instrument to spark revival in this congregation, in this city, in this state, in this nation, among God's people in all the earth.

Daniel attends his prayer with acts of self-denial; fasting, sackcloth, ashes. Jesus would mock the Pharisees for such outward expressions, but Daniel's self-denial was a genuine expression of the devotion of his heart. He was single-mindedly devoted to the will of God and so he expressed that devotion by denying himself physically even as he prayed for God's blessing. As in other things, so also it is true in the Christian life. No pain, no gain. Daniel was ready to endure the pain because he desired the spiritual gain.

No wonder, friends, no wonder he didn't stop praying when Darius issued that decree, that everyone should cease to pray to anyone but him for thirty days. You remember Daniel, chapter 9, happens chronologically before Daniel, chapter 6. Daniel was thrown in the lion's den in Daniel, chapter 6, but that happened chronologically *after* this prayer. No wonder Daniel refused to stop praying! *Gabriel had already met the man* and there was no one in the world that was going to stop Daniel from faithfully praying to the God who had comforted him in prayer, not lions, not kings, not decrees. No wonder he refused to stop praying.

So many implications of this for us. Let me suggest two of them for you this evening. God's promises are intended not to supersede, but to encourage and excite our prayers. That's something that Matthew Henry said about 300 years ago, "God's promises are intended not to supersede, but to excite and encourage our prayers." When God promises us something in the word, that is not designed to make us think, "O. K., well, God's promised that. No need to do anything about that." Those promises are there to encourage us to pray that God will bring about those promises in our experience. That is the logic of scripture and of prayer.

And so Scripture is a key matter in finding God's will because it shapes our heart to His heart. We go to the Scripture and the Scripture informs us how we ought to pray. One of the great struggles that we all have in life from time to time is the issue of what would God have me to do. How do I discover God's will? How do I find God's will? Well, this prayer gives us a clue to one of the most important

components of that. We go to the Scripture and we focus our hearts and we focus our prayers on that which God has called us to focus them on. And so our hearts are captured for what God's heart cares most about.

Let me give you an example of this. Many of the men who came together at the Westminster Assembly, that wonderful Assembly that wrote *The Confession of Faith* and *The Catechism*, many of them came together because it was the desire of their hearts to see God establish one united Reformed church in all of Great Britain, England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland. That was their desire and they had no doubt prayed about that before the Lord. They desired earnestly that He would be glorified by seeing one united Reformed church in that great nation. God didn't answer that prayer. Were they in God's will? No question about it, because their ultimate desire was to be faithful in recording the truth of God's Scripture and to present to another generation those truths in a digestible form which could foster true devotion to the doctrines of the Scriptures and thus foster Christian life. They failed in their desire to see a national church established; in only one of those nations was a national church established on the basis of *The Confession*. It didn't happen in England. The English Church never accepted *The Confession*. It didn't happen in Ireland, and it didn't happen in Wales, but thousands and thousands and thousands of Christians in countries that they never would have dreamed about, because they didn't even exist in their time, have been thankful to God for their faithful labor. Their heart had been captured by God. And so with regard to finding God's will, their utmost question in their mind may have been, "Lord, do you want us to labor to see a national church established?" Even though that didn't come about, yet because their hearts were with the heart of God, they have been a blessing to countless thousands of Christians both here in America and Korea and South America, and all over the world who have used the products of their labor. God's will in the specifics of how their work would be used wasn't made known to them, but their heart was with God and so He used their labors.

## **II. True prayer recognizes who God is and who we are in relation to Him.**

The second thing we learn in this passage we see in verses 4 through 19. This passage tells us something about the covenant God of prayer and we learn here that true prayer recognizes who God is and who we are in relation to Him. I want you to notice that when Daniel realizes what Jeremiah has promised, he immediately begins to confess his sins and the sins of his people. Daniel's response to God's promise moved him to confess his sins and I wish that we had several weeks to look at this confession of sin, but let me outline it in brief for you.

Notice in verse 4 he humbly confesses that the Covenant God of Israel is to be feared and to be trusted. Then, in verses 5 and 6, he gives a contrite confession of his people's responsibility in God's judgment. In other words, he confesses

that Israel deserved the judgment of the exile that God had given to them. When he sees that God is about to bring an end to the exile, he immediately confesses 'Lord, the fact that we're here in exile is all our fault. We're not here because You're not a good God. We're not here because You're not a loving God. We're here because we're sinful and we rebelled against You.'

Notice also in verses 7 and 8, he acknowledges God's righteousness in punishing Israel. It's not only that he says 'Lord, we're here because of our sins.' He goes on to say, 'Lord, You were righteous to send us here. You were right, Lord, to punish us.' It's like a child going back to a parent who has just punished him and saying, "Mother, Father, you were right to punish me because I sinned. You were right to do what you did." It's an acknowledgment of the Lord's justice.

And then in verses 9 through 15 he makes an appeal to God's mercy based on His compassion, not based on their deeds, not based on their deservingness, but based on God's compassion. And then in verses 16 and 17 he lifts up a prayer in which he complains to the Lord about the desolate condition of these people. All this Daniel confesses before the Lord.

And in verses 16 through 19, he then begins to petition. He begins to supplicate to the Lord in verses 16 and 17. He requests that the Lord would restore the kingdom to Israel, that He would build up the spiritual condition of Israel.

And then in verses 18 and 19 he offers arguments to God as to why God ought to honor His promises. And primarily he calls on God to respond to his prayer because of God's name and because of God's city and because of God's people. He seeks things in God which belong to God. and he appeals to those things as the basis of his petition. And again we learn a lot of things from the way he prays.

First of all, we learn that true prayer is based on what God has promised that He will do. The Puritans used to call that *pleading the promises*. You go to the word, you discover what God has promised you in the word and you go back to God and you say, 'Lord, do what You promised.' Just like a child does to a parent. You know the parent says, "I'll take you to the zoo on Saturday." And at 6:00 a.m. on Saturday, you know who is tugging on your trousers saying, "You remember you promised to take me to the zoo? Do what you promised." That's exactly what God wants His children to do in prayer. I promised you this. Now you bring that to me and you say Lord, do what You promised. That's exactly what Daniel does in this prayer.

Notice how God-centered this prayer is. This prayer from beginning to end seeks God's glory. He doesn't say, 'Lord, respond, do what You promised because we're such a deserving people. We're such a wonderful people.' He says Lord, 'Do what You promised because of Your name, Your reputation. Because that's Your city, Jerusalem, that is desolate and because we are Your people. We belong to You. You answer these prayers. Not for us, but for You, for Your name,

for Your reputation, for Your honor and glory.'

Notice how this prayer appeals to God's covenant mercy over and over. Daniel reminds himself in this prayer in verses 8, 11, 12 and 18 how God's covenant mercy had been shown towards Israel. And after he lifts up that prayer based on God's mercy, not on his deservings, but on God's mercy, he touches the deep places of the heart of God and moves Him in His compassion for His people.

Notice also that this prayer doesn't try and escape the issue of sin and of misery. It doesn't try and escape responsibility. It faces the responsibility of sin and the result of misery square on and it acknowledges that God's people deserve to be punished. It doesn't by-pass sin and misery. It expresses the plight of God's people to the Lord and asks Him to forgive them. All those things we learn from Daniel's prayer of confession.

### **III. True prayer is always heard by God.**

And then in verses 20 through 23 we learn something quite unique and glorious. In those passages, in those verses, this prayer is heard and we have a description given to us as to what happened in heaven when Daniel prayed. Now we need to treat this in a very precious way because we don't have many examples of this. There are some examples in the book of Revelation of what happens when Christians pray in heaven. But there are not many examples of what happens in heaven when Christians pray. So treat these verses very, very carefully and treat them as precious because these verses teach us that true prayer is always heard by God.

In verses 20 and 21, I want you to see the reality of God hearing our prayers. We are told in those verses that as Daniel prayed, God sent Gabriel. Look at these verses: "Now while I was speaking and praying and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord, my God, in behalf of the holy mountain of my God, while I was still speaking in prayer then the man, Gabriel, came to me in my extreme weariness." What is God telling us there? God is telling us that He always hears our prayers immediately, even if His answer delays. He hears our prayers immediately. His heart is immediately with His people. And in this case He sent an angel to interrupt Daniel in the middle of his prayer to assure him that his prayer had been heard in heaven. Gabriel flew at the behest of God at the response to Daniel's prayer.

Gabriel, we are told in verse 22, came for a very specific reason. He came to aid Daniel in understanding. We're not going to study verses 23 through 27 in detail tonight. We will look at them in the context of some things that we're going to do later on. But they are among the most difficult passages, not only in the book of Daniel, but in all of the Bible. People argue about them all the time. Good people. People who know their Bible. And so it's no wonder that Gabriel had to be sent

for even Daniel to understand. That's an encouraging passage to me. If Daniel had a hard time with verses 24 through 27, I'm really comforted by that because I have hard time with verses 24 through 27. It's kind of like Peter when he writes to the people and he says, 'You know, there are some passages in Paul that are difficult and hard to understand.' That encourages me because I find the same true for myself. Gabriel comes to aid Daniel's understanding here.

Notice also in verse 23, that Gabriel gives Daniel a benediction, a blessing that comes from God Himself. He says that Daniel is a man greatly loved or highly esteemed. Can you imagine a greeting from heaven that informs you that you are dearly beloved of God. Can you imagine a more encouraging thing. And yet, every time we pray based on the merits of Christ in Christ's name, we must realize that God has not simply sent an angel to assure us of the greatness of His love for us, He sent His own Son to die on our behalf and that is a pledge of His love for us; not an angel, but His Son. Every time we say "in Jesus' name," we ought to be mindful of that.

I want you to note two things that we learn in verse 21 and following. Daniel says, almost incidentally, that Gabriel came to him. Look at the very last sentence of verse 21. Gabriel came to him about the time of evening offering. Daniel doesn't draw attention to that. He says it in passing. That is one of the most moving phrases in this passage, in my opinion, because this reminds us that though it had been decades since Daniel had been in Jerusalem at the time of the evening offering, his heart was still being set by the worship of God, morning and evening, in the sacrifices at the temple. It's an almost incidental statement, but Daniel has not forgotten.

Though it had been years since he had been in Jerusalem for the evening offering, yet his thinking was still regulated by the life and the worship of Jerusalem. No wonder he was beloved of God. His heart was with the worship of God and he longed more than anything else to see it re-established. I want you to listen to what Calvin says about this: "Already seventy years had passed away. Seventy years during which Daniel had never observed any sacrifice offered. And yet he still mentions sacrifices as if he were in the habit of attending daily in the temple, which was really not in existence." When it appears how God's servants, though deprived of the outward means of grace for the present moment, are yet able to make them practically useful by meditating upon God and the sacrifices and other rights and ceremonies of His institution. If anyone in these days is cast into prison or even prohibited from enjoying the Lord's Supper to the end of His life, yet he ought not on that account to cast away the remembrance of that sacred symbol, but should consider within himself everyday why that supper was granted us by Christ and what advantages he desires us to derive from it.

I want you to see finally, that in answer to Daniel's prayer, God gives him a vision, a picture, words about the coming of the Messiah. Daniel earnestly prayed

that God would end the exile. God responded to Daniel's prayer by saying, 'Daniel, there's something much bigger here.' And it was in response to this prayer of Daniel that God set in motion the prophecies leading up to the coming of our Lord and Savior. Daniel prayed for the end of the exile. God was saying, 'Daniel, in part your prayers are being used as instruments for the coming of the Messiah, the Prince.' God always answers our prayers beyond our fondest hopes because His mercy is full. Won't you trust Him in your prayer? Won't you be conformed to His heart by the word and reflect it as you plead His promises back to Him? Let us pray.

*Our Lord and our God, we marvel at what a man You made out of Daniel, and we want to have a heart like he had. We want to have a heart for God's people like he had and we want to have a heart for God's glory like he had. So sanctify to us Your word and Your sacraments, we ask in Jesus name, Amen.*

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