

The Prayer of Daniel

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[0:00] Daniel chapter 9 and we'll begin in the first verse. In the first year of Darius, son of Xerxes, a Mede by descent, who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom, in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the scriptures according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet that the desolation of Jerusalem would last 70 years.

So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting and in sackcloth and ashes.

I prayed to the Lord, my God, and confessed. Oh, Lord, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands.

We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled. We have turned away from your commands and laws.

We have not listened to your servants, the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers and to all the people of the land.

[1:19] Lord, you are righteous. But this day we are covered with shame. The men of Judah and the people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you.

Oh, Lord, we and our kings, our princes and our fathers are covered with shame because we have sinned against you.

The Lord, our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him. We have not obeyed the Lord, our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants, the prophets.

All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you. Therefore, the curses and sworn judgments written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us because we've sinned against you.

You have fulfilled the word spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing upon us great disaster. Under the whole heaven, nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem.

[2:34] Just as it is written in the law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us. Yet we have not sought the favor of the Lord, our God, by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth.

The Lord did not hesitate to bring the disaster upon us for the Lord, our God, is righteous in everything he does. Yet we have not obeyed him.

Now, O Lord, our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day.

We've sinned. We've done wrong. O Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill.

Our sins and the iniquities of our fathers have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us. Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant.

[3:41] For your sake, O Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. Give ear, O God, and hear, open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that veers your name.

We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, listen. O Lord, forgive.

O Lord, hear and act. For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your name.

O Lord, hear and act.

Hope, the possibilities, the difficulties, all of that wells up and comes together in prayer. And this is how it's been for days now. Work and prayer.

[5:03] A bureaucrat's job is never done, and he's long past retirement age, and yet he's kept working. And for 70 long years, he's been here.

And yet, out of the monotony of this work, something has happened. He had been reading a book from home. And out of this book, out of reading this book, a new life, new vigor has poured into Daniel's heart, and it's overflowed into prayer.

And it's powerful prayer. It's sad. It's hopeful prayer. A yearning has broken out, groaning, yearning for God's glory, and a yearning for restoration, for revival.

He must have it. God must act. And so Daniel prayed. And tonight, we're going to look at Daniel's prayer. And then we're going to ask some challenging questions.

And then we're going to end with a family story. That's where we're going. And so let's begin with Daniel's prayer. So Daniel's prayer is a plant, and we're going to examine it this evening.

[6:17] And the first thing that we learn is that Scripture is the soil that prayer grows out of. Scripture is the soil that prayer grows out of. We read it in the first three verses. Daniel's been reading from the prophet Jeremiah.

And aren't you so curious as to know how he, who was all the way in Babylon, got portions of Jeremiah? I'm not sure, but he had it, and he was reading. I don't know if he had all of it, but he had some of it.

And he came to Jeremiah, chapter 25, verse 11, and he read this. The whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the kings of Babylon 70 years.

Daniel reads on. And in chapter 29, he reads, When 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.

So where does prayer come from? As you're looking at your life, and you're looking at maybe areas of prayerlessness, where is that going to come from?

[7:27] It's going to come from Scripture. Looking at Scripture, and then looking at your world. That's what Daniel did. He looked at the Scriptures, he read, he believed, and he looked at the world around him.

Daniel had just seen the passing away of the Babylonian dynasty. After 70 years, he has finally seen that. He's been in exile that whole time. And God's Word said that after 70 years, I will restore Jerusalem.

He would bring his people back into the land. And so he knew God's plan. But did that lead him to just wait? To say, well, what's the point of praying?

God's going to do what God's going to do. And the answer is no. Daniel prays. It's the very promises of God. The very Word of God that makes Daniel pray. It gives him confidence in prayer. And it's no different from us. When we have one eye on God's Word, and one eye on God's world, it's going to make us pray. It moves us to pray. And so God still has purposes for this world, doesn't he?

[8:29] He still has plans. Think of what we've seen so far in Daniel. God has said, I'm going to plant my kingdom in this world, and it's going to fill the whole earth.

And the Son of Man is going to rule over the nations. But do we see all those things yet? Well, not completely. And so should we just wait?

And just sort of wait it out. Wait for the time when that will happen. Not if we're going to learn from Daniel. If we're going to follow Daniel's example, what we're going to do is we're going to pray for God to bring those things about.

Prayer is one of the means that God uses to do what he says he's going to do. His promises in prayer, they go together. So the second thing we want to notice about this plant, this prayer, is that faith is the energy that makes it grow.

Faith is the energy that makes prayer grow. So faith in God's promises moves Daniel to pray. It's faith in God's covenant love and God's covenant character and the things that we just sang about of his faithfulness.

[9:40] So Daniel chapter 9 is the only place in Daniel where God's covenant name is used. It's the only place. So we look at verse 4.

It says, I prayed to the Lord, all caps, Yahweh. I prayed to Yahweh, my God, O Lord, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of love to all who love him and obey his commands.

And in verse 10, I don't want you to look at all these, but in verse 10 we see Yahweh again in verse 13 and verse 14. And scattered throughout the rest of the chapter, it's covenant language.

God's promises, God's covenant character is on Daniel's heart. He's trusting that God is his covenant God, is Israel's covenant God. And so Daniel takes hold of God's covenant promises to Israel that he is going to be Israel's God.

Now, faith, it works the same way in our prayer life. Faith is what's going to drive, it's the power, it's the energy that makes prayer happen. Scripture itself won't do it. There's many people that read and study the word and they don't pray.

[10:58] Only faith in God's goodness, only faith in God's love and God's concern will move a man or a woman, a boy or a girl to pray.

And so that's what we see in verse 9. The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving even though we have rebelled against him. Prayer, our faith, looks through our own sinfulness.

It looks through it. It doesn't look around it or past it. It looks through it and lays a hold of God's grace. But how did Daniel know that the Lord would forgive them and have mercy on them?

Well, because God had told them. Daniel had God's word and God had told them, if you confess, I will remember and I will forgive. So if we go back in our minds to Leviticus chapter 26, the Lord is talking to the people, to Israel.

And he's saying, if you disobey me, you are going to go into exile. You will. This will happen. And then after that, he says, if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers, their treachery against me and their hostility toward me, I will remember my covenant with Jacob, Isaac and Abraham and I will not reject them completely.

[12:19] So the Lord said, I'll remember my promises. I'll remember my covenant and I'll remember my love and I'll restore you if you confess. And so Daniel believed and so he prayed.

And so brothers and sisters, what's going to move you? Well, it's going to be faith in God's promises that he does love you, that in Christ Jesus, he's made you one, he's brought you into his family. You have his love, you have his favor. And so you'll pray out of that. Now, if Daniel could look back on God's promises and that would move him with expectation to pray, can't we?

I mean, shouldn't we? We have many more promises than Daniel had. If you think of the big epic event in the history of Israel, it was coming to Mount Sinai.

And this is what the book of Hebrews says about that. We have not come, talking to the Christians, we haven't come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire, darkness, gloom and storm to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it beg that no further word be spoken to them.

[13:31] That was the covenant. That was the promise that Israel was a part of. And the author of Hebrews says, we haven't come to that mountain and said, we've come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to the city of the living God.

We have come to thousands and thousands of angels and joyful assembly to the church of the firstborn. We've come to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant whose blood speaks a better word than Abel's.

And so, brothers and sisters, all the promises of God's word are yes, they're amen, they're right on in Jesus Christ. It's faith in Jesus. His life is enough. His death is enough.

And his death has completely satisfied God's wrath. And so it's faith in the gospel that will move us through our sin into prayer. Now, what else do we see about Daniel's prayer?

We see that God's glory is the sun that it always reaches for. God's glory is always the sun that it reaches for.

[14:36] Have you ever seen a lily follow the sun across the sky? I don't know if they all do it, but so the flower opens in the morning and it's facing east and as the sun goes overhead, the flower moves right along until it's facing west.

And that's the heart of every healthy believer. His heart is set on God's glory. He's looking into God's glory. He's yearning for it. He's wanting it.

He's open to it. And so he prays for it. And that's how Daniel prays. Daniel, if you don't get anything else, look at how Daniel yearns and longs for God's glory.

Look at verse 17. Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant for your sake, O Lord. Look with favor on your desolate sanctuary.

So what's Daniel's argument? It's for your sake. This is your sanctuary, God. This is your city, God. This is where you're supposed to be worshipped.

[15 : 41] This is the place where in all the earth you are to be honored and glorified and look at it. It's destroyed. It's ruined. Lord, we've sinned.

We need mercy. We need restored. We need brought back. We need revived. God, you must do something for your sake. Look at verse 18. It tells us one reason why not to answer them and one reason to answer them.

We do not make request of you because we are righteous. But because of your great mercy, O Lord, listen. O Lord, forgive. O Lord, hear and act for your sake.

O my God, do not delay because your city and your people bear your name. Daniel is longing for mercy, not for justice.

He's not asking God to answer them because they're so righteous. He's asking them for mercy. God, make a name for your mercy. Make your mercy known here. O Lord, hear us.

[16 : 43] This is your city. These are your people. Your name is on them. They're carrying it. It's their burden. And Lord, so please revive them.

Restore them. Restore us. They're the laughingstock of the world. They're scorned. And when they're scorned, you're scorned. You hear the passion in Daniel.

He's a plant. And he's stretching out for God's glory. He's yearning for it. He isn't satisfied with the status quo. He wants God to be worshipped.

He wants God's name known. And he can't bear it the way it is. He can't be content. He's waiting on the Lord. And his mouth is full of arguments. He's not waiting placidly.

He's waiting, doing nothing. He's waiting with yearning and passion and argument. Lord, you must do something. And so we can check our own spiritual health here. This is a thermometer where you can examine yourself.

[17 : 47] Are you panting after God's glory? Or are you satisfied with the status quo? Are you looking around your family and yourself and your marriage your job, your place of work, your neighborhood, your church?

And is there something in you that says, you know, everything is not just right. God's glory isn't seen the way it should be seen. There's more to be seen.

There's more to be experienced. They're not loving him. They're not rejoicing in his grace. They're living for other things. They're serving money. They're living for the American dream. And it's not right.

And when you feel that way, then what do you do? You pray. You pray that God would do something. And so God's glory is that sun that prayer reaches for.

And finally, confession and repentance is the fruit it bears. Confession and repentance is the fruit that it bears.

[18 : 54] sinners. There's no doubt that this is the dominant theme of this prayer. We have sinned. We have done wrong.

We are wicked. We've been wicked. We've rebelled. You are righteous. And but we're covered with shame. We've sent our forefathers of sin. He's confessing the whole community's sin.

He's confessing his sin. He's confessing all the people's sin. He doesn't excuse it. He doesn't belittle it. He doesn't say, well, that's the way we are. Old habits die hard.

It's what we've always done. This is things are always going to be this way. It's not so bad. He says, no, we've sinned. We've disobeyed. We've rebelled.

We've done it in the past and we're still doing it today. So God, restore us. He's begging for mercy and grace. Revive us, change us and make us into something new and different.

[19 : 54] And we can know that that's what he's longing for because we didn't read it, but in the second half of Daniel chapter nine, God answers Daniel's prayer while he's still praying.

You notice it didn't end with a amen or anything like that. While he's still praying, God answers his prayer and he promises a new covenant. And that, and then he promises, I'm going to send a king, a prince.

I'm going to do something miraculous. I'm going to bring everlasting righteousness. I'm going to atone for wickedness. I'm going to put an end to sin. So Daniel's looking for more than just a rebuilt city.

He's looking for a rebuilt people. He's looking for a time when they can move out of the situation, the covenant that they're in and into something different. He's looking for God to do away with sin and to write the law of God on their hearts.

But as Daniel looks around at the people of God, as he sees them now, all he can do is confess and hope in God's mercy.

[21:10] God must act, must act, and we need grace, and he must forgive us and work powerfully for them. So I want to move on to some challenging questions.

As I came to this passage, it is a bit difficult to know exactly how you want to preach it, how I want to preach it, because it could have been a very good how-to sermon. How does Daniel teach us how to pray?

And it does that, doesn't it? It does that, certainly. There's enough there to make us reevaluate and rethink about how we pray. But Daniel 9 wasn't written to teach us how to pray.

It wasn't a manual, although it does that, and we should learn from it, definitely. Daniel's prayer was to teach us how we participate, how we should be participating, in God's plan for his world.

We've seen a lot of things of God saying, this is what I'm going to do, this is what I'm going to do, and he's showing. Now, this is what Daniel does. This is Daniel's part, and Daniel's part is to pray and to confess and to say, we've done things wrong, but Lord, we need mercy in order to do things right.

[22:36] We need your grace. And so Daniel knew God's plan. He knew where all this was going. He'd seen visions before. And it made him long for revival in his own day.

He didn't want things to go on as they had. He was longing for those things of the future to come to him now and to God's people now. He wanted God something to do something new and powerful. He just wasn't satisfied with how it was going, the status quo, and so he prayed. And so that leads me to some challenging questions. As we think about our part, our participation, the first question is, is there anything that we need to confess?

What do we need to confess? Daniel's was a prayer of confession. And so what do we as a church, as a people, do we have nothing to confess?

If we long for God's glory, then we can never be satisfied with the same old, same old. We can't look at ourselves. We can't look around us, at our church, at our world, at our neighborhood, and say, you know, things are right where they should be.

[23:54] Things are just the way it needs to be. That's to deny that we're sinners. And brothers and sisters, we are sinners. We are. And we can, and we should, be doing more for God's glory.

And so that should lead us to confess our sins, the sins of our body, the sins as a people. Not just our personal sins, not my personal sins, not just your personal sins, but the sins that we have as a body.

Daniel says, look at Israel. And he's confessing for all of Israel. And so, Grace Fellowship, we have sins and weaknesses that mark us. But if we confess them, God is faithful, and he'll forgive us.

Confession is the only thing that's going to lead to growth and to change. Confession leads to repentance, and repentance leads to us living a life that's more in line with God, more for His glory, more for His honor.

And so I ask, is there nothing that we need to confess? The second thing related to it, I ask, are we what we should be? Are we what we should be?

[25:07] Daniel could look around and say, oh God, we've sinned. We're not what we ought to be. We aren't what we should be. And so I ask, are we what we should be?

Recently, I read a blog about how a man started to reach out to the people in his neighborhood. And the blog began with him saying, for seven years, I've lived in my neighborhood for seven years, and in that time, only one person has come and repented and been baptized out of my neighbors, out of the people in my neighborhood.

And he said, but it's not as bad as it sounds. Because for the first six years, I didn't know any of my neighbors besides the names of the neighbors on either side of me. And I didn't know that was the extent of it.

And the extent of my outreach, the extent of my evangelism, the extent of my love to my neighbors was he said that occasionally he would go out and hand out Bibles and at Christmas time they would do Christmas caroling and they would come up and the lights would go off and people would pretend like they weren't home.

And so it was somewhere in there when he's standing out there in the cold and he said, I asked myself, if you know so much, how come no one around you is repenting and being baptized?

[26:28] And that question has struck me and haunted me. And I ask, is everything as it should be with us, brothers and sisters, are the unchurched being saved here?

Are the unchurched being saved at all here? And so what should we be doing? Well, before we do anything else, we should be begging God to forgive us and to make us different in this area of evangelism and outreach.

We aren't what we should be and I'll be the first one to sign my name to that. Now, the third question is this, don't we need restored and revived? That's what Daniel was praying for, he was fasting for, he was longing for with sackcloth and ashes and I ask myself, don't we need revived? When I read Acts, I read of a vibrant community, outgoing community and wherever they went, they were gospeling. They were telling people the gospel and people were being saved all the time. It was a regular thing. We just think of those big 3,000 on this day and 5,000 on this day but that's not exactly how, it wasn't just 3,000, 5,000, it was every day more and more were being added to their numbers and so I ask, why can't those things happen again?

[27:45] We have the same Lord, we have the same spirit, we have the same gospel. God can revive us, God can restore us, God can change us.

Things aren't what, aren't what they should be but we serve a gracious God. We serve a God who loves us and who has sent his son to die for us and so if we confess our sins, he will be faithful and just and to forgive us.

He doesn't treat us like our sins deserve and so if we confess and repent like Daniel did, he'll act for us. God opposes the proud wherever he finds them but he gives grace to the humble and I know those are challenging questions.

I know it, they're hard for me to deal with but if we love God's glory like Daniel loved God's glory, we will ask ourselves those hard questions for ourselves about ourselves.

Now, I want to end with a family story and it's an illustration but it's also a completely true story and it's a family story, it's your family actually and don't you love family stories?

[29:03] Don't you love hearing about things that your ancestors did? My grandmother, my grandmother's maiden name is Arnold and this is a true story, I have a family, a man in my family who was so patriotic that he served on both sides of the Revolutionary War.

It's true and if you need to figure that out you can talk to me later and I loved hearing about that when I was growing up because that was something, I had some attachment to history, it wasn't a good one but, so I have a family story for you and it's about our ancestors and it's all true.

Now, I'm not sure if you know where Calvinistic Baptists, Baptists come from, where they started but they started in the 1600s in England and in 1630, so we're talking 400 years ago, there were a few Calvinistic Baptist churches sprinkled throughout England and 1640, 1650, 1660, the churches were growing, more and more were growing but in 1662, it became illegal to be a Baptist it became illegal to be a Baptist in England.

If you're outside the Church of England, you had some major issues. That's why John Bunyan spent 12 years in prison. But it didn't matter. During that time, the church, the Calvinistic Baptist churches grew and soon there were over 300 churches all throughout England.

I mean, can you imagine that? That's like one every town. There's all these churches. Then in 1689, something good happened and something bad happened. And it was the same thing.

[30:51] The act of toleration was passed. And so, now it became legal to be a Baptist. You could meet together, you could preach. And so, what did our forefathers do? What did our fathers do?

They got together and they said, well, we want to write a confession of what we believe. And so, they did. And that's where our confession comes from, the 1689 confession. And that's the good part.

Now, the bad part is this. When they got out from under persecution, when they got out from distress, something happened in their hearts.

I don't know exactly how it all went, but something happened. And one by one, the churches started losing the gospel. They believed the five points of Calvinism.

They preached election. They held the predestination. But they lost their heart for people. And they lost their passion to calling, to pursuing people.

[31:51] They really did. And they didn't feel like they could call men to faith in Jesus. And they said, well, if God's going to do what God's going to do, then the best thing that I can do is to get out of the way and just wait.

So, that's what they did. And they stopped growing. Their children, you know, were baptized and believed. They were converted. God didn't totally abandon them. But their churches were dying. And then God moved. God did something. So, this is the 1730s now. And God pours out His Holy Spirit, showers, revival showers upon hundreds of churches all throughout England and all throughout the United States. And hundreds and thousands of people were saved and churches were growing and blooming and blossoming all everywhere. But not in our family's churches. churches. And so, these 1689 believing Baptists were cautious and they were critical and nothing happened in their churches. [32:54] Very little anyways. Charles Wesley, who wasn't necessarily perfect, but he said this about them. They are carnal, contentious sect, always watching to steal away our children and make them as dead as themselves.

not very nice. And by their children he meant their converts. The Baptists even had problems with George Whitefield who was a Calvinist and they said he had an Arminian accent. And so, for decades they resisted the revival of their time. They wanted to preserve what they had. They wanted to preserve proper church life. But they didn't long for more. And so, they were dying in a slow death. They had the right doctrine. They knew the gospel but they lost their joy and their love for it and they lost their love for sinners. And it was a spiritual winter. But that's not the end of the story. I didn't tell the story to make you sad. That's not the end of the story, not at all. [34:00] Because God breathed on that frozen tundra. And men started to pray. They started to pray. Men woke up from their spiritual slumber and here and there they looked around their denomination.

They didn't have that but whatever. And their churches and they said, you know, something's not right here. And they prayed. And this was here and there, here and there. And then there was a meeting of the Northampton Association of Baptist Churches and one of the pastors named John Sutcliffe wrote up a proposal and he said, and this is my summary, this isn't the exact words, he said, we need to pray. Brothers, visitors, messengers of the churches, we need to pray. We need to confess our sins. And he said, we need to bewail the condition of religion among us. We need to pray for revival. We need to wrestle with God for a pouring out of the Holy Spirit. And Sutcliffe said, let's do it. The first Monday of every month we'll get together and we'll pray for this. [35:12] And so that's what they did. And this is what one historian says. There is little doubt from the record of the history that God heard the prayers of Sutcliffe and his fellow Baptists as they prayed the Calvinistic Baptists in England began to experience the blessings of revival.

Though it should be noted, it was not immediately evident. So they started experiencing it, but it wasn't full-blown great awakening of revival, but it was there. And the first fruit of all this prayer together was a short, little, bald cobbler named William Carey who couldn't help himself any longer. And he fought tooth and nail to go to India. And so we like to boast about the first missionary being a Reformed Baptist and that's our right, but it came at the cost of prayer and by God's grace. And so men started praying more and more and more and by 1810 their churches went from being barren wasteland, frozen, to just thronging with people, exploding with people and churches were being planted and missionaries were going out and evangelists were going out and the churches were, people in the churches were being saved and the unchurched were being reached and brought in and converted.

[36:39] So that's our family story. It's all true. Now what can we learn from our family story? It's possible to be doctrinally precise and spiritually asleep.

It's possible to be so careful and so critical that we can actually grieve the Holy Spirit. And so while he's being poured out on other people, he passes us. And finally, and this is the most important thing, brothers and sisters, in answer to confession and to repentance and to prayer, God can revive us again. And so brothers and sisters, this is our, that's our family history. But by God's grace, that could be our family's future. So as Daniel sat there in his room, he saw the condition of God's people.

He yearned for God's glory. And so he prayed. Shouldn't we do the same? Let's do that now. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are the Lord of history, that you are the Lord of salvation. [37:55] and though we are sinners, you are a merciful God. Though we are sinners, you are cleansing us and working out each spot and you are so patient, so gentle with us.

And we love you. We love you for not pouring out all of our sin on us and dumping it all on us at one time and so we get so distressed and so consumed.

Thank you that you are wise and you are a good God and you show us little by little how we need to be more and more like our Lord Jesus who loved the lost, who is full of the Holy Spirit, who is full of joy.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, that we are one with you, that we have union with you. And so we are asking that you would please take what is yours and share it with us even as you have.

Holy Spirit, come and fall down upon us and revive us, encourage us, make the gospel sweet to us. We know none of this will happen if we are holding on to any of our sin or idolatry.

[39:05] And so I pray, Lord, that we would just cast it away, cast it from ourselves, come confessing and owning what we are. Thank you that you oppose the proud but you give grace to the humble.

And so we come and we confess that we are sinners. We haven't loved you. We haven't loved our fellow men like we ought. Will you please forgive us and change us.

Thank you that you work in us to will and to do all your good pleasure. And that is our hope that you do not leave us to ourselves but you are still with us.

You are the vine and we are the branches. Thank you that all the life we need can come from you. I pray that we would rest in it. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.