

1/21/24 Christ Fellowship

## Daniel's Prayer - Daniel 9

My dad used to tell the story of when he was a little boy and he asked his parents for a bicycle for Christmas. All the other kids in the neighborhood had bikes but not him. He knew his family was poor but he really wanted a bike. So, for months before Christmas, he started telling them what he wanted. He cut out a picture of the Sears catalog and gave it to them and he asked and asked and asked but they always said they would try but they couldn't make any guarantees.

So, Christmas morning came and he ran downstairs to where the tree was and amongst all the other Christmas presents, there was not just one bicycle but two! Pop was overjoyed. He was jumping around and was just about to grab one of those bikes until he saw his two cousins. And then his uncle and aunt. They had shown up after my dad went to sleep and spent the night and Pop didn't know they were coming. And then he found out that the bikes weren't for him but were bought by his uncle and aunt for his cousins. And Pop still didn't have a bike. He said it was awful to watch his two cousins riding those bikes around his neighborhood that day when he didn't have one. Isn't that a horrible story? 😊

Some of you feel the same way my dad did after you have asked God for something for so long. Maybe you have prayed for healing; physical healing or maybe the healing of a relationship or something else. Maybe you have prayed for help breaking a habit or you need God's help with your finances or maybe your marriage is in trouble and no matter what you say to God, it never gets better. Or maybe you have been wronged and you just want to see justice done. *"God, how long will it take for you to answer me?"*

Scripture is full of wonderful prayers that we should model. Jesus Himself gave us what we call the Lord's Prayer and when used as a model, it is powerful. In fact, it has all the power of the One who gave it to us. All prayer is talking to God and asking Him for His unlimited power to be unleashed. And all through scripture we see examples of effective and powerful prayer and yet our prayers sometimes seem to flounder around. We see other people pray and their prayers are answered. Why aren't ours? Have you ever felt that way? Well, you aren't the only one.

Let's turn to the amazing book of Daniel in the Old Testament. Daniel is between the books of Ezekiel and Hosea and was written by Daniel when he was a fairly old man. Daniel had been born in Israel but had been taken captive as a young man, probably a teenager and had spent his whole adult life basically as a slave but because he had proven himself

capable and honest, he had been promoted and well-taken care of through the years. But he longed for home.

Everybody knows the story of Daniel being thrown into the Lion's den for praying but in **Daniel chapter 9**, we see written out a prayer that Daniel prayed many years later and not everybody knows this prayer. But they should because it is some of the most powerful and effective prayer that has ever been prayed. We looked last week at how James said that the fervent prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Well, I want to read some of this prayer by this righteous man and I want to see just what makes it powerful and effective.

Let's start by reading the first five verses. **Daniel 9:1-5.**

*In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom— 2 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 seventy years. 3 So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. 4 I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: "Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, 5 we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws.*

I think the first thing we learn from Daniel about prayer in this passage is "what" to pray. And I know you know what to pray, right? Whatever is your need, you take it to God. That's what you pray. If you need healing, you pray to God and ask for healing. If your marriage is struggling, "Lord, help us." If you have financial needs, you pray for God's mercy. And that's not wrong but there's more to it. Look at **verse 2**. Daniel said he learned from the scriptures, from reading the book of Jeremiah, that the Israelites would only be in captivity a total of seventy years. That was the word that God gave to Jeremiah and Daniel was wise enough, even then, to realize that what Jeremiah had written was part of the holy scriptures.

We don't know exactly how long before Jeremiah had written this but Daniel read it and knew it was God's word and so he prayed back to God His word. Most scholars believe Daniel had been abducted and taken to Babylon as a young teenager and here he is a man probably north of eighty years old. He does a bit of quick math and realizes the time is almost up. It has been almost seventy years and so Daniel prays that God would do what He promised to do.

Daniel's greatest desire, his overwhelming need was for his nation to be together again in their own land. And so he prayed what he read in **Jeremiah 25**, *"This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. 12 "But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt," declares the Lord, "and will make it desolate forever."* And then again in **Jeremiah 29**, *"This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place."*

So, if you are most desperate for God to heal you, you should find out what God says about healing in His word and you pray that. In **James 5**, just before that great verse about effective and powerful prayer, James says, *"Are you sick? Ask the elders of the church to come and pray for you."* Have you done that? Then find out what else God has to say about healing.

If your marriage is struggling, find out what God says about marriage and divorce. Maybe divorce is no big deal to God and you shouldn't even worry about it. No big deal right? But if God says – like He does in **Malachi 2:16** – *"I hate divorce!"* then maybe you ought to pray with that in mind. And then find out what else God says about marriage and divorce and pray those words over your situation.

If you are struggling with addiction, study passages like **2 Corinthians 10:5** that says to take every thought captive. Then memorize **Romans 13:14** that says we are to make no provision for the flesh. Find out what that means and then pray back to God what He says in His word.

Do you absolutely positively want your prayer answered? **1 John 5:14** says, *"This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."* Do you want to pray in God's will? He tells us His will in His word. Whatever your main prayer concern is, there is something in scripture that addresses it one way or another. Find it. Memorize it. Roll around in it. Know it and then pray it back to God.

The second thing we learn from Daniel about prayer is found in **verse 3**. *I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.* Now, when was the last time you wore sackcloth and ashes? Been a while? Probably and that's okay. Sackcloth and ashes was more of an Old Testament thing that was meant to show an outward sign of your inward grieving and sadness. I don't know of any New Testament illustrations of it so I think we're off the hook on that one. What would

be better is just to have that same grieving and sadness over our sins and Daniel shows us that in a few minutes.

But I do want to talk about fasting for just a second. I think it was Gallagher the comedian who said, “*Why is it called fasting when it goes so slow?*” And that’s a good question but fasting tends to have a mystery around it that is unnecessary. Fasting is not some mystical, magical observance that can only be done by priests or skinny little Hindu guys. It’s for anybody that really wants to hear from God.

Let me give you a scenario. You have some kind of question; a problem; an issue that you really need help with. You need wisdom. You want to do the right thing but you have no idea what it is. So, you pray. And then you pray some more. You keep praying and you know God is hearing you. There is no unconfessed sin in your life. You know God wants what is best for you but sometimes God just doesn’t answer when we think He ought to. How dare He, right? Doesn’t He know who we are? 😊

Here's what I recommend. You block off a certain amount of time when you can just be alone and pray. Take some time off from work and away from everybody else and just tell God that you would rather hear from Him than eat. And the thing about fasting is there is really not any rules. Yes, we see certain people in scripture who fasted for as long as 40 days but why not start with one meal? And technically, it doesn’t even have to be a fast from food. If social media is blocking you from hearing from God, fast from that. Fast from music or work or sports or TV or whatever God calls you to do. But that’s the real secret. Ask God what He wants you to do. That’s where He wants you anyway. Maybe He says you don’t need to fast at all. He was just waiting on you to be submissive enough to be willing to.

But here we see Daniel was fasting and praying and we see one last thing in these few verses. He was confessing. Do you see that in **verse 4**? See, way back in Deuteronomy, God told the Israelites that if they would just obey Him that He would bless them but if they were not obedient then God would cause the nation to fall. And what happened? They were not obedient and the nation fell. Now, nearly seventy years later, Daniel looks around and realizes that not much has changed. His Jewish people were still disobedient, still stiff-necked and had not repented. So Daniel does it for them.

And it’s not just **verse 4**. Look at **5 and 6**. “*we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. 6 We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name...*” and it goes on

and on. Daniel names their sins, confesses their sins and asks God for forgiveness. Look at **verse 11**. *“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 have sinned against you.”* He is again going to scripture and agreeing with God that they messed up. They sinned and what God said was going to happen happened. No excuses, no reservations, no finger-pointing and blaming it on somebody else. God, we’re guilty. Please forgive us because of your great mercy. That’s powerful stuff right there.

Now, one last quick thing to see in this beautiful prayer. Look once again at this chapter and let’s read **verses 17-19**. *“Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. 18 Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. 19 Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.”*

Some of y’all like to get tattoos. It might be good to have especially that last verse tattooed on the back of your hand or somewhere where you can see it easily. *“Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! **For your sake**, my God, do not delay, because **your city** and **your people** bear your Name.”* Now, if you are praying...and fasting...and asking God for a new bass boat, just leave this part out. You are not asking God to give you a new bass boat for His sake or His glory or so you can go to His lake and go fishing. That’s not what this is about.

But if your marriage is in trouble or you have a child or grandchild acting the fool, if you are tempted to go back to a lifestyle God has called you out of then now is the time to remind yourself as you tell God that you are His child. You bear His name and everybody knows it. So, now is the time to plead and ask God for mercy based on who He is and for the sake of His name and because of His righteousness and for His glory!

Do you think that is a prayer God wants to answer? Absolutely. But this is not about manipulating God or memorizing these words so God will now have to answer your prayer. Get over that right now. This is not about telling God what He has to do or what you think he ought to do. This is about saying and meaning in your heart that God, your word says this and I claim this and I am asking based on what you said and who you are, with no sin in my heart and wanting nothing more than to make you look good, God, please answer me. Please help me. Please rescue me.

Daniel was praying this prayer for God to rescue his country from a place they were not meant to be. They were and still are God's special, chosen people. And when they look bad, God looks bad. But God is just as well as merciful. That is obvious all through scripture from front to back.

For us today, I see us in a very similar place. We, as Christians, have not taken Israel's place as His chosen people but we are special. We are grafted into the family and we are His children and we were born into a country that was founded as a Christian country. And God has blessed us and has been merciful for a long, long time. But we see all through scripture that there are benefits of obedience and consequences of disobedience. And I am afraid we are very, very close to seeing those consequences.

How much longer can we kill 2,000 unborn babies every day before God says, *"That's it! I can't watch this any longer."*? How much longer can we sit back and watch gay pride parades in every state? How much longer will God show mercy to a country that kicked Him out of school and invited drag queens in for story time? How much longer before God destroys our country or allows it to be destroyed when we use sex to sell everything from cars to hamburgers. How much longer can we as a country call what is good evil and what is evil good?

Let's pray right now. God, I come to you because of who you are not because of anything in me or about me. I come to you because your word tells me to come boldly into your throne room and ask for help when we need it. I come to you because there is no other and I come to you because I know you are in control and you love us. So, based on that, I come to you and ask you to search us and try us and see if there is any wicked way in us. Then God, please forgive us. I know our country has messed up and has for many years. God forgive us. Not for my sake but for your sake and for the sake of our kids and grandkids.

Lord, like Daniel was an old man and his prayer wasn't even going to affect him for very long, I pray the same way. Lord, I'm concerned about my family. My blood family and my church family. Lord, we are headed in the wrong direction as a country and I am concerned about my family and about my neighbors and all the country and all the world. And that would be too big of a prayer to pray if you were not all-powerful, all-knowing and all-loving sovereign God.

So, I come to ask for your mercy and grace to continue and to start with me. Change me, Lord. Then change this church. Change this church to be what it is you exactly want us to be. For your name and for your glory and for the sake of your Kingdom. *Lord, listen! Lord,*

*forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.” Amen.*

If you don't know Jesus as your Lord and Savior then today is the day of salvation and now is the time. Ask Him to forgive you of all your sins and just believe in Him with the faith that He has given you. Believe that His death on the cross was full payment for the sins you have committed. And that His death, burial and resurrection paid the price you couldn't pay. Repent of your sins and allow God to come into your life and start changing you from the inside out. Do it right now as the music plays.