

“THE GREAT PRAYER OF DANIEL.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Daniel 9:1-14

Introduction.

We aren't quite prepared for what happens in chapter nine. We are so accustomed to strange and big events. Dreams and visions, revelations and interpretations, handwriting on a wall, fiery furnaces and scary lions' dens and swift beasts with many horns.

All of a sudden we are privy to one of Daniel's quiet times, one of his moments of personal devotion, when three times a day he would kneel and face Jerusalem. It's as if we are in his personal study where we see him with his Bible open praying.

God gives us a glimpse of what a Christian looks like when he is reading Scripture and offering personal heartfelt prayer.

We are privileged to have written down for us one of the truly extraordinary prayers of all time, inspired by the Holy Spirit and preserved for our blessing and benefit. This is a prayer worthy of reading and re-reading and meditating on and praying ourselves.

We start by asking what prompted Daniel to pray this prayer in the first place?

Motivation to prayer, vss. 1-2.

Remember how the book of Daniel began with an historical reference.

Daniel 1:1-2 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand.

Daniel began in Babylon, at the beginning of a 70 year captivity of the people of God. It is now about 68 years later and Babylon has fallen to the Medes and the Persians. Chronologically there is a 12 year gap between chapter 8 and 9, and we are actually back to around the time of the lion's den in chapter six when Darius was reigning.

Daniel was reading from the book of Jeremiah. This is not just ancient history in some ancient writings, this is God's Word, God's book. He knows *Jeremiah* is a prophet of the one, true living God, and he knows what the prophet has written is the Word of God.

In Jeremiah it is written:

Jeremiah 25:10-13, 14 Moreover, I will banish from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones and the light of the lamp. 11 This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall 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. . . . 14 They themselves will be enslaved by many nations and great kings; I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.”

Jeremiah 29:10-14 “For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. 11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. 13 You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

Israel’s destruction and Babylon’s dominance are the same length of time. Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon, has been defeated and overthrown by King Darius of the Medes and Persians. Daniel knows with the fall of Babylon, Israel’s restoration should begin soon.

So Daniel set his face toward the Lord God and prays and calls on the name of the Lord.

God’s promises in God’s Word are Daniel’s motivation to pray. As he sees God starting to fulfill His promises, Daniel increases the fervency of his prayers, pleading for God to restore Israel to her homeland.

Does it seem redundant or unnecessary to you to pray if God has already promised it?

Why pray “Thy kingdom come” when we know for a fact His kingdom will come when He ordains it?

Pastor John Piper gave an analogy at the Pastors’ conference I found helpful. If you see a 2x4 with a nail driven in it, did God ordain that nail to be there? Of course, nothing happens without the ordaining will of God. From before the foundations of the earth, that nail was meant to be there.

Does that render the actions of the carpenter who drove the nail insignificant or inconsequential? No, not at all. The carpenter is God’s means to His purposeful ends.

Prayer is the means by which God has ordained to accomplish His works on earth. We can pray with confident assurance God will hear and answer. In Scripture God’s sovereignty is never an

excuse for inaction but an incentive to action. It is precisely because of God's sovereignty and power that we pray to Him. Prayer is the instrument of God's activity on earth.

People who believe in the sovereignty of God pray with more confidence and assurance than those who don't believe in the sovereignty of God. Let Spirit-inspired truth drive your prayers.

Daniel's prayer was just as significant and important in the fulfilling of the promise as Darius' defeat of Babylon.

The promises of God as motivations to pray lead us straight to the Bible as a key aid to prayer.

Aids to prayer, vss. 2-3.

Start with the Bible. Daniel turned to the Bible. Make the Bible your prayer book and your prayer guide. Pray what you read. Do that as you read through the OT.

I am trying to do this reading through the OT. I did that as I was reading Exodus 4 ten days ago.

Exodus 4:10-12 But Moses said to the Lord, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue." 11 Then the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? 12 Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak."

Then I added:

I Corinthians 2:1-5 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Those of you reading through Exodus, how to pray about tabernacle furniture and priestly garments? Thank you God that you are a God of beauty and glory, that you care about details, that your Word was obeyed then, may it be now. Thank you for this glimpse of heaven. Thank you that Jesus fulfills completely our need for all of that, that His blood makes us clean and that His perfect righteousness make it possible to even us to enter into the Holy of Holies.

Consider that Daniel is one of the holy prophets, one of the inspired writers of divine Scripture, and yet he himself is reading Scripture and studying it and meditating over it and benefiting from it. If that's true for Daniel, how much more true is it for us?

Scripture promises God will give wisdom to those who ask so we can pray for that in our own lives and circumstances.

Scripture promises God will work all things for the good of those who love Him, so we can pray that over every difficult or painful situation, confident He will answer.

Scripture promises God's strength when we are weary to all who wait on Him.

Scripture promises God will forgive our sins if we confess and repent with all sincerity.

Scripture promises God will be with us even in the deepest and darkest valleys, so we can ask for that confident He hears and answers.

All through Daniel's prayer there are allusions and paraphrases of other verses in the OT. His prayer is Bible saturated.

Scripture and prayer orient our lives toward God. They keep us grounded in the knowledge we live in an open universe, a universe where our prayers uttered here on earth escape the atmosphere and traverse trillions of light years of space and arrive immediately before the throne of God.

Scripture and prayer are our access with the living God, our communion with God, our drawing nearer to God. They open windows through which we can see God and hear God, and through which He comes to us.

Daniel also used fasting, sackcloth, ashes, as aids to prayer, to stir up heartfelt earnestness. They were common in the OT, signs of self-denial and self-sacrifice, expressing devotion, earnestness and urgency. We might use tears, crying out, lifted voice, raised hands, falling on our knees.

Another aid to prayer is to write them out, as Daniel has done. Keep a journal for writing out your prayers to God. I challenge you to try this a time or two and see if you are not surprised by the things that flow out of your pen onto the page. Words and thoughts and phrases will come that you would not have prayed without a pen.

The slower pace of writing allows more thoughts and expressions to come to mind.

Who to pray to, vs. 4.

It is said beautifully and powerfully. "I turned or set my face toward the Lord my God seeking Him by prayer and pleas for mercy."

I set my face and I prayed to Yahweh my God. Daniel is greatly burdened by the sin of his people, that's what drove him to his knees. But he didn't go straight there immediately.

He addressed God and he gives appropriate adoration. In prayer we should always acknowledge who we are talking to and what He is like.

“O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments.”

God is great and awesome, great and fearful, the one before all tremble. He is faithful. He is a covenant making and covenant keeping God. He makes promises and He keeps them. He scares us and makes us secure in His love. He is our God and He has made us His children.

If we forget God's greatness, our prayers will be too small, too weak. But when we make much of God and who He is and what He has done, how He created the heavens and earth out of nothing with just a word, how He rules the nations, how He cares for us as the sheep of His pasture, then our prayers begin to swell, and we can ask truly great things of so great a God.

Whatever great burden or need or crisis at the moment might be driving us to our knees, it is always important to pause and even just briefly remember who we are rushing in to talk to. This is the holy God, the creator of the universe, the sovereign Lord over all things. He is great, and far greater than all our needs, problems and concerns.

Having acknowledged that God is righteous and faithful, Daniel is painfully aware that his people have been neither, so his prayer shifts to confession and repentance. Our prayers of confession and repentance should be driven by a true sense of the holiness of God and a genuine fear of the Lord. Fear of God is healthy and leads to a healthy love of God and respect of God and desire to please God.

This is our pattern in worship. We begin coming into the presence and exalting our great and holy God. We acknowledge Him and who He is and His greatness and glory. Once in the light of His glory we see ourselves and our sin more clearly and we move to a time of confession.

We will take up the meat of this great prayer next week.

Conclusion.

We are assaulted by noise, hurry and crowds. We are stretched thin and thinner. We are surrounded by things and people demanding our attention. We feel the ache in our souls for something deeper, of more substance.

May I put it as strongly as possible? Whatever there is in your life that opposes prayer, that is your greatest enemy. Because if you are not abiding in Christ by prayer and by His Word then you are dying. Prayer is time consuming and whatever else is consuming all your time at the

expense of prayer, is draining the sap of life right out of you. You will soon be a brittle branch, ready to break.

Don't ignore your soul any more. Don't give in to all the substitutes. Make prayer your first business of the morning and your last business of the night.

I beg you for the sake of God's glory and your good, for the sake of our love for Him and each other and for the world, for the sake of Christ and your relationship with Him, please value and use His precious gifts of Scripture and prayer. Make your relationship with Christ your first priority. Plan regular times to withdraw from the world and to set your face toward the Lord your God, seeking Him in prayer.

Prayer: Our Holy Father in Heaven, we beseech you to bless our seeking of you. Bless us with the power of your Holy Spirit to become a more prayerfully empowered congregation. Bless us with a deep and lasting hunger and thirst for righteousness, zeal for the truth of your word, and a great love for you and for each other. Bless us to be a blessing, used of you to extend your glory and your kingdom to all the nations. I pray for your Fatherly blessing to be upon this flock. Make us fruitful for your glory. And above all, dear Father, grant that our lives will increasingly bring glory to your dear Son, our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, in whose precious name we pray. Amen.