

“GABRIEL’S ANSWER.”
Rev. Robert T. Woodyard
First Christian Reformed Church
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Scripture Texts: Daniel 9:20-23

Introduction.

We have dealt with some large texts of Scripture lately, so large we sat for the reading of Scripture. It’s tempting to lump this little four verse text in with the next passage and just go over it quickly.

You have heard of fly over country, what the east and west coast people call the Midwest. This is treated as a fly over text, one we read quickly to get to the really strange and interesting stuff about Seventy Weeks and what that means and how it relates to world history and Jesus.

But it is good to slow down and meditate on small texts and find in them hidden gems of wisdom. God’s Word really is like a beautiful multi-faceted diamond, where careful reflection and contemplation reveals beautiful insights.

God hears prayers.

Do you ever pray and feel like your prayers are just bouncing off the ceiling? Like your prayers never even make it out of earth’s atmosphere? Do you wonder if God really hears or if it really matters whether you pray?

If we wonder if our prayers are heard, notice even Daniel is a bit surprised by this heavenly visitor. We are told that the instant Daniel started praying, God was sending a messenger with an answer.

God always hears. For Daniel the answer came while he was still praying, as if he was actually cutoff before he finished.

Our prayers are heard as soon as they are spoken. They don’t get put into a message cue because there are so many coming into heaven all the time. They aren’t sent to a middle managers desk to sort out or categorize or determine if they should go all the way up to God Himself.

God is as eager to hear and answer your prayers as the prayers of Daniel. You can count on that. He delights to hear and answer for the sake of His glory. Our

prayers are never in vain or unfruitful if they are asked in humility and faith. A mustard seed of faith accomplishes much in God's kingdom.

God is a prayer hearing and prayer answering God, especially prayers of confession and repentance.

In **Ezekiel 14:14** Daniel is called one of the three most righteous men ever to live, along with Noah and Job. But notice, one of the three most righteous men in the world is earnestly confessing his sin before God and pleading for mercy forgiveness.

And like Daniel's prayer, we need to offer prayers that get to heart of the most greatest issues of the day. How many of our prayer are for the spiritual revival of our nation, for the hearing and believing of the Word of God, for the moral renewal of our land, for a rebuilding of the foundations of truth and righteousness? Do we plead for mercy and healing?

We cannot stop mourning over the sins of our nation and repenting for our land. It doesn't have to be the only thing we pray, but it can't stop being one of the things we pray.

If you are concerned about the direction America is going or are concern about the moral decay and decline of our culture, this is a model prayer that penetrates to the heart of the matter.

What is the ***holy hill of God*** today? Is it not the church of Jesus Christ? And what is her condition today? Is it much better than the temple in Jerusalem which lay in ruins?

We are reminded again of another aspect of Daniel's prayer. He doesn't just pray for himself, but for his brothers and sisters. If we desire our prayers to be pleasing to God we must move beyond ourselves and our own interests. God bids us to pray for all the elect.

The church in the world today is facing two great threats. Tyrants and terrorist are attacking from the outside in many nations around the world. Persecution is increasing. China is now a new concern over growing crack downs.

But the second threat may be bigger and worse, from the inside the church is facing apathy and apostasy, false teaching and compromise with the culture. Pray for the Church.

Daniel-like prayers and Daniel-like pray-ers are needed now more than ever.

God helps pray-ers.

This is at least the second time Gabriel has come and both times it is to aid his understanding. He is called the man Gabriel only because he came with the appearance of a man.

Gabriel says he has come to give Daniel insight and understanding for the vision he has received, presumably verses 24-27. God uses angels to be His messengers and deliver His messages to us. God gives them special assignments and he used them in His care for us and in His blessing us.

We are not to pray to angels, they are not intermediaries for our prayers. Neither are Mary or the saints. God hears our prayers directly and Christ is the only mediator between us and God. We pray only in His name.

One of the best ways to gain better wisdom and understanding about a situation or question is to pray, to ask God for help. He delights to answer our prayers.

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

Gabriel came at the time of the evening sacrifice.

This may seem like an off the cuff, throw away phrase, seven little words that are easy to pass over. What is significant about Daniel praying at the time of the evening sacrifice?

The evening sacrifice was the daily burnt-offering of a bull, offered around 3 pm at the temple in Jerusalem.

It has been over 70 years since Daniel was in Jerusalem. He must have only been a young teenager when he last saw a burnt-offering sacrificed. The temple doesn't even exist anymore, the Babylonians tore it down and destroyed it.

But Daniel is still thinking and praying on Jerusalem time. Over 70 years of living in a grossly pagan culture, surrounded by idolatry and temptations of every kind had not erased what was most precious to him.

His mind is still on his homeland, his clock is still set to Yahweh's, not his ways. You can take the boy out of Jerusalem, but you can't take the Jerusalem out of the boy.

“When in Rome, do as the Roman's do” is not necessarily a good way to live. Daniel lived with God in view, with his eyes fixed on the joy set before him.

His life was lived according to the covenant. He lived longing for the restoration of God's holy city and holy temple. He hungered to experience the grace of the sacrifices, the daily humbling before God, being reminded of their sins and their need for salvation and of God's provision of a substitute to take away their sin and bring them His forgiveness. That has holy, that was cause for worship, that was a healing balm to their sin sick souls.

Daniel made it his habit to attend to the daily evening sacrifice. Being deprived of that outward means of grace, didn't mean that he could not still make that means of grace useful and fruitful to him by remembering and reflecting on its importance and meaning and significance.

John Calvin has a beautiful application of this. Suppose you were cut off from coming to worship and could no longer come to the Lord's Supper as we will next Sunday morning. You could still spend time each day remembering and considering what the significance of the Supper is for us, that Christ has freely offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins and to appease the Father's just wrath, and so remove our guilt and shame and reconcile us to our God.

You can meditate on the meaning of your baptism, on the significance of being adopted into the covenant family of God, on being set apart for a holy purpose.

Daniel praying at the time of the evening sacrifices is filled with insight into the soul of a man who longs for God and the things of God, whose soul is hungry for truly good things, a man who treasures what is truly most valuable and noble and worthy.

He desires the means of grace, those avenues in which God's grace most freely flows to us, prayer, Scripture, worship, sacraments, holy living.

This is the habit of heart that longs for its true home. This is a soul thirsting after God.

Psalm 42:1-2 As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

God loves pray-ers.

Gabriel tells Daniel something that must have struck a deep cord in his own heart. An angel straight from the throne of God tells Daniel he is *greatly loved*.

What does it mean to be greatly loved? The Hebrew word here refers to something or someone highly esteemed, precious, highly favored.

What a thing to hear God say to one of His servants, you are greatly loved. What would those words do to your soul? Could you even believe them if they were spoken to you by an angel?

You are deeply loved. The cross proves it. You cannot be more loved, more accepted. God loves you more than you know.

I know the older generations didn't say I love you much, but our heavenly Father isn't of that generation. He freely tells us He loves us.

Mark 1:11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Zephaniah 3:17 The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.

Isaiah 43:4 You are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you,

I John 3:1-2 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. ... 2 Beloved, we are God's children now.

If God has called you out of the world and saved you and revealed His Son to you, then mark my words, you cannot be more greatly loved than that.

Prayers answered bring responsibilities.

When God comes to us, when God gives us wisdom, insight, clarity, there comes a duty, a responsibility to do something with what He gives us. Prayer and answers carry a responsibility to obey.

Gabriel tells Daniel to consider what he has been given. Think on these things, reflect on them, turn them over, mull them over in your mind. Make fruitful study and inquiry into these things.

I am not the only one here who is called to read God's Word and reflect on it and study it and trace out the thoughts and arguments and ideas. Study to show thyself approved.

Every time we read Scripture or hear it read or attend to the preaching or teaching of the Word of God is opening His very heart to us in the Word and we must in kind open our hearts to Him. We should desire it and treasure it as living bread and living water for our thirsty and hungry souls.

Attend to it with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Gabriel won't come but the Holy Spirit will.

Psalm 25:4-5 Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.
5 Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation.

Psalm 119:17-18 Deal bountifully with your servant, that I may live and keep your word.
18 Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

II Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Implications and Application.

Let me tie some threads together.

Daniel has been confessing and repenting of his sins and the sins of his people. He has been pleading with God to restore His holy city Jerusalem and His holy hill the temple. Daniel has been asking for forgiveness but without any means of making atonement for his sins and regain God's favor.

The only means had been for the guilty worshipper to being an unblemished animal and lay his hands on the animal's head transferring his sins to the victim

and then kill the animal as a substitute for his own life. Having done that, the priest would give the assurance of forgiveness and they would eat a meal indicating fellowship with God was restored.

Israel learned sin was a serious offense against the name and honor of a holy God and that atonement was costly, and required blood.

Daniel's prayer at the time of the evening sacrifice recalled these events and hoped they would be restored. But Daniel is told his prayer has heard and answered and that God has accepted him, he is greatly loved. How can this be?

God is revealing to Daniel an old truth and a new truth about sacrifices.

Psalm 51:16-17 For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.
17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

But God has sent Gabriel to give the prophet Daniel a new vision, a new revelation about the temple and temple sacrifices and about how God was going to replace them with a permanent temple and a permanent sacrifice. The shadow would be replaced with reality.

The blood of bulls and goats would be replaced with the blood of a sin Savior.

That revelation is the mystery to be revealed in Gabriel's words in our next text to be considered in two weeks. Read this brief text two or three times between now and when we meet again, and consider the Word given to us in them.

Glory to God that we can come to Him in the name of Jesus, and that He hears and answers and forgives and accepts us on the basis of Christ's sacrifice and perfect obedience and righteousness. And that He calls us greatly loved.