

## **“THE GREAT PRAYER OF DANIEL.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

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### **Scripture Texts: Daniel 9:1-10**

#### **Introduction.**

It is my custom on the first Sunday of each new year to challenge and encourage us to devote ourselves to Scripture and prayer.

In this text we find ourselves 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. God gives us a glimpse of what it looks like when a Christian 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?

#### **Why pray, the motivation to prayer, vss. 1-2.**

Daniel is praying at the end of his life, having spent a lifetime with the people of Israel in exile and captivity in Babylon under the tyranny of Nebuchadnezzar. But now Nebuchadnezzar is dead, Babylon has fallen to the Medes and the Persians.

Daniel’s morning devotion was 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 29:10-14** “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.”

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?

At last year’s Pastors’ conference I heard a helpful analogy. 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 fulfilling God’s promise as Darius’ military defeat of Babylon.

The promises of our faithful God are our motivation to pray and a huge help or aid to prayer.

**Helps or 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 NT.

I did this while reading through the Sermon on the Mount.

**[cite some examples: salt, light, anger, anxiety, log/speck, do unto others, bear good fruit]**

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.

When we are weary Scripture promises God's strength 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 on earth escape the atmosphere and travel trillions of light years of space and arrive immediately before the throne of God.

Scripture and prayer are our access to 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. And you will receive a double blessings when you go back months or years later and re-read what you prayed.

#### **Who to pray to, vs. 4.**

“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 faithful. He is a covenant making and covenant keeping God. He makes promises and He keeps them. He is our God and He has made us His children. He makes us secure in His love.

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.

#### **What to pray, vss. 5ff.**

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 by coming into His 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.

Daniel acknowledges the justice of God's judgment. He makes no excuses. Israel deserved everything they got and more because of how they rebelled against so holy and good a God.

Daniel doesn't imply that God owes him or Israel anything. He doesn't say, "OK, God, the seventy years are up. When are you going to let us go home?" God is holy and just and His ways are righteous.

Consider also, Daniel was a truly godly man, yet he has lots of reasons to repent. In fact the most godly people are usually the most repentant because they see most clearly.

He doesn't *blame others*, the political leaders, the rulers, the bad people. He doesn't blame Babylon. Daniel didn't see himself as better or less blameworthy.

The prayer that is most pleasing to God is the prayer that comes out of a humble heart, a heart with a deep awareness of one own sin before a holy God.

If you can say out loud to yourself and others that your heart is *desperately wicked*, then you are well on your way to health repentance and receiving forgiveness. This shows that you haven't become casual or calloused about your sin.

**Psalm 51:17** The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

**Matthew 5:3** Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus taught us to ask, Forgive us our sins. We all know that we are supposed to pray for each other, but do we pray for each other's sins? I pray regularly for myself and my sons and all of us that God would bring us to continual conviction of sin and repentance, that we would hate our sin and turn from it.

One old pastor from the Netherlands put it this way:

"What distinguishes us from the world is not that we are less wicked but that by the grace of God we have learned to see our wickedness for what it is and that we confess our sins. The church is the only body on earth that confesses sin. Where the confession of sin dies

out, the church is no longer the church” (Herman Veldkamp, *Dreams and Dictators*, 202).

No one else confesses and repents, not companies, businesses, city councils, politicians, governments, nations, or the United Nations. Only the church if it is a true church.

Notice in this strong prayer of confession, Daniel still has hope.  
“To the Lord our God belongs mercy and forgiveness” (vs. 9; see 18).

If my people should repent of their sins and turn back from their wicked ways, and call on me, then I will hear and answer and be gracious and rescue and redeem and restore.

### **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 hinders prayer, that is your greatest enemy. If we are not abiding in Christ by prayer and by His Word then we are dying. Prayer is time consuming and whatever else is consuming 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, bless our seeking of you. Bless us with the power of your Holy Spirit to be 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.