

Daniel's Prayer, Part 1
Daniel 9:1-20
ABC 1/19/20

Last week we took some time to look at prayer. After all, we're told to be **devoted** to it (Col 4:2; Rom 12:12). My goal isn't to make us all feel guilty but to encourage us to pray more this year than we did last year. It would be hard to find a Christian who'd say they didn't think prayer is important. We all know it is. Jesus prayed, Paul prayed, the apostles prayed, & they all encourage us to pray as well. Does God use the prayers of His people to accomplish His will? Yes! Do I know how all that works together in the mind of God? Not even a little bit! But I'm thankful for it as I'm sure you are as well. Throughout Scripture, God's people publicly talk about God's work in their lives. As we share testimonies about God's working in our midst, we glorify Him through our praise & thanksgiving. We express our gratitude to Him for His gracious answers to our prayers. These witnesses to what God is doing encourage the rest of us. With that in mind, I've asked Gary to come & share a little about what prayer means to him. GARY

We need to hear from each other how God has worked in their lives through the prayers of others. Thank you, Gary. As I mentioned last week, we'll be looking at a few of the great prayers of the Bible this year as a reminder to pray more this year than we did last. In Daniel 9 (turn there) we have one of the great prayers recorded in Scripture. This prayer isn't like what we call *The Lord's Prayer* where Jesus gives us a pattern of prayer. Daniel's prayer is instead an example of what prayer can look like. Today we'll begin looking at this prayer, his attitude, & what's included in it. Let's read it, pray, & get into it. **Dan 9:1-19**. PRAY

We all know about Daniel, right? Not your average Jew in exile. We know of his integrity, wisdom, & rise to a high position in Babylon. We know of his commitment to prayer as he was thrown into the lion's den because he wouldn't stop praying even when it was illegal. By the time we find him here, he's around 80 years old. He's been an exile for 65+ years. His spiritual devotion & love for God are an example to us all. He's bold, uncompromising, faithful, selfless, humble, loyal, resistant to the world, persistent in devotion to God, incorruptible, virtuous, obedient, reverent, & a whole lot more. He's also a man devoted to prayer. He's so committed to prayer that he'd rather be

thrown into a den of lions & eaten alive than stop praying. This is a familiar chapter but we're often more aware of the last half than the 1st half. We focus on the answer to Daniel's prayer that gives us the prophecy of the 70 weeks of years & the time from the decree of Artaxerxes to restore & rebuild Jerusalem to the arrival of the Messiah. We won't be getting into all of that, but it's the answer to this prayer. As important as the answer is in helping us understand God's plan & program, we're focusing on Daniel's prayer. In 8:27 we read, **I, Daniel, was exhausted & sick for days.** Daniel was suffering from what he was hearing from God. He knew the children of Israel were under God's judgment. That's why they were in captivity. That's why he was there. He knew Jerusalem & the temple were destroyed. He knew this was a judgment for sin & he knew there was more judgment coming because he'd had a vision of that. He also knew there'd be a future glorious kingdom but also that there'd be a judgment upon Israel 1st. He had no one to interpret the visions about the kingdom & the future & he was distressed by not being able to understand fully what it all meant. There's a burden in his heart & he brings it before the throne of God in prayer. Look at vs 1 for the historical setting. 1

The Babylonian Kingdom had ended. Daniel had seen the demise of Nebuchadnezzar. He'd been there at Belshazzar's feast when God wrote on the wall, **MENE, MENE, TEKEL, & PARSIN** (5:25). **You have been weighed in the balances & found wanting** (5:27). Daniel has seen the demise of the great Babylonian power & is now in the 1st year of the Medo-Persian Kingdom, the 1st year of Darius' reign. One day, he's reading **the books**, not the NY Times best sellers, but biblical scrolls. 2

Just because Daniel had received divine revelation & been an instrument through which God revealed future events, didn't mean he wasn't to be a student of God's Word. Here he's reading Jeremiah, which he calls **the word of the Lord**. He reads, probably, Jer 25:11-12, which says,

This whole land will be a desolation & a horror, & these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. 'Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon & that nation,' declares the LORD, 'for their iniquity, & the land of the Chaldeans; & I will make it an everlasting desolation.'

Daniel's reading Scripture & he comes to this remarkable prophecy & he believes immediately that it's the inspired Word of God. He learns that their captivity will be for 70 years. You don't have to be a math major to figure out he knew he'd already been there at least 65 years. He'd longed for

the end of Judah's captivity. He'd longed to see God's people restored to their land & he knew now it was nearly over. He probably also read Jer 29:10, which added another detail. **Thus says the LORD, 'When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you & fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place.'** Now he knew at the end of the 70 years there'd be the destruction of Babylon, which had happened & there'd be the restoration of his people. That's what he was reading in the scrolls. So he prays. & what is Daniel's attitude as He comes to God in prayer? **3-4**

What do we see here about Daniel's attitude? Devotion, concentration, humility, confession, & reverence. Sounds like the right kind of heart & attitude to have as we come to the Lord in prayer, doesn't it? In the remainder of the time we'll spend in this prayer I want you to see some principles of true prayer. They were true in Daniel's time & they're true today.

1. Prayer is based on & in response to God's Word Daniel's prayer was based on his understanding of God's Word. In other words, it's important to read & study God's word as we come to Him in prayer. Unless we understand the Word of God, we won't understand the purposes & plans of God. If we don't understand that, how can we rightly pray? Daniel's prayer begins with his reading God's Word & his prayer is saturated with Scripture. Phrase after phrase comes right out of God's Word. There are allusions to Lev (26:40), Deut (28:64), Ex (34:6), Ps (44:14), & Jer (25:11). The prayer brims with a biblical view of reality, because it brims with the Bible. Daniel prays for his people based on what God has said. That's an essential element of prayer. You might think, since Daniel knew this was going to happen because God said through Jeremiah it was going to happen; since he knew it was going to happen after 70 years & the 70 years were nearly up, then what's there to pray for? That's a good question, isn't it? Obviously, God will do what He does when He says He'll do it. He's always faithful to His Word. He said after 70 years Babylon will be destroyed. They were. After 70 years He'd bring His people back into their land. &, as we know, they were. So why are we to pray? The answer is because all prayer is to be in accord with, in harmony with, & in response to God's Word. This is a common question: *If God is sovereign, why should we pray?* Since God has everything planned out ahead of time & knows already what He'll do, what's the

point in praying? Isn't it a waste of time & breath, pleading with God when the outcome's already been settled? Daniel speaks to this in that his faith in God's sovereignty & his passionate, persistent prayer is the opposite of what we might expect. Daniel teaches us that because God is sovereign we must pray. It was when Daniel read in the Scripture the plan of God to judge Babylon & restore His people, & when he saw God's plan coming to pass, that he lifted up his voice in prayer. He didn't pray because he thought the prophecy of 70 years might somehow fail or be delayed if he didn't pray. No, he prayed because he was confident that His sovereign God would do exactly what He promised to do. We must learn from Daniel. Most of us have probably had the experience of not knowing what to pray for. In those times we can follow Daniel's example & search the Scriptures so we can pray for the things God has clearly promised. For example, God has promised to complete the good work He's begun in us (Phil 1:6). So in the midst of trials, we can pray that God will use them to further His work in our hearts & lives, humbling us & breaking our pride, showing us how desperately we need Him in our weakness & sinfulness. God has promised to give us peace beyond anything the world knows (Jn 14:27). As a result, in our confusion & turmoil, we can ask Him to give us the peace that He alone can give. The Lord has promised to be our Shepherd & to walk through the valley of the shadow of death with us (Ps 23). Therefore, we can pray that He'll watch over us & guide us even in the blackest hours of the night. God has promised to bring a new heaven & earth where He'll wipe away the tears from our eyes (Rev 21:1-4). For that reason we can pray for that day to come quickly. Daniel prayed that God would do what He had promised to do & he prayed with confidence because he was praying for what God had promised. Daniel believed in the sovereignty of God. He believed God always keeps His Word. Yet Daniel still prayed. Human reasoning would say, *If God always fulfills His Word, why pray for it? What are you going to pray for? It's cut & dried. 70 years & it's over.* But that isn't Daniel's response. Even though we don't understand the relationship of prayer on a human level as it relates to God & His sovereignty on a divine level, Daniel somehow felt the responsibility & that's the issue. I don't know & will never understand the relationship between God's sovereignty & man's responsibility. The fact is, I don't understand much! I don't understand how God can write the Bible & men can be used as

instruments. I don't understand how God can become a man & remain God at the same time. I don't understand how I can be saved by my own choice & yet it's God's sovereign will & choice before the foundation of the world. I don't understand how God can do His sovereign work & my prayers have a part in it. But that's not for me to understand. So when Daniel read God's plan, rather than becoming fatalistic about it & saying, *Well, that's that*, he went immediately to his knees & cried out to God on behalf of his people. When we find God's purposes & plans in His Word, we don't pray because God needs us to. We do it to line ourselves up with His plan. Prayer is for us. We see our sinfulness. We see the need of His grace & power & we submit ourselves to His plan. Prayer & God's Word are to be inseparably linked. Ps 119 expresses this clearly. **Your testimonies also are my delight, they are my counselors.** In other words, when we read God's Word, it becomes our counselor. It instructs our minds. Vs 99 says, **I have more insight than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation.** The Psalmist is simply saying, *If I want to get in on Your plans. If I want to understand Your precepts, I have to commit myself to Your Word.* In prayer, we're not praying for God to change what He's going to do. We're identifying ourselves with His plans. We can't pray intelligently about His plans unless we understand what His Word says. Jesus says in Rev 22:20, **Yes, I am coming quickly.** What does John immediately pray? **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.** Jesus just said He was coming, so why does John pray, **Come, Lord Jesus?** Because prayer finds its foundation in the purposes of God. Prayer is when we align our hearts to God's purposes. It's when we say, **Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven** (Mt 6:9-10), even though we know it will be. The sovereignty of God, His purposes & promises, don't exclude the prayers of His people. Instead, they call for it. We pray in response to God's revealed plan. We pray to line our hearts up with His divine purposes. You could ask the same question about why we're to be witnesses of the gospel message. God's going to save whom He's going to save, right? So why tell others? Because He's chosen personal testimony & the proclamation of the gospel to be the means by which He saves people. Likewise, He's chosen prayer to be the means by which He accomplishes His purpose. That's why James could say, **The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much** (5:16).

God chooses not only the ends, but He chooses the means. Don't we all want to line ourselves up with His will. Daniel realized prayer was an element in the fulfillment of God's Word. His love for God was so deep & his desire for the purposes of God to be fulfilled was so great that he couldn't restrain himself from praying for God to do what he knew God would do. As we heard last week, it's good to pray with your elbows on either side of your Bible, praying back & for the things you read. Read a portion of Scripture & then pray your way through it, lining your will up with the will of God. If you have difficulty thinking of what to pray for, pray through a text of Scripture, identifying with what God has revealed. When you need to confess, confess. When you need to praise, praise. When you need to thank Him, do so. When you need to seek understanding & wisdom, ask for that. & when you see something that dishonors God, cry out your concern for His dishonor. & when you see something that glorifies Him, give Him glory. The Word really teaches us how to pray because it reveals God's will, purpose, plan, & character. We have the example of Daniel who's reading the scrolls & from them he sees the plan of God. & once he knew the plan of God & that it was coming to fruition & restoration was to come to his people, he was motivated to pray. If you can read God's Word & not be driven to prayer, you aren't paying attention to what you're reading. Whatever you read should be cause for confession of sin or for praise & gratitude to God or thankfulness for the plan that's unfolding. That's why in Acts 6 we're told the apostles had to give themselves continually to prayer & the ministry of the Word (4). They go together (cf Eph 3). The Word generates prayer. When it speaks of God, we long to commune with Him. When it speaks of blessing, we long to praise Him. When it speaks of glory we pray He receives it. When it speaks His promises we want to experience them. When it speaks of sin, we long to confess it. When it speaks of judgment, we pray to avoid it. When it speaks of hell, we pray for the lost. The Word of God is the impetus of prayer. Just because we know something is inevitable, doesn't mean we aren't to pray for it. Daniel's prayer, as all prayer, is born out of a study & understanding of the Word of God. I think it's true that those whose prayers are most saturated with Scripture are generally most fervent & most effective in prayer. & where the mind isn't brimming with the Bible, the heart isn't overflowing with prayer. Jesus tells us in Jn 15:7, **If you abide in Me, & My words**

abide in you, ask whatever you wish, & it will be done for you. When he says, **If My words abide in you**, he means, *If My words saturate your mind & shape your way of thinking, your prayers will be answered because they're based on My Word.* Daniel's prayer, like all prayer, should be born out of the study & understanding of God's revealed plan & character in Scripture.

2. Prayer is grounded in God's will This goes hand-in-hand with point #1. Daniel clearly knew God's will about this. The desolation of Jerusalem was to be completed in 70 years. How did he know? Jeremiah had written of it. Again, you might ask, *Well then, why pray? Why is Daniel going to pray for restoration if he knows it's going to happen?* Again, God hasn't just chosen what He will do but also the means by which He'll do it. Those who are in love with God & His Word will find themselves praying according to His purposes. They'll say with John, *Yes, I know You just said You're coming, but I'm telling You, even so, come, Lord Jesus.* Remember the martyrs in the book of Revelation who were under the altar (6:10). They've been martyred in the time of the tribulation & are crying with a loud voice, **How long, O Lord, holy & true, will You refrain from judging & avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?** It wasn't that they had no clue of the timing, it was simply that they entered into the reality of what God was going to do. *God, do what You're going to do.* We need to pray that God will accomplish His will, which we know He will. In 1 Sam 12 the Jews wanted a king. We read in vs 19, **all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, so that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil by asking for ourselves a king."** In other words, *You've got to intercede for us. We're in some deep trouble with God.* Samuel does so & says,

'Do not fear. You have committed all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. You must not turn aside for then you would go after futile things which cannot profit or deliver because they're futile. For the Lord will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the Lord has been pleased to make you a people for Himself (20-22).'

He says, *God isn't going to destroy you because His name & reputation is at stake. If you were all destroyed, it would be bad for His reputation. All the other nations would say not only do the Israelites not have a king, but they have a God who can't protect them. This wouldn't be good for God's reputation. God will not abandon His people on account of His great name.*

Now vs 23. **Moreover, as for me**, & you might think he'd say, *I don't need to pray for you. I just told you God's not going to abandon you.* But instead he says this, **Moreover, as for me**, *in regard to*

your request, far be it for me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you. That's a strange response, isn't it? It seems like the opposite of what you'd expect. Instead we read, *I would sin against the Lord if I didn't pray for you even though I know He won't destroy you.* All this to simply say, once you know the will of God, you know how to pray. Whatever you ask according to His will, He hears (Jn 14:13-14; 1 Jn 5:14-15). We can't live thinking or saying, *Oh well, God's going to do what He's going to do. How's my prayer going to help?* That's a mark of spiritual immaturity. Prayer in God's will is a form of rebellion against the world & its sinfulness. Prayer according to the will of God is a celebration of His purposes. Daniel wanted the fulfillment that God had promised, so that's how he prayed. In fact, that's really the only safe ground to pray on. Peter said this, **The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment & sober spirit for the purpose of prayer** (1 Pt 4:7). Somebody might say, *If the end is here, what are we praying about? Hasn't God figured it all out already anyway?* Yes, He does & we pray for that to happen. We don't pray to change God's purposes, plans, & will. We pray to line up our hearts with His purpose, plan, & will. Don't pray for God to change His will. You don't want what He doesn't want. He wants our best & we want His will done. & so we pray as it's generated from the Word of God & as it's grounded in the will of God.

Does prayer make a difference with God? Yes, it makes a difference with God when it makes a difference with us. If you want your prayers to change things, let them 1st change you. We've seen that prayer is generated by the Word of God & grounded in the will of God. Does that describe your prayers? God is calling us all to pray more than we have in the past. These are trying times. We tend to forget the battles that are going on around us. It's easy for us to sit here & think, *Who needs my prayers?* So we never pray identifying with the will & Word of God the way Daniel did. Because of this, we miss out on the intimate communion with & blessing of our wonderful God. I don't believe we've yet seen what God can do in this church if we prayed more. How's your prayer life been this past week? How will you improve on that this week? Be praying fervently based on & in response to your reading of God's Word & according to His revealed will. Do this & God will be honored & glorified.