

A Prayer That Is Effectual and Avails Much #1

Daniel 9:1-19

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Greg L. Price

Our prayers reveal much about our understanding of God, about our faith in Jesus Christ, and about our love for Him. The fervency of our prayers (or lack thereof) will tell us whether we are just going through the motions or whether there is really a living communion with our heavenly Father. Our prayers reveal whether our God is great or small, whether He is our heavenly Santa Claus or our heavenly Father, whether He is holy or common, whether He is near or distant. What do your prayers reveal about your relationship to the God you profess to be your God?

Prayer is communing with our great Lord and Savior. To be a distant stranger in prayer is to walk at a distance from Jesus Christ. To be a close disciple in prayer is to walk in close communion with Jesus Christ. If God and His Word are our air that give us life, then prayer is the appointed means by which we breathe in and out that life.

The Lord Jesus (in the Sermon on the Mount) has given us a model prayer to use in approaching our God in prayer, but we also have model prayers given to us throughout Scripture for our benefit; and one of those model prayers is uttered here by Daniel (Daniel 9), which we will consider over the next couple Lord's Days. I have broken down Daniel's prayer to the Lord into the following six parts: (1) Daniel Exalted God; (2) Daniel Confessed Sin; (3) Daniel Was Ashamed of Sin; (4) Daniel Hoped in God's Mercy; (5) Daniel Did Not Justify Sin; (6) Daniel Pled with God.

I. Daniel Exalted God (Daniel 9:1-4).

A. What is the connection between the two visions in Daniel 7 and 8 and Daniel 9?

1. In the previous two chapters of Daniel, God gave visions to Daniel about two arch enemies of His people (Daniel 7—the Papal Antichrist; Daniel 8—Antiochus Epiphanes); but in both cases, the Lord also gave a certain hope that they would both be destroyed by Him.

2. In Daniel 9, God gives to Daniel an amazing prophecy of the coming of the Messiah—Jesus Christ who is God's anointed King to rule over His Church and over all nations to the good of His Church. He is the One who will bring salvation to His people through His sacrifice at His first coming. But before coming to that amazing prophecy (that begins in Daniel 9:24), Daniel first prepares himself to receive that prophecy by means of humbling himself before the Lord in prayer. That is the ordinary means that the Lord uses in preparing us to receive and to do His will—He humbles us through prayer.

B. Note first what historical circumstances led Daniel to humble himself in calling upon the Lord in prayer.

1. Babylon has now been conquered by the Medes/Persians, for it is Darius the Mede that is ruling over the Chaldeans/Babylonians (Daniel 9:1). As noted in a previous sermon, Darius the Mede was likely a subordinate ruler under Cyrus who ruled the former kingdom of Babylon while Cyrus ruled the entire empire ("was made king..."). Xenophon, the Greek historian, called him Gorbyras. This Ahasuerus is not the same person as King Ahasuerus, the Persian king that is identified in the Book of Esther (this Ahasuerus was a Mede; the one in Esther was a Persian).

2. Through Daniel's study of the inspired Books of Scripture that he had access to (particularly the Book of Jeremiah 25:12—desolation; Jeremiah 29:10—restoration), he realized that the fulfillment of these prophecies was near (the first deportation of the Jews under Nebuchadnezzar in 606/605 BC; the first year of Darius was 538/537 BC). In anticipation of the fulfillment of that prophecy, Daniel humbled himself before the Lord and called upon God to bring about their restoration to their land, city, and temple (which was realized in the Books of Ezra/Nehemiah and Haggai/Zechariah).

3. Just as Daniel's effectual prayer here was based upon God's Holy Word (it is filled with biblical references), so should our prayers be likewise filled with God's truth in Scripture. Our knowledge of God's Word is not an end in itself, but should send us to Jesus Christ. And our prayers should then send us back to God's Word—

it's a dialogue—He speaks—we respond.

C. Daniel does not jump immediately into his urgent petitions, even though they are consistent with and agreeable to God's Word. There was something in prayer that was even more important than Daniel's serious appeals to the Lord to restore and bring reformation to God's people: exalting the greatness of the Most High God. That is where our prayers should begin—not with our needs, but with Him who supplies our needs.

1. The fasting, sackcloth, and ashes are not meritorious with God (Daniel 9:3). They are means that Daniel took to set his face upon the Lord God—he humbled himself in order to exalt the Lord. These customs remind Daniel that he is absolutely weak (fasting), lowly (sackcloth), and mortal (ashes), but God is mighty, great, and eternal.

2. **God is "great" (Daniel 9:4).** He is great (we are small). He is infinitely great without any limitations/boundaries in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. There is nothing He cannot do. If He spoke into existence the universe, created man, and upholds and controls all things by the word of His power, nothing that we ask or think is beyond His power. It may not be His will. It may not be the right time. It may not be what is best for us. But it is not above and beyond His greatness and power to perform (Ephesians 3:20).

God always answers the prayers of His beloved children: yes, no, wait. He will only give us what is good for us (Matthew 7:11). Let us not limit God as Israel did (Psalm 78:19,41). He can do all His holy will.

3. **God is "dreadful" (Daniel 9:4).** He is to be feared and revered as our Creator, Savior, and Lord. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7) and wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). For the child of God this is not a slavish fear, but a holy fear that takes God seriously. A flippant, irreverent view of worship reflects a very small view of God. He holds life and death in His hands—His warnings and His promises are to be taken seriously. He is not to be taken lightly or casually. He is not to be treated like one of the guys. God is love, but He is also absolutely holy. He mercifully saves, but He also righteously judges. That is why worship of God is not a game—it is serious because of who God is.

4. **God is merciful (Daniel 9:4).** God's mercy is undeserved by us. We as sinful creatures deserve God's justice, but He freely bestows His mercy upon those who deserve His righteous judgment. God did not owe Israel His covenant of grace and mercy to be loved by Him, saved from Egyptian bondage by Him, provided for by Him in the wilderness, protected by Him from enemies that hated them, and given to them His gospel, holy law, and ordinances to lead them to Christ for forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life. God's lovingkindness was freely bestowed upon Israel out of all nations, not because they were more mighty, more numerous, or more righteous, but because He loved them (Deuteronomy 7:7; 9:5). If God's undeserved mercy does not overwhelm and humble you, you do not yet understand your sin.

5. Our prayers become mechanical and lifeless, become more of a chore than a delight, and become a struggle to us because we have forgotten who it is to whom we pray. Nothing we seek in prayer will truly matter if we do not get this right. What we seek is meaningless if we do not first seek to exalt our God. Our prayers will be full of life and communion with the Lord to the degree that we remember who He is and what He has done. When the greatness, power, mercy, love, and holiness of our God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) fill our minds and our hearts, prayer will not be hit and miss, but will become a way of life (like breathing).

6. Prayer is not just a duty (a commanded obligation). It is that, but it is more than that. If that is all prayer is to us, it will simply become a heavy burden. Prayer is an honor, a privilege of being a child of the living God. It is our inheritance. Prayer is an act of love and gratitude for who our God is and what our great Savior and Lord has done for us. When we truly understand to whom we pray, it transforms our prayers. Perhaps you have forgotten who God is, or perhaps you have never known who God is. In either case, there is mercy and forgiveness if you turn in faith to Christ and confess as Daniel did.

II. Daniel Confessed Sin (Daniel 9:5-6).

A. Note the various words Daniel used to express the sin of God's people. This is a national confession of sin (moral person). Thus, there is national repentance, national forgiveness, and national reformation (Isaiah 19).

1. "Sinned" (missed the mark, like an arrow that misses the target).

God's Law is the target, but all have sinned (Romans 3:23). Israel has not just missed God's mark in general, but as God's covenant people had gone after the gods of the nations, and had conformed to the pagan culture all around them. Out of all nations, Israel had more reason, not less reason (due to greater privileges) to walk in faithfulness to God's commandments. So do we.

2. "Committed iniquity" (had distorted what God made clear they were to do). God gave Israel a clear revelation at Mt. Sinai and brought them into a gracious covenant with Him. Israel added and subtracted by words and deeds what He clearly gave to them. This is what we do when we justify our sins due to the situation we were in. Our excuses for not obeying God's commandments are committing iniquity (distorting His commandments).

3. "Have done wickedly" (have intentionally done what they knew was wrong). When God said serve and worship only Him, Israel said, "No, we will serve the gods of the nations around us." This is to sin with a high hand and with a raised, closed fist against the Lord. Such sins are aggravated because it is to willfully sin against the knowledge of the truth. And yet, here is Daniel confessing this sin unto God because God is merciful (David).

4. "Have rebelled" (have turned against the supreme authority and lordship of the Lord over them and have become rebels). Daniel is confessing that in turning from God's commandments, Israel had turned against and denied God's authority over them. They had made themselves lord and master, and had made Almighty God their servant to help them whenever He was needed. That's salvation on our terms, not God's. By nature, we want to be lord of our own lives. We don't want God to control all things (and particularly we don't want Him to control us and to tell us what we ought and ought not to do). This is a serious problem when our children do this, but do we excuse it when we do so with our Heavenly Father?

B. Daniel now gives the reason why Israel had "sinned", "committed iniquity", "done wickedly", and "rebelled". What did they do? They had departed from God's written Law (Daniel 9:5) and had not heeded the spoken words of the prophets (Daniel 9:6).

1. Here is both the mercy of God and the judgment of God displayed. It is the mercy of God that He both gives to us His written revelation (Scripture) and then He even sends His prophets (ministers) to declare to us what He has written. The Lord did not send one prophet to Israel and Judah, but sent many prophets over and over again. That was a great mercy that should have led to their repentance, but it didn't. Thus, having refused the mercy of God, the judgment of God fell upon Israel by way of the Assyrian captivity and upon Judah by way of the Babylonian captivity. If being convicted by the Holy Spirit in the written Word and the preached Word is not a blessing to you, it is because you refuse to repent of your sin. It is because you do not want to let go of your sin. That's a dangerous place to be. It will only harden you to God's mercy, and lead to God's judgment.

2. As I close, there are two extremes I pray you will avoid as you consider Daniel's confession of sin.

- a. **Extreme #1.** You continue in your sin, your iniquity, your wickedness, and you rebellion. You ignore God's mercy and you also ignore His judgment. You make excuses for your sin. You blame others for your sin. You compare yourself to others whom you think are worse sinners than yourself. You procrastinate and do not take God seriously, and do not seek His mercy in Jesus Christ who promises to forgive all sinners (great or small) who will trust Jesus as their only Savior and Lord and repent of sin (sorrowing over it, and endeavoring by God's grace to walk in loving obedience).

- b. **Extreme #2.** You disbelieve/doubt God's mercy can cover the sins you have committed against God and His Law. Your eye is upon the enormity of your sin rather than upon the infinite love, mercy, and grace of God in Jesus Christ. You must turn from what you think and feel to what God declares, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Romans 5:20). Do not call God a liar when He promises to forgive you. I urge you to believe and receive the sacrifice of Jesus as all sufficient (paid in full). If God could forgive the chief of sinners (Paul), He will forgive you so that you can walk in communion and loving obedience before Him (1 Timothy 1:14-16).

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