

Sermon – 25/11/2007 am

Daniel's Prayer

Study Text: Daniel 9:1–19

As a young man Daniel purposed in his heart not to defile himself (1:8). He determined not to worship idols even when most of the people around him did so. He would live with integrity and honoured God. Daniel prayed and gave thanks to God three times every day and would not stop praying even when threatened with death in the lions den. We are privileged to hear one of the prayers of this greatly beloved servant of God; and I trust will be blessed.

There is an old evangelical saying that goes like this: 'what an individual is in secret, on his knees before God, that he is and no more'. True prayer must come from the heart and so as we listen to this prayer of Daniel we get a glimpse into the heart of a faithful child of God. We see his commitment to God, we see the covenant relationship he had with God, and we see his desire to glorify God. 'Prayer is an expression of what we know of God and ourselves. In public we may successfully disguise the truth about ourselves but not in private prayer – or the lack of it'. This is the reason why it is so difficult to pray and why so many Christians fail to pray.

Why do we pray? Do you value your prayer times? We pray to confess our sin. We pray to ask for God's help. Jesus said 'ask and you will receive'. *If you ask anything according to the will of God then you will receive it* (1 John 5:14). You can accomplish more and greater things through prayer than by your own strength. But in our pride we often struggle on, refusing to confess our sin and weakness before God.

Commitment

Daniel was living in exile. He was not free to go and worship God. He longed to return to his home in Jerusalem and worship God in the temple. This was one reason why he prayed. He called upon the Lord who by faith he knew could deliver him and his people. Daniel did not rely upon his own strength or cleverness.

Daniel was further stirred to pray because of what he read in the Bible. God spoke to Daniel in dreams but this did not obviate him from reading the Bible. His whole life was not guided by dreams. In the first year of Darius the Mede Daniel was reading his Bible and came to passage in which Jeremiah said the exile would last for 70 years. He did not get truth through a dream but from the written word of God.

Many years ago I went to prayer meeting down the road from where I lived. The small group was sitting around chatting and then began to pray. Some were quite animated as they sought guidance from the Lord. After a while one person claimed to have received a message from the Lord. The message was 'be still and know that I am God'. I came away thinking they could have read this in the Bible – which I don't remember being opened in that prayer meeting.

Daniel opened his Bible and read it – and see, what a wonderful promise he found. The 70 years spoken of by the Jeremiah was now up. He had been in Babylon for seventy years. It was in the first year of Cyrus the Persian (and Darius the Mede) that the Lord stirred the spirit of Cyrus to have the temple rebuilt (Ezra 1).

God has spoken to us in his word. In the past he spoke by the prophets but in these last days he has spoken by his Son Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2). There are great and wonderful promises in the Bible. Let these promises inform and direct your prayers. It is futile to pray what is contrary to what God has already spoken in his unchanging word.

Daniel was committed to daily prayer. Daniel was committed to reading the Bible. Daniel was also committed to earnest prayer. See the beautiful way in which he described his prayer – *I set my face toward the Lord God (9:3)*. Could you say this of your prayer – ‘I set my face toward the Lord’. This was no tired and hasty prayer at the end of the day. Daniel did not regard prayer as a waste of time.

Look further! He put on sackcloth and ashes, and fasted. This self-denial shows his humility and sincerity in prayer. It shows his total commitment to the Lord. Wearing sackcloth and pouring ashes over the head was the Jewish way of expressing extreme anguish of heart. It was commonly practised during mourning. Still today some Christians fast during special days of prayer.

Daniel valued above all else his time with the Lord each day. Just as he continued steadfast in prayer we are also commanded to do the same (Romans 12:12). How often does prayer get squeezed out of your busy day?

Covenant

Daniel prayed and made confession (9:4). Confessing sin is essential in prayer, but even before this it is essential to acknowledge who God is. *Those who come to God must believe that he exists and rewards those who earnestly seek him (Hebrews 11:6)*. Daniel did not pray to a God he did not know. See how well he knew his God. He is a great and awesome God who keeps his covenant and mercy with those who love him (9:4).

Daniel knew God as the mighty creator of heaven and earth. He knew the works of God in creation and redemption (9:4, 15). He knew God as the redeemer of his people, the God who made a covenant with them through Moses after bringing them out of bondage in Egypt. The whole of his prayer is based upon this covenant.

Firstly Daniel knew many attributes of God from what God declared through Moses. See the word mercy (9:4, 9). God declared himself to be merciful and forgiving (Exodus 34:6-7). There was no point confessing sin if there was no forgiveness. The Bible does not teach that there is any value in confessing to an idol; nor in writing an autobiography that tells all. Such confessions affect the wallet but not the soul.

God is also ‘righteous’ (9:7, 16). This word is sometimes translated as ‘justice’ and seen in a courtroom setting. In the Old Testament it is a covenantal term with a somewhat wider meaning. Justice is part of it, but it refers to the integrity and faithfulness of God under the terms of the covenant. Righteousness for Daniel meant forgiveness as well as judgment. Daniel knew that in his rightness God would forgive but that he also got angry and punished those who broke his covenant (9:16).

Secondly, Daniel knew the details of the covenant in the Law of Moses (9:11 – see Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28). God declared I will be your God and you will be my people. Attached to this declaration was a statement of duties as it were. God gave ten rules for them to obey. They were written on stone by God himself. If the people obeyed these rules then God would bless them in the land he gave them to settle in. If they failed to obey the rules then covenant curse would come upon them.

If Daniel did not know beforehand then he did from reading his Bible that he and thousand of other Jews were in exile because they had broken the covenant. The last and most severe of the curses stated that they would be scattered among the nations and their land destroyed (Leiticus 26:33, Deuteronomy 28:34). *Yes all Israel has transgressed your law...therefore the curse and the oath written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God has been poured out on us*, because we have sinned against him (9:11).

The people of God were in exile because they had sinned by breaking God commands. They were not there by accident or even because they were not strong enough to defeat the Babylonians. They were suffering because the heavy hand of God upon. God had given them up. ‘You want to worship idols, then go and live among idol worshippers’ said God in effect (Romans 2:26).

God says this to nations and to individuals. How much of the suffering in our nation, child abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual abuse, gambling abuse and so much more, are because God has given us up to follow these dark and destructive ways.

We need to say more than sorry to the first inhabitants of this land. We need to say sorry to the thousands of children murdered in the womb as well as too many neglected and abused in their childhood. Above all we need to say sorry to God for we have broken covenant with him. We no longer want to hear his word in the Bible but want to go our own ways – and we are seeing the outcome.

Daniel confessed his sin and the sin of his people (9:20). He pleaded for mercy and forgiveness from the Lord, just like David when he sinned and the prodigal son in the story Jesus told. *O Lord, according to your righteousness I pray let your anger and your fury be turned away from your holy city Jerusalem* (9:16).

Glory

When the people of God rebelled in the wilderness and made the golden calf God was going to destroy them. But Moses pleaded with the Lord suggesting that to do so would not bring glory to the Lord (Exodus 32:11-12). The Egyptians would say that God turned upon his people and destroyed them.

Daniel similarly prays for the Lord to glorify his own holy name by forgiving their sin and restoring Jerusalem, your city Jerusalem *.For the Lord's sake cause your face to shine on your temple which is desolate* (9:16, 17). Notice the word ‘your’ that comes up again and again as Daniel closes his prayer. There is not one ‘I’ or ‘me’ here. It is ‘not my will bt yours be done’. It is not make my life better but may the Lord be glorified. Their sin had brought shame and reproach upon them, the people who were called by God’s great name (9:19). O Lord listen and act...for your own sake, my God for your city and your people are called by your name.

Some may think it strange that Daniel prayed with such commitment and confessed so readily when God has already declared in the Bible that the exile would end soon anyway. God was going to restore Jerusalem anyway so why pray? We never see true servants of the Lord saying such things. We never see them saying ‘the Lord will save whom he has chosen so why pray for the lost’. Daniel prayed and his prayer was pleasing to the Lord. The Lord heard his cry because he prayed according to God’s will as revealed in the Bible.

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