DANIEL’S PRAYER

Daniel 9:1-19

Key Verse: 3

“So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.”

Daniel described his first vision in chapter 7 and his second vision in chapter 8. His first vision was solely related to the kingdoms of the Gentile world and their destruction with the establishment of Christ’s eternal kingdom as the final kingdom in human history, which will never be destroyed. His 2nd vision was also about the Gentile kingdoms of the world yet related to Israel pointing to the time of the end with the final Antichrist to be destroyed. In chapter 9, Daniel shares his 3rd vision focused on the future history of God’s chosen people Israel to the time of the end. This vision is truly amazing with a detailed description about the coming of Christ and the Great Tribulation which leads to the great and glorious climax of Jewish history – the ultimate restoration of all things through the coming of the Messiah. This vision was God’s direct answer to Daniel’s prayer. So prior to the 3rd vision, we think about Daniel’s prayer in today’s passage, after having studied about Daniel’s life of prayer in chapter 6. This prayer of Daniel is an exemplary standard of intercessory prayer. In chapter 8, after witnessing the astounding vision, Daniel was exhausted and lay ill for several days, yet he got up and came back to his normal life, going about the king’s business. So Daniel’s prayer in chapter 9 flows well, following his brokenness over what is going to happen to Israel.

Verse 1 says, “In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom.” This Darius is the same Darius as in chapter 6, Cyrus the Persian (6:28). Since he was the king of the Medo-Persian kingdom, he could also be said to be a Mede. Since this is the first year of Darius, it really takes us all the way back to the same period of time as chapter 6 and so what is written here in chapter 9 must have happened around the same time as the lion’s den experience.

And verse 2 says, “in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.” When they were in the captivity, they had no human power at all, no military or economic power. How could it be possible to be liberated from the captivity? Their situation was totally hopeless. Yet, despite the circumstances, Daniel understood from the Scriptures that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. Such understanding comes from faith in the words of God. It is written in Jeremiah 25:11-12, “This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt.” It is also written in :29:10, “This is what the LORD says: ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.’”

The understanding or solution of the problems in a person’s life or in the world comes from the words of God, who is sovereign over all things. How important it is to receive the word of God especially in our adverse situation and in this troublesome world! Thank God that we could study Revelation, 1, 2, & 3 John, and 1 & 2 Thessalonians, and now are studying Daniel so that we could understand better what is happening and what is going to happen when the time of the end is near. Particularly 1 John 5:19 says, “We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.” And as we studied in Daniel 8, when the transgressors are come to the full, that is, when transgression has come to its apex and its fullness, a stern-faced king, the final antichrist will rise. Yet we do not look for the antichrist, but the Christ. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 says, “After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” This is our blessed hope as we studied in Titus 2:13, 14, “…we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us…” We really thank God for granting us these precious words of God for us to understand our time and the future.

When Daniel learned that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years, what did he do? Did he just relax being comforted in assurance that God would fulfill his promise regardless of how his people lived? No. Verse 3 says, “So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.” This is a right attitude before the promise of God. Daniel uses the term not *Yahweh* here, but *Adonai*, which means, Lord, master Sovereign. He knew that God is utterly sovereign, and utterly authoritative, yet in submission to the authority and the sovereignty of God, he pleaded with him, seeking his mercy with fasting in sackcloth and ashes. He really humbled himself and prayed. This kind of heart attitude is truly important in our life of faith. We know that we are saved by faith alone and grace alone. How are those who have such assurance to live? Among them are the people who live a carefree life, claiming that Jesus forgave all their sin. They are greatly mistaken. The right attitude is to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). Paul said in Philippians 1:6, “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” Those who have such confidence of God’s work in God’s flock of sheep will care for the flock of sheep faithfully with constant sincere prayer for them. Assurance in God’s word of promise and humble, sincere prayer are to go together.

Here again verse 3 says, “So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.” As we studied in chapter 1 of this book, there were three times deportations among the Jews to Babylon, 605, 597, and 586 BC. Daniel did not know from which year the seventy years could be counted. Yet, one thing is clear that the closing date was coming near. So he turned to the Lord and pleaded with him humbly and earnestly.

Once more, Daniel’s prayer was generated by the word of God. His prayer was born out of an understanding of the Word of God. It was when Daniel perceived what God had in mind that he began to commune with God. Daniel believed absolutely and totally in the sovereignty of God. God would fulfill his Word.  Yet, Daniel still prayed. Daniel’s prayer has two parts: 1) sincere confession of sin in 13 verses (4-16) and 2) earnest request in 3 verses (17-19).

Daniel says in verse 4, “I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed. Daniel first of all calls, “O Lord, the great and awesome God.” Again, here “Lord” is *Adonai*, meaning Sovereign God. And the great and awesome God is the God who has power to do all things and the one we are to revere. He is to be honored, glorified and exalted.  And the great awesome God keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands. Before this God he confessed, “we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.” Notably, in his entire prayer Daniel never said, “they have sinned and done wrong”, but “we have sinned and done wrong.” Although he lived an amazing life of faith, he identified with people of God, the people, who sinned against God and whom he was praying for. And with four different expressions, he confessed the sins of his people including himself. No one can come to God with a righteous heart, but a sinner’s heart, a repentant heart. Jesus once told the parable of a Pharisee and a tax collector. A Pharisee prayed, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector” and boasted about his religious act. But a tax collector beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Jesus commented that the tax collector went home justified before God while the Pharisee was not(Lk 18:9-14). We need a humble repentant heart, not a righteous proud heart, in coming to God.

In his confession of sin, Daniel stressed the sin of not obeying God’s commands. He said, “We have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servant the prophets, who spoke in your name…” Our fundamental sin is not obeying the word of God, thus breaking God’s heart. Adam’s sin was disobeying God’s command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, hearing Satan’s voice and obeying his word.

This sin is described continually. In verses 7 and 8, Daniel says, “Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame—the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you. O LORD, we and our kings, our princes and our fathers are covered with shame because we have sinned against you.” In this shame, again Daniel included himself, associating with his own people. It is like parents being accused and shamed because of their children’s sin and shame. Consequently, Daniel says, “The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him; we have not obeyed the LORD our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets. All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away refusing to obey you.” As you see, in verses 5-11, Daniel pointed out 4 times, not obeying God’s word with the expressions, “we have turned away from your commands and laws”, “we have not listened to your servants the prophets”, “we have not kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets” and “all Israel has transgressed your law and turned away.” The standard of the life of God’s people is the word of God. Although we can be nice before the eyes of people, what matters to us is whether we obey God’s word. For example, God speaks to us time after time, “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Mt 6:33); “Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desire of the sinful nature” (Gal 6:16); “Faith in God” (Mk 11:22). God expects from us our personal obedience in these words of God.

In verses 11b-14, Daniel describes that God’s judgment was the result of their disobedience and the curses and disaster were according to his word. He said, “Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you. You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing upon us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem.” We are to know that God fulfills his word whether spoken for us or against us. Daniel continues, “Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us, yet we have not sought the favour of the LORD our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth. The LORD did not hesitate to bring the disaster upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him.” To God’s people, nothing happens by chance. In these verses, “disaster” is written 3 times. Again, disaster does not just happen but in accordance with God’s word. Both blessings and curses are written, especially in Deuteronomy 28, and rewards and punishment in Leviticus 26. Briefly, Deuteronomy 28:1 says, “If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth.” And in 28:12b-13, “You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. The LORD will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the LORD your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will aways be at the top, never at the bottom.” It is also written in 28:15 says, “However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.” And in 28:20, “Then the LORD will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him.” God’s people should know the consequences of both obedience and disobedience.

Daniel knew that God is righteous, and also God is merciful and forgiving (9). Verse 9 in KJV is, “To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled.”  Forgiveness is in plural form. We need mercy and forgiveness more than once.  In verses 15-16 there is a progress in his prayer: “Now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day, we have sinned, we have done wrong. O Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. Our sins and the iniquities of our fathers have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us.” Here, Daniel continually confessed the sins of his people, saying, “We have sinned, we have done wrong…Our sins and the iniquities of our fathers have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn.” Yet, he mentioned “your people”, “a name that endures to this day”, and “Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill.” What a truthful and wise claim! God and his people cannot be separated. Now God’s honour is at stake.

Finally, in verses 17-19 Daniel makes a request, “Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, O Lord, look with favour on your desolate sanctuary. Give ear, O God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because you are righteous, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act!” What a bold and earnest request! He uses 8 verbs 10 times, “hear, look with favour, give, hear, open, see, listen, forgive, hear and act”! Then he says, “For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.” He repeats “for your sake”, and lastly mentions “your name.” “For the sake of God and his name” is the bottom line of the life and prayer of God’s people. That is God’s honour and glory.

We see that Daniel’s relationship with God is amazing and so intimate and deep. Yet, Daniel could not call God “Father.” At this point we are reminded of the Lord’s prayer, the prayer Jesus taught us: “When you pray say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come…” (Luke 11:2). In Christ Jesus, we can call God “Father.” When children call their dad “father” or “daddy”, fathers’ hearts are moved and their affection and attention go to them. In this world, our identity is “I am a child of God” redeemed by the grace of Jesus. My family is a family of God. This community and ministry are God’s. All these bear God’s name. This can be our prayer, “Lord, Father, for your sake, for the sake of your name, for your kingdom listen, forgive, hear and act.”

May we understand each event from the Scriptures, especially in adverse situations and learn Daniel’s exemplary intercessory prayer for God’s flock of sheep, our children, the families of God, his church and this nation.