“A Prayer for an Obedient Faith”

Daniel 9:4-8, 15-19

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Introduction:

“I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes,” (Daniel 9:3).

And, this is exactly where we find Daniel in today’s lesson: in prayer. Praying, not just for himself or some random course of events. He is interceding on behalf of his people as a whole.

Daniel knew throughout the years of their history God’s people have sinned. Not only sinned but totally rejected God and His covenant. Time and time, God sought to reconcile His people to Himself, but, alas, they would have none of it. Which ultimately led to their time in captivity and being under control
of enemy after enemy. But, what Daniel also knew, was according to their history, and according to the word of God pronounced by the prophet Jeremiah (Daniel 9:2), the time of their captivity was almost up. Deliverance was on the horizon. Hope was in their future of returning home once more, and so Daniel prayed. He prayed a prayer that relied on nothing but God’s mercy and righteousness that forgives and works beyond their iniquities and sins.

This lesson is important in our own walk of faith. Anytime we are seeking to enrich our relationship with God, one of the most potent ways to do that is from the stance of prayer and repentance. It’s a heart that is personally yearning not just for deliverance, but more of God and to be right and restored to Him. In that, one realizes, as Daniel did, the frailty of our flesh and power, opposite His greatness and righteousness.

We take these words and glean from them that we might learn to have an obedient faith as well.

Daniel 9:4 “And I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments.”

“I prayed unto the Lord my God.” "Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire?” (Corrie ten Boom/Quote Source: Crosswalk). For Daniel, prayer was his steering wheel. He
didn’t just pull it out of his spiritual trunk whenever he needed it. If you remember, back in Daniel 6, his dedication to God and prayer is what caused him to be thrown into the lion’s den. So, prayer to him is not a foreign concept and it shouldn’t be for any child of God. Daniel had a strong prayer life and after reading and studying and realizing the time was almost at hand for their freedom to break loose from their captors, Daniel prayed all the more, with fasting, in the humble fashion of wearing sackcloth and donning ashes (Daniel 9:3).

“And made my confession.” 1 John 1:9 is a widely known verse in Scripture. It says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” The word “confess” simply means to acknowledge. Acknowledging that one is a sinner and has sinned is the key to receiving God’s forgiveness.

With humbleness of heart and spirit, Daniel is in this process of acknowledging their own sinfulness as a people who are supposed to be holy and in a covenant. But, before he gets that far, his faith recognizes, and his mouth speaks of the character and love of this great God they serve. “O Lord, the great and dreadful God” he speaks, inspiring praise and worship and reverential awe at His wonderfulness. True prayer approaches God, recognizing fully who He is (compare Matthew 6:9).
Not only recognizing who He is, but what He does. “Keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments.” Faith keeps in mind the love God has for people and the mercies He seeks to extend to them. Daniel has found God to be nothing but faithful to every word He has promised.

When their history taught them from the very beginning of their deliverance from Egyptian captivity that God shows, “lovingkindness unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments,” (Exodus 20:6), Daniel takes that to heart even in his day and remembers God is not slack concerning His promises; that he will do what He said He would do. And, although he recognizes in the next verse they, as a people are far from the keepers of the covenant they should be, God will always hold up to His end of what He has committed Himself to.

There is a direct correlation in “keeping” and “keep” in this verse. He keeps His covenant when we keep His commandments. But, what happens when we, not He, fall through the cracks and not live up to what we are called to do.

It is that very event that has driven Daniel to his knees in prayer, seeking the mercy and forgiveness of God to restore that proper balance between God and His people. While humanity may fall short, we depend on God who never has.
Daniel 9:5-6 “We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.”

After expressing the awesomeness and faithfulness of God in prayer, Daniel admits and confesses the not so awesome state of the people. All these words noted, Daniel said we did it all. In our lives, we have wronged God. In interceding and sharing the responsibility with the people, although his personal faith and walk with God was strong, Daniel was identifying himself nationally as a whole, as God’s covenant people.

Sin is sin, no matter how we describe it: “sinned... committed iniquity... done wickedly... departing from thy precepts and judgments,” all of it equals to we didn’t do what we were supposed to do. These very words are echoed in other portions of the Bible (compare Psalm 106:6). True confession and repentance does not come without one accepting personal responsibility for what they have done. Before they can move forward into a positive future, the sin of yesterday and today must be dealt with. This is what Daniel is seeing to.

A heart or a nation or a people that is not moved toward true repentance isn’t really seeking God as the head of their lives.
And, true repentance starts as Daniel started it, knowing and admitting, they, as a people, were not fitly walking in the holiness of God. They have turned away from Him and departed from His “precepts and judgments.” Their lives were opposite of His standard and they needed to repent; they needed an obedient faith.

“Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets.” For hundreds of years, God chased after the heart of His people. God had repeatedly tried to navigate his people back on the right path of righteousness through chosen men who carried His word to the people. But, with hearts of stone and ears stopped at their hearing, the people refused to listen to those life-saving, soul-saving words.

Some of the prophets God used during this specific time of their captivity and before were Jeremiah and Ezekiel, whom cried out, “This whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years,” (Jeremiah 25:11); and, “A sword, a sword is sharpened, and also furbished,” (Ezekiel 21:9) prophesying also of Babylon against His people (see Ezekiel 21:2). Despite these warnings, the people persisted to chase after false ways and turned their back on the truth of all that God is.

Outside of those men, God used others to call His people back to their first love found in Him, but they still refused to listen. 2
Kings 17 tells us, “Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statues, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers that did not believe in the LORD their God,” (vss. 13-14; read verses 13-23).

The word had gone out. God’s holy message of warnings was delivered. The response from the people was nonexistent. Therefore, they went into captivity, out of which Daniel now prays, recognizing the fault lies in the bosom of people and leaders, including “our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land;” people of note who should’ve been directing people closer to God instead of further away from Him.

Daniel 9:7-8 “O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee.”
In his prayer, Daniel attributes to God His due, and to the sinful people of his land and history, he calls them out by the shame they have displayed.

“O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces,” is a portion of prayer that sounds very similar to that of Nehemiah when he said, “Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly,” (Nehemiah 9:33). There is no fault in the face of God for what the people have faced. If they didn’t like their captivity, it’s not because God chose for them to be there, it’s because they, through the choices they made, that chose for them to be there. God maintains His integrity through it all. God maintains His “righteousness.”

The fault, once again pointed out, lies in the heart of the unfaithful people compared to their faithful God. Thus, they have “confusion of faces” and bear the humiliation and shame of those choices. They are the reason they are in captivity. It is because of “their trespass that they have trespassed against thee.”

Sin separates God’s children from Him and His promises physically and spiritually. Physically, it took them out of their country; and, spiritually, it left their soul adrift, floating on the ebbs and flows of the false and the unknown, untethered from their true Anchor.
Sin also contaminates every area of life and it destroys everything it comes into contact with causing one to lose out on the blessings of God. Sin is not just a naughty choice someone made. Sin is not just a vice or a misbehavior of some sort. Sin is a destroyer. Sin will collapse all that is good. Sin is an offense against God! The people were scattered and sent into captivity because of their sins and Daniel does not beat around the bush or sugar coat in admitting their “trespass against” God! And, no one is spared or excused from this prayer of confession. “Our kings... princes... fathers...,” Daniel continued, “We have sinned against thee.”

After the which, Daniel continued in his prayer expressing God’s mercies and forgiveness compared to the rebellious heart of the people (Daniel 9:9). Daniel said, “Neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets,” (Daniel 9:10; not in today’s printed text). Everything they have experienced regarding their captivity has been due to a lack of obedient faith. Disobedience equals disaster. The evil they have dealt with was because of their lack of a personal relationship with God. They have not prayed to Him and kept themselves before Him “that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth,” (Daniel 9:13; not in today’s printed text). But now, Daniel is praying for a reversal of it all. Despite their sins,
Daniel is leaning on the faithfulness of God to deliver as He has done before.

Daniel 9:15-16 "And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly. O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us."

When one is personally devoted in their relationship to God and personally devoted to prayer, it’s not hard to reflect on one’s relationship with God and where He has brought them from, brought them through, and the paths He has walked with them along the way. There is no stretch of the imagination to look back and see and rejoice over previous deliverances He has gotten for His people.

Daniel wasn’t alive back then but readily recalls their history of God’s power of deliverance for His people from Egyptian bondage (vs. 15). God is the one who “brought thy people forth.” In one of the most fantastic stories of the Bible, this event expresses God’s power at work for His people through plagues and miracles unheard of such as a great sea standing
aright and allowing passage on dry ground for people to walk. The fame of God went out not only through the hearts of His people, but those of other lands heard of the great power of this great God and “hast gotten thee renown,” (compare to Rahab’s testimony in Joshua 2:10-11). The name of God had gone out. People and nations knew that the children of Israel are the people of God and that God had their back.

Rather than magnify His name further, the people “have done wickedly.” Their sinful acts and broken relationship didn’t publish His greatness. In their unholy living, they detracted from the praise and honor that should have been going to God and became a people of captivity.

So, Daniel prays, “O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain.” “Not because of what we have done, but because of who You are, O God, in Your “righteousness,” please, turn your “anger” away from us, Your people,” is in essence, what his petition was. Daniel prayed for a reversal of all that befell them contingent on the wonderfulness of God.

Rather than a people of praise, they have become a people of “reproach.” This word matches the shame and “confusion of face” they were described as before. They have disgraced the name of God as His holy people, but through it all, Daniel is
praying for God to intervene and bring to a close this time of punishment in captivity.

Daniel 9:17-19 “Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.”

“Hear the prayer of thy servant,” was his plea. One can get a sense of the earnest cry of the heart that must be mixed with those humble words as he makes his petition to God. The people have been separated from God long before the desolation of the temple, but Daniel prays for God’s “face to shine upon thy sanctuary” once more. Daniel is praying for wholeness, favor, and restoration for the people of God and their worship of Him.

“For the Lord’s sake.” As His chosen people, the children of Israel were the people whom God used to show what He is all about to the world (compare Deuteronomy 7:6-8; Isaiah 43:10-12). The testimony of who God is to the other nations is
attached to these people who are called by His name. People often attribute to God what they see manifested in His people.

Daniel knows, it is not their own “righteousnesses” he is leaning on for this prayer to be answered, for it is not with them as a people. A similar sentiment is expressed in Isaiah where he noted, “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags,” (64:6). Even if they were good, which their wickedness noted earlier speaks against that idea, they still wouldn’t be good enough. Rather, Daniel is basing his petition and supplication for God’s intervention because of “thy great mercies.”

The children of Israel aren’t the only ones who depend on the mercy of God. We, as well, rely solely on His goodness and compassion toward His people. We depend on His grace, that unmerited favor, that paves the way when pardon shouldn’t have been granted.

For this Daniel prays, “Open thine eyes, and behold our desolations.” God is always attentive to the needs of His people. He has never clocked out of any situation that they or we are involved in. But, as stated before, sin gets in the way of that openness one has with God and works as a hindrance to the fulness one can experience in Him (compare Isaiah 59:2). With the thoughts of deliverance on the horizon, perhaps Daniel was ready, almost pleading for the performance of the
promise of the ending of the captivity to be taken on behalf of his people.

So, Daniel ends this prayer with a simple, “O Lord, forgive.” This is what every true, repentant confession seeks after, the forgiveness of God. With forgiveness comes release and restoration of the offender; another chance.

“O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake” puts some urgency behind the prayer. “Don’t delay, O God! Let Your name be glorified, O God when the nations see that You are still in the saving business; You are still true to deliver Your people, according to Your holy Word! For we, “thy city and thy people are called by thy name. They know we belong to You, and now they will know of Your power when You bring us out. When we return home, Your glory will be magnified!”

**Conclusion:**

James 5:6 tells us, “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Daniel prayed and interceded for his people and their deliverance from captivity. Moses was a man, too, who had to act as a go-between for God and man when the people rebelled and worshipped the golden calf (Exodus 32:30-35). And, our Lord Jesus Christ became the ultimate intercessor to man, not just
through prayer, but through His shed blood for all those that believe on Him.

May Daniel’s prayer inspire us to seek God earnestly and to walk in an obedient faith before Him.