

Prayers of the Exiled Answered.

Daniel 9:20-27

Exegetical Big Idea: God hears and answers Daniel's prayer. By God's grace he reveals that the answer is larger and more glorious than Daniel could imagine.

Homiletical Big Idea: **God answers our prayers, not always how we think he should, but always how is best.**

Fallen Condition Focus: It is hard to trust that God's answer to prayer is not always what we think it should be. We must grow in our faith that God always brings about answers to our prayers that ultimately glorify him, which is also for our best.

Background:

Last week we looked at Daniel's prayer. We saw that Daniel's prayer was one of an exile, who had no self-righteousness of his own but who deeply needed God's sovereign hand to work according to God's glory.

You'll remember that the reign of Belshazzar had come to an end and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom of the Babylonians. With the kingdom changing hand, Daniel recognized as he read the prophecies of Jeremiah that God had determined Israel be in exile seventy years. It was about that time and Daniel pleads with God to have mercy on Israel despite their wickedness and to restore Jerusalem and the temple for God's name's sake.

It's important to remember those events from last week, because this chapter is a direct response to that prayer.

One important thing to note about these few verses in Daniel 9 is that these are some of the hardest verses to understand in all of Daniel. There are numerous interpretations and scholars are divided as to how to understand these verses. My plan today is not to nitpick every possibility, but to outline what I think is generally going on and try and see the large picture of what these verses are trying to teach.

Intro:

Once upon a time there was a father and son who owned a dairy farm. They worked hard together and the boy was getting older and could do much of the work around the farm. The son had the idea of getting into delivering the milk to the customers. So he went to his dad one day and said "dad, I would like to start a delivery service for our milk, and I'd like a wagon so I could put my orders in it to deliver them." The dad thinks about it for a while and says "ok, I think that's a good idea". The son waited and waited and the wagon didn't seem to come. Until finally, on the son's birthday, the father said to him "Son, I have a present for you, it's outside in the yard". So together they go outside and to the son's amazement, a truck is waiting there for him!

Now the question is, did the father answer the request of the son? Of course he did! Was it exactly as the son thought the father would answer? No. It wasn't the timing the son wanted, and it wasn't exactly what the son asked for, but it was exceedingly better than he imagined, and ultimately the father did what was best for the son.

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Oh how often when we pray, we are sure we know exactly what we need, and when we need it. And aren't we often disappointed if God seems to take his time in answering, and answers in a different manner than what we asked for. Oh how we often forget that God's ways are above our ways, and that he is able to do immeasurably more than we could ever imagine.

In the first part of chapter 9, Daniel is like the son who asks for a wagon. In these verses, God answers with the truck.

Last week we saw that God's people are a praying people, because praying people know their need for God. This week we see that:

God answers our prayers, not always how we think he should, but always how is best.

VV. 20-23 God listens to the prayer of the humble.

These first few verses are relatively straightforward. We jump into actually the middle of Daniel's prayer from the previous verses. We get the impression that Daniel wasn't even done yet. While Daniel is in the middle of petitioning the Lord and confessing the sin of Israel, Gabriel the angel that Daniel saw in his previous visions appeared.

Now it's interesting that Daniel makes sure to note that Gabriel comes during the time of the evening sacrifice. That would have been three or four in the afternoon. Why are we told this? This gets even more interesting when you consider that the evening sacrifice has been a thing for about seventy years!

Daniel has not seen an evening sacrifice in about seventy years because he's not in Jerusalem, and even if he were, there is no temple in which to offer the sacrifice!

I think this offers us a glimpse into Daniel's heart. Daniel's heart is bent towards God and his glory. Realistically we already knew this. The whole of Daniel's life in this book has been set apart for God. His prayer in the previous verses were fixated on God's mercy for this people according to his great name. This mention of the evening sacrifice reminds us that Daniel longs for the time when God's sanctuary is honoured and glorified. Daniel longs for the evening sacrifice to return, because with the rebuilding of the temple and the reinstating of the sacrifices, God's people can be made right with him again.

Daniel's heart is humbled before God, and Daniel seeks God's glory.

As we pray and eagerly expect God to answer, are our hearts bent towards our own glory or God's? Do we pray when we want something and pray according to what we want? Are we angry when God does not answer the way we think he should? That reveals a heart that is not bent towards what God want, but what the self wants.

As Daniel is praying, Gabriel comes to him. This isn't a leisurely trip that Gabriel makes. The ESV translates this here as "swift flight", but the actual wording here is "wearied weariness". Now this could be meaning that Daniel is weary, but likely it is referring to Gabriel. This is not meant to teach us anything about the physical capabilities or limitations of angels, but instead is conveying here the meaning of haste. God sent Gabriel right away! Gabriel himself says so in verse 23. As soon as Daniel started to pray at the beginning of chapter 9, God sent his Word of response via Gabriel.

So much is the sense of speed here that we get the sense that God had an answer to Daniel's prayer even before it fully left Daniel's mouth.

[We live in the days of the email and the text message. This is instant communication. I think that has conditioned us to think we need an immediate response to our requests. In fact I know on my phone I can turn on a setting that will let you know if I have opened your message, even if I haven't responded to it yet. I was a teenager when this stuff came out and I can still remember a bit of what we now call "snail mail". Snail mail is a good old fashion letter on paper and sent through the mail. I'm sure some of you can remember this better than me. Imagine having a pen pal who lived on the other side of the ocean. You would write them a letter and send it. It would take weeks or months to arrive, if it arrived at all. And you wouldn't know if it arrived at all unless you got a response. It's only if and when you got a letter back that you knew the person got it. For all you know, you could be waiting for a response, only to never get one. Did the person get your letter? Did they get your letter and send one back but it never made to you?]

Daniel had the glorious gift of an angel to reassure him that God heard him right away. We don't get that, but the same is nonetheless true. God listens to the prayers of the humble. How do I know this? Because Daniel is heard by God for the reason you are heard by God. Because you are loved by him.

Look again at verse 23. Daniel is heard because he is loved by God. The same is true for his children who are loved on account of Christ. Many people have this impression that because I'm a pastor my prayers are heard by God more than other people's. That's not true. I didn't open up a way to the throne of grace to which we can bring all our cares. Christ did. Enter into God's throne room by prayer at your time of need because Christ has opened the way for you.

If you are in Christ, you are loved by God on account of Christ, and God hears your prayers, even if you don't feel like he does.

If you have humbled yourself, confessed your need for Christ and his Lordship, then you are heard by God.

God answers our prayers, not always how we think he should, but always how is best.

V. 24 God is able to do more than we can possibly imagine.

Admittedly the rest of this chapter is hard to understand. However we understand the specifics of verse 24, I think we can know from it that God is able to do more than we can possibly imagine.

Gabriel has come to Daniel to give him the answer to his prayer and reveal what God is going to do. Here we read in Verse 24 that seventy weeks are decreed for Daniel's people and the Holy City (which is Jerusalem). Now you might be thinking "but I thought it was seventy years of captivity, not seventy weeks". You're right. So why do we have here seventy weeks?

For one thing, the language here is not exactly seventy "weeks". A more literal translation is "seventy sevens". Now obviously a week is seven days and that leads the translators of the ESV to translate this as weeks, but it does not necessarily mean week. Seven in the Bible is a number of perfection, or completeness. The fact that Gabriel here is speaking of seventy sevens may mean that he is emphasizing the completeness of what is going to happen. In other words, what is going to happen is not just complete, it's perfectly and utterly complete.

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If we continue reading, we will understand what will be accomplished by these seventy sevens. There are 6 things: To finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.

The question to me seems to be this: are we meant to understand those events happening at the time the Israelites return from exile? I don't think so. I think we are looking at events that God has planned for later, events that far exceed the accomplishments of just the Jewish nation returning from exile. I think we see these things being accomplished by Christ.

Christ takes all the transgression and sin of his people upon himself and atones for the iniquity. Christ brings in not a temporary righteousness at best that is accomplished through an animal sacrifice, but everlasting righteousness as he is the perfect sacrifice. Christ is the culmination and fulfilment of all vision and prophecy. It is not clear what I meant by anointing the most holy place. Literally it's the holy of holies, but we know that Christ by means of his sanctifying blood entered into the heavenly temple.

So you see I think this bet points to God's fulfilment of freeing his people an event greater exile than Babylon, freeing them from the exile of sin.

I think what is going on is that Gabriel is here to tell Daniel that his prayer is answered, but God is going to do immeasurably more than even Daniel can imagine! Daniel has visions of the earthly temple and earthly Jerusalem being rebuilt, but God has bigger plans than just that. Daniel has the vision of seeing the nation of Israel being restored. God has bigger plans still.

[My wife and I are both coffee drinkers. If you're a coffee drinker you will probably understand that not all coffee is created equal. If we're at home for example, and my wife asks me to make her a cup of coffee. I could make her what she expects, which is a normal coffee from the coffee maker. Or I could surprise her with what she doesn't expect, but is better than what she expects. I could grind fresh beans, and put them in the espresso machine with a little bit of cinnamon mixed in. I'd get her favourite mug and put some maple syrup in the bottom. Then I can pull the perfect shot of espresso. I could make it a latte and steam some oat milk, which she likes, with the perfect amount of froth. Finish that up with a sprinkle of maple sugar on top.] Have I answered my wife's request? Yes. Have I answered by giving her more than she expected? Yes.

How much more so does God have in store for those who love them. God has so much more than what Daniel even has in mind.

God's plan is for Christ to enter into the heavenly tabernacle, after which the earthly one was modeled. Christ entered not by the blood of animals, but by his own blood. God's plan is not just to restore an earthly Jerusalem, but to make a new Jerusalem where God will dwell with his people for all of eternity. God's plan was not just to bring back the nation of Israel from Babylon captivity, but to rescue all those who would put saving faith in him, from all nations and tribes and languages. God's plan is not to save them from human slavery, but from the slavery of sin.

Because God is able to do immeasurably more than we could imagine, we can and should pray on every occasion, and not be downhearted when it seems as though God has not given us what we ask for. Our heavenly Father knows our needs, and he only gives good gifts. Let this thought encourage you when you are in prayer, that:

God answers our prayers, not always how we think he should, but always how is best.

VV. 25-26 – What seem like troubles to us, all only serve God’s sovereign plan.

Gabriel continues his message by saying that a word to restore Jerusalem will go out, and that a prince will come. Jerusalem will be built up, but in times of trouble.

The first part seems to make sense, since we know that under Artaxerxes, he gave a decree (or word) that Jerusalem could be rebuilt. Indeed Jerusalem was rebuilt, but it wasn’t easy. They had to build the walls with swords in one hand in case their enemies tried to stop them.

But then there is mention of a prince in this same verse. This prince is also called “an anointed one”. That word meaning anointed in Hebrew is where we get the word “messiah”. Could this be *the* Messiah? Well if it is, then verse 26 seems to indicate the way Christ dies. Verse 26 says that the messiah would be cut off and have nothing. Certainly from our perspective Christ had no descendants and so he was cut off. And he had no material wealth to his name (even to the point of being laid to rest in a borrowed tomb) and so had nothing.

But then of course there seems to be a prince, whether it is this same prince or a different one we cannot tell, who shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end comes with a flood and to the end there shall be war. The destruction of the city and sanctuary certainly came in 70 A.D. Perhaps this is eluding to that.

As I said before, there are numerous interpretations to this passage, and the reasons for why different people think different things is just as numerous.

One thing that I think we can all see here, is that from our perspective, God’s plan does not seem to be smooth sailing! Jerusalem is rebuilt in times of trouble? There is a messiah who is cut off? There are times of war and Jerusalem is destroyed again? Desolations are decreed?

Is God ok? Does he have this under control? Are these dark events hindering the plan of God?

To our eyes, we see trouble and obstacles. To God’s eyes, he sees exactly as he has ordained. God causes all things to happen as he desires them to happen, and that means that even these dark events are purposed by God to bring about his sovereign will for the glory of his name.

Not only does God allow these things to happen, but he uses them for his purpose.

[I don’t know if you’ve ever had a broken bone. I haven’t thankfully. Many times a broken bone, depending on the break, just needs to be fixated and the bone will heal itself. Other times however, the bone needs to be reset. There’s only one way to do it. Move the bone back where it should be. Nowadays we have God’s good gift of anesthesia, which numbs the pain. Back before there was no anesthesia however...you get a stick to bite down on while the bone is reset. Now this would have been extremely painful, but the pain had a purpose! Resting the bone means that it can heal. Not doing so would have been worse because the bone could never have healed and the person would have probably been in pain for the rest of their life.]

God does not bring pain into our lives for no reason. Neither do the things that we consider to be troubles hinder God’s plan. Instead, he ordains all of this for our good and for his glory.

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The writer of Hebrews (Hebrews 12:11) as he or she writes about God's discipline, is that no discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Trouble is not an indication that God has failed. We see this most clearly in the suffering of Christ. Verse 26 in my opinion eludes to Christ. From our perspective he was cut off, having nothing. He died the death of a criminal, abandoned by all his friends, and experienced the full measure of God's wrath.

This didn't hinder God's plan, this *was* God's plan!

Christ, for the joy set before him, endured the cross scorning its shame. He did this for the glory of God's name, to redeem a people unto himself. The glory of the resurrection would not have happened if not first for the pain of the death of Christ.

God's glory truly shines in the darkness. As you seek God and walk in obedience to him as you trust him, don't view hardships as meaningless trouble, but as a means by which God is accomplishing all that he intends to accomplish.

If Christ endured for the glory of God, should we not do the same as his followers?

God answers our prayers, not always how we think he should, but always how is best.

V. 27. What God intends to do ultimately, may not happen immediately.

Gabriel continues to give Daniel God's answer to his prayer in verse 27. Three things are told to happen in verse 27. First, someone (who we are not told) will make a strong covenant with many for a time, and during this time he will end sacrifices and offerings. Secondly, there will come one who "makes desolate" The Hebrew here is hard to translate but this is not a good figure, that much we can tell. Thirdly and finally there is an end decreed for the desolator.

If we look at this first thing, commentators are divided. If this "he" in this part is Christ, then we can look at the covenant for a "seven", and the end of sacrifices as a good thing! Christ did in fact end the sacrifices with his death because they are no longer needed. This would be seen as Christ ushering in the Kingdom of God, and yet not fully bringing it to its climactic conclusion until his return.

If of course this is not meant to be Christ, then the covenant is an evil covenant and the ending of the sacrifices an abomination.

Either way, what happen next is the presence of one who a clear enemy of God's people. It's unclear who this is, and we could speculate, but one thing is absolutely clear. It is clear that whatever is set up against God and his people will come to an end. God has ordained and decreed that evil will one day stop. God will put an end to this desolator, whoever he may be, just as he will put an end to all evil.

God will finish what he started. Oh but how we want it now! I am so impatient often, just wanting God to finish his plan now.

[Our youngest daughter's birthday is coming up in a week and a half. She's very excited for it. She knows it will be a day of fun, she'll get some presents, eat the food she picks and get cake. There's just one problem with all of it. It's a week and a half away! And guess what, she doesn't want to wait. Now I'm

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not sovereign like the Lord, but Lord willing there will be a party! As far as it's up to Alana and myself, we will have Evy's birthday. It's coming, but she needs to wait.]

How much more can we be certain that God will one day bring an end to all things that are evil and bring his people into his presence in the New Heavens and the New Earth? And we can know this for certain because God *is* sovereign.

Every time we celebrate communion we acknowledge the sovereignty of God and we eat and drink together and proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. We can be sure that he who began a good work in us *will* carry it on the completion until the day of Christ. Jesus went to the Father to prepare a place for us and if he's going, he *will* come again to bring us to him. When God brings down the New Heavens and New Earth he *will* wipe away every tear and we *will* dwell with him.

So why wait? Peter gives us the answer. God is being patient. Who is God being patient with? You and me. In that same letter, 2 Peter, there are those who say "where is this *coming* that Jesus talked about? Everything is just going on as it has been".

So the question is, what will you do today? If you are not a Christian here today, will you mock God and ask where this "coming" is that Jesus talked about? Or will you realize that God is being patient with you, and accept his grace? We just read that God will one day bring an ultimate end to evil. Will you remain evil and rebellious against the Lord and be cast into hell? Or will you turn to Christ, have our sins washed away, and be loved on his account? Instead of Hell, you will inherit eternal life.

Chose today, because you do not know when God's patience with you will run out.

For those of us who have accepted the Lord's kindness and grace, may we be a people who pray with expectation that God will answer. But may we not be satisfied only with what we think is best, but what God thinks is best. Daniel had expectations, and they were good expectations! But ultimately, even if not immediately, God's plan was best. God always answers all prayers according to his glory, not our expectations. But the good news of that is that the magnification of his glory is the best thing for us!

God has promised us freedom from sin as we dwell with him for all of eternity. We will have to wait our own "70 7's", but we will get there, and I promise you it will be more glorious that you can possibly imagine.

God answers our prayers, not always how we think he should, but always how is best.