

Daniel 9:1-19

Exegetical Big Idea: Daniel prays for mercy and grace according to God's sovereign plan laid out in his Word, for his name's sake.

Homiletical Big Idea: **God's people are praying people, because praying people know their need for God.**

Fallen Condition Focus: As exiles, we are in desperate need of God's redemptive work in our lives, but too often we are either not praying, or our prayers are self-focused.

Background:

Today we take a little break from the heavy prophecy chapters of 7 and 8. There's more to come, but between the prophecies of the last few chapters and the prophecies of the rest of the book we have recorded here a prayer of Daniel. We find ourselves in this chapter in the first year of Darius the Mede. If you recall, Darius the Mede took over the kingdom in a single night after Belshazzar received the writing on the wall by God deciding his judgement.

So we're in a pretty big transition time for Daniel. He came into exile under Babylonian rule, and now all of a sudden it has all changed and he serves under the Medes and Persians. What I love about this, is that Daniel is not shaken up by it all! In fact, because Daniel knows his Bible, he is able to see God's hand in all of this!

Intro:

Jesus tells a parable in Luke 18. In the parable, he tells of 2 men who go up to the temple. One of them is a Pharisee, and the other is a tax collector. Jesus says that the Pharisee went up and prayed about himself. The Pharisee thanked God that he wasn't like these other sinners and tax collectors. He reminds God that he fasts twice a week and gives a tenth of all he has.

The tax collector on the other hand can't even get close, but stands at a distance. He beats his chest and prays "God have mercy on me, a sinner".

Jesus then makes the statement that it is the tax collector, not the Pharisee who went home justified before God.

Why?

The Pharisee did not take part in the sin of the tax collector, who admits that he sinned. The Pharisee not only doesn't take part in that sin, but he fasts twice a week and gives a tenth of all he has!

So how is it that the tax collector walks away justified? Because it is the tax collector who humbled himself before God, and knew his need of God's mercy. In fact we can look at the Pharisee's prayer and conclude that it's not a prayer in any real sense of the word. He's not praying to God in reality, he's simply sitting in his own self-righteousness.

When we read through the book of Daniel, we see that Daniel is steadfast in his obedience to God, that he refuses to take part in the sin of the other exiles, and that he is diligent in prayer. But which of these two characters in the parable of Christ do you think Daniel is most like?

You might think that Daniel deserves to be most like the Pharisee! His lifestyle might be closer to the Pharisee than the tax collector, but that's not who Daniel is most like. If anyone can pray the prayer of the Pharisee, it's Daniel! But as we read Daniel 9, that's not the sense we get.

Daniel, in all he's done, has no self-righteousness of his own. Daniel is a man who knows his deep need of God's mercy. We are reminded in this chapter that Daniel is just a man. He's a man of Israel who was exiled because of the sin of God's people. He's a man who deserves the righteous judgement of God. And he's a man who knows all he can do is throw himself at the mercy of God. This need of God drives him to prayer.

In this sense, we are not unlike Daniel. We are brought back to one of the main themes of this book, namely, the question of how to be God's people while in exile. We too are in exile. We too have rebelled against God and deserving of righteous judgement, and we too, need the mercy of God. It's this need that should drive God's people to prayer. This prayer of Daniel's in chapter 9 reminds us that:

God's people are a praying people, because praying people know their need for God.

VV.1-3 We can and should pray in accordance with God's true Word

We begin this chapter placed now in the first year of Darius the Mede as was said before. This change causes Daniel to recognize God's plan as predicted through the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah and Daniel were actually alive at the same time and their ministries overlap a little. Daniel is a young man when he is carried off to Babylon, but when Daniel is being taken to exile, Jeremiah has already lived through multiple kings of Judah and is likely an old man when Jerusalem is conquered. Jeremiah himself starts to be carried off into exile, but the commander of the Babylonian army finds him and frees him and Jeremiah goes back and lives with the people left in the land.

Whether Daniel knows Jeremiah personally we do not know, but it is clear here that Daniel is familiar with Jeremiah's writings, and knows they are the Word of the Lord. In particular, Daniel is reading parts of Jeremiah like Jeremiah 25:11 and 29:10

In these verses, God reveals to Jeremiah that Israel will be subject to the Babylonians for 70 years. Well guess what just happened in Daniel's day: Babylon was overthrown. Daniel knew hi Bible, and he was convinced in the sovereignty of God over kings and nations. It's this understanding of the sovereignty of God that moves Daniel to pray.

Why is this? Does Daniel think that God needs the magic of Daniel's prayers to make his plan happen? Does Daniel's prayer speed God's plan? None of that. Daniel prays in accordance with God's true Word because Daniel is confessing his need for God's plan to unfold and Daniel's will is bending to God's will.

It's the same thing when Jesus instructs his disciples (and us) to pray that God's "kingdom come, [His] will be done..." Does need our permission for his kingdom to come and his will be done? Of course not! So why pray it? To conform our will to God's, and to recognize and declare our need for him to act according to his sovereign will.

[Have you ever bought anything big that has a warranty? Have you ever had to use that warranty? Suppose you buy something with a lifetime warranty and after a while the thing breaks. How foolish would it be to think to yourself "well, I guess I'll probably take it apart and see if I can fix it myself" Of course that's foolish, you have a warranty! The wise person will take it back to the store and get a new

one. What's happening here? There was a promise made by the store, and you going to the store is simply petitioning the store to make good on the promise already made.]

How much more so should we be convinced of the sovereignty of God over all things and so be motivated to petition him according to his eternally glorious promises? And what better way to pray according to God's will and promises than to pray the promises of Scripture?

Scriptures like:

Romans 6:18 – ...Set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Mathew 28:18,20 - ...All authority on heaven and on earth has been given you (Jesus).

20-...Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Psalm 37:16-17 – Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of the many wicked; for the power of the wicked will be broken, but the LORD upholds the righteous.

Psalm 51:1-2: Have mercy on me, o God, according to your unfailing love: according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

And so many more. Guess what all of these have in common? They express our need for God to act according to his sovereign will.

When we pray in accordance with God's true Word, we don't treat God like a genie, but acknowledge his will and conform our hearts to desire God's will. That's of course why Daniel doesn't just offer up a "hey God" type of prayer. In verse 3, we read that he turns his face to God, seeks God, pleads for mercy, fasts, and weeps.

This is the action of a man who knows his need for God. When we pray, do we treat God like a genie or a pen-pal that we talk with once every few months? Or do we truly want to conform our will to his, and pray according to his true Word, expressing our need for him?

God's people are a praying people, because praying people know their need for God.

VV. 4-10 In prayer we must recognize who we are, and who God is.

Now I confess, if this were me, I'd move right into the "Yes God, get the bad guys" type of prayer. My focus would be on the judgement of God towards my enemies. But that's not the focus of Daniel's prayer. In fact Daniel sees things from a different perspective.

Daniel does not in fact focus on the Babylonians, nor does he focus on the Medes and Persians! His focus is on who God is, and who Israel is in relation to God. He understands that the exile is not ultimately a result of the Babylonians or the Persians, but is a result of the sinfulness of Israel.

Because of this, Daniel confesses the righteousness of God, and sinful failings of man. He focuses on who God is, and who people are in relation to God.

First let's look at his confession of who God is. In verse he confesses that God is great and awesome, and that he is a covenant keeping God, who keeps relationship with those who love him. In verse 7, God is righteous. In verse 9, God is merciful and forgiving.

The picture painted here of course is a God who initiates love for his people, is gracious and forgiving and who keeps his covenant promises with them. God is holy and righteous.

But how do God's people respond to the goodness of God?

In verse 5 Daniel confesses that the people have sinned and rebelled against God's laws and commands. In verse 6, the people have not listened to God's Words through the prophets. Verse 7 shows that the people belong open shame because of their treachery against the Holy God. Verse 8, there is more shame because of sin. Verse 9, the people are guilty of rebellion. And in verse 10, the people neglected the laws of God.

If you take all these together, you can see that the people have sinned by willful act of rebellion, they have sinned by omission by refusing to do the things that God has commanded, and that nobody is ignorant of God's righteous decrees since God warned them time and time again by sending prophets.

It is clear, that Daniel recognizes and confesses that God is holy, and they are not.

What's probably the most astonishing thing about this is that Daniel includes himself in this! If anyone is special, it's Daniel, but he is just as much unholy and rebellious against the Holy God as any of his fellow Israelites.

[Kids, let me tell you about taxes. Taxes is money that you have to give to the government. When you get a job, the government takes some money from your pay and they keep it for themselves to use for different things. If you think that's not much fun, you're right. You might think that you don't want to pay taxes, fine, neither do your parents, but that doesn't change the fact that you're going to have to. Some people think they're special and don't have to pay taxes. That's called tax evasion and those people go to jail. The fact is that everybody has to pay taxes, and nobody is so special that they don't have to pay taxes. Pastors aren't special. The prime minister is not special. Everybody has to pay taxes]

Oh how easy it would be for Daniel to put the blame all on the "other" Israelite. If anyone is special, and exempt from the evil of rebellion against God that's Daniel. But that's not what Daniel does.

Oh how easy it is to think of ourselves as "not that bad" or even as "basically good". And how easy it is for us to think of others as the "bad guys". Here's the reality, we are all evil.

Our nature as human beings is not good and righteous. There are many today who will tell you that you are good, but that's not true! We sin in all the same ways as Israel did. God has clearly outlined in his Word his commandments. There is not one of us who can say we have never intentionally broken his commandments. Not only that, there is not one of us who can say that we have never sinned by neglecting what God commands. And the Scriptures are clear that God gives each person a conscience, so that there is no one who is ignorant of God's requirements.

As we're going to see soon, if we have brought this upon ourselves, there is also no way we can help ourselves. Thus, we are at the mercy of God and in need of him.

God's people are a praying people, because praying people know their need for God.

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Daniel recognizes that. And it's important that Daniel recognizes that because rebellion and disobedience to God only has one consequence.

VV. 11-15 Our prayers should reflect a conviction of God's judgement on sin.

Daniel has clearly outlined that all Israel, including himself, has rebelled against God. And now he confesses that there is only one natural consequence of this, namely, God's judgement. Verse 11 shows that the curse and oath written in the Law of Moses has now come on God's people *because* they have sinned.

This should be of no surprise to Israelites. God is a righteous and just God, who keeps his promises. Daniel already confessed that. Part of the promise keeping nature of God is that he will keep the promise, that if the nation of Israel chose to turn from worshiping YHWH and turn to other gods, then he would bring destruction and exile upon them and thrust them from his presence. Which is what Daniel recognizes has happened when Nebuchadnezzar marched on Jerusalem and burned it to the ground.

But God is a God of mercy, and in his mercy he had tarried in executing his judgment and sent them prophets to warn them of the coming wrath. We see this admission in verses 12-13. In those verses Daniel writes that God confirmed his Words that he spoke to the Israelites. God wrote it down in the Law of Moses that this would come upon them if they disobeyed.

Israel has a history of not learning this. After Joshua died in the Promised Land, the people turned from God and did as they pleased. God gave them over to their enemies until God had mercy on them and sent the judges as deliverers. The people rebelled again and demanded a king like all the nations around them, so God gave them Saul, who for a time was obedient but then himself rebelled. God blessed them with David as king, but it wasn't long before David himself sinned and Solomon his son after him. After Solomon the people rebelled further and the kingdom was divided. The northern kingdom turned to idol worship and was sent into exile. The people of Judah however did not learn their lesson and followed in the footsteps of the kings of Israel. They too turned to idolatry and God judged them by sending them into exile under Babylon. And this is where the nation is in Daniel's day, but of course we know more of the story, and still Israel did not learn their lesson as they disobeyed in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. We could go on and on, but this is not just a history of the nation of Israel, it's ours as well.

God has given us his Word, and has not only outlined how we ought to live, but he has outlined the consequences of rebellion and disobedience! All those who reject God as king, and sin and rebel against him are subject to his judgement. And that includes every single human being.

And what are we to say to this? That this is unfair? Is God unjust? We cannot accuse God of that. Look at verses 14-15 again. God is righteous in all that he does! Including his judgement. Not only that, but God showed kindness to his people bringing them up out of slavery from the land of Egypt. That was purely grace, and the response? Look at the end of verse 15. Daniel admits "we have sinned, we have done wickedly"

[We are not unlike children who deliberately disobey their parents and are punished. No good parents enjoys punishing their children, but often instead give warning after warning of the consequence of their actions. And when the punishment eventually comes if the child does not turn from his or her actions, they are often in shock and awe that it is actually happening! Parents understand that the punishment is righteously warranted, and plenty of warnings given, and a good parents will discipline their children. But of course the child sees is often as unfair and mean.]

We may be older, but we're not different. God does not get some kind of sick pleasure in pouring out his wrath on sin! God has given us infinite kindness and mercy and has warned us clearly of the punishment for sin. And he is a good God, who will justly and righteously punish our sin.

I wonder, as we pray, how often we pray prayers of confession for our sin. It's not wrong to pray for our needs. It's certainly not wrong to pray and adore God for who he is. It's not wrong to ask God for help. But we must also not neglect prayers of acknowledgment of our evil.

You might think that this is just doom and gloom talk and is it really necessary? There are those who would rather not talk about sin, and just focus on the love of God. God's Word does not allow for this. We must see gravity of our sin. We must see that God has been infinitely kind to us as human beings, and our response to his kindness is just like Israel's, namely, behaving wickedly.

We must see just how bad our sin is, because it's only in seeing the darkness of our sin, can we see the light of the hope of the gospel. The more we know we have been saved from, the greater our love for God. Greater is our joy for Christ the more we can see from what we are saved from.

There's a hint of hope in verse 15. It seems as if Daniel is reminding God "you showed great kindness to us as you brought us out of exile from Egypt, do you think there is grace enough to do it again?"

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VV. 16- 19 Pray for God's mercy not because we deserve it, but for the glory of his name

So with his and his people's sin acknowledged. With the righteous judgement of God acknowledged. What then does Daniel do? He prays for God's anger and wrath to be turned away of course! Look at verse 16. Look also at verse 17. Daniel prays for God to restore the sanctuary, and by implication, his people. Look also at the beginning of verse 18. Daniel pleads with God to open his eyes and listen to Daniel's prayer.

Israel is in shame because the holy city is rubble. God's temple is burned with fire, and the nations laugh at Israel. So Daniel prays that God would restore his temple and his people.

But let's stop and ask the very important question here. On what basis does Daniel ask this? Daniel does not ask this because the people promise never to sin again. He doesn't ask God to do this because there are still some who worship him and don't bow the knee to other gods. He doesn't ask God to do this because the judgement is unfair or unjust. He doesn't ask God to do this because of the righteousness of the people. So on what basis then does Daniel ask God to turn away his wrath and listen to Daniel's prayer?

God's mercy.

Verse 18. "For we do not present our plea before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy"

But how can he do that? How can God be merciful to a people who have rebelled against him time and time again? You might say, "well they have served their time, and payed for their sin". Except for the fact that God has clearly outlined that the penalty for sin is death, not just temporary exile.

Can God truly just turn a blind eye to the sin of the people? Can he just show mercy and leave the sins unpunished? No he cannot. All of acts are righteous. He would not be a righteous God if he left sin unpunished.

The key here is that Daniel asks God not to forget his wrath, but to “turn it away” in verse 16. God’s wrath cannot just disappear, but it can be turn away. Can God’s righteous wrath and his righteous mercy somehow both be satisfied? Yes!

[Suppose you get a call from your bank. They tell you that you can just forget about your mortgage, the guy on the phone is going to delete it from his computer. Well that just wouldn’t happen. They can’t just magically disappear. Somebody has to be on the hook for the debt! But it is possible, that you get a call from your bank saying that you no longer have a mortgage because somebody has paid it for you! Why is that a possible phone call (though not likely)? Because the debt cannot just vanish, it needs to be paid. Somebody paying your mortgage for you both satisfies the requirements of the debt, and is a great deed of mercy.]

How much more infinitely merciful is the gift of Christ. At the cross, God’s righteous justice, and his righteous mercy are displayed. His justice is displayed because the wrath of God that is turned away here in Daniel chapter 9 is placed onto Christ. In fact, all of God’s wrath upon the sin of his people is placed upon Christ as he hung on the cross. But his mercy is also displayed because Christ’s fulfilment of the law of God is transferred onto us. At the same time that Christ took the wrath of God that we deserve, he gives to us who believe by faith, the gift of his perfect obedience to the law of God.

Christ does this, not because we deserve it, but for the glory of his great name. At that moment, the requirements of the covenant with God were met by Christ. And because God is a covenant keeping God, we can have complete assurance that Christ’s resurrection gained for us who believe, the hope of resurrection life.

Oh how we need the mercy of God! Oh how we need to be a church that is constantly praying for God’s mercy to be shown to us. We must be a people whose hearts and minds are centered on the mercy and grace of our God. All we do should be motivated by the unmerited goodness of our God towards us.

This is the gospel isn’t it? That God has stooped to a sinful people who cannot and would not help themselves, and has poured out mercy instead of wrath. The gospel, the good news of Jesus, should motivate everything we do, not the least of which is prayer.

Think again of this prayer of Daniel, it’s no coincidence that the prayer is simply a shadow of the gospel.

Daniel’s prayer, and the gospel, can be summed up in this: That God has revealed himself to us as a righteous covenant keeping God. We however have responded to his goodness by rebellion and sin, and all of us have gone astray. This rebellion and wickedness is rightly deserving of God’s righteous wrath. And yet, God turns his wrath away to another, Christ, and shows mercy to his people. He does this not because of anything we have done, but because of the glory of his great name.

Do we pray the gospel? My hope is that we often, and with heart that seek God, pray this gospel. Because at the heart of the gospel is the confession of our desperate need for God.

God’s people are a praying people, because praying people know their need for God.