

Message #11
Daniel

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DEALING WITH GUILT
DANIEL 9:1-19

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

One July day three boys went looking for golf balls at a country club in West Warwick, Rhode Island. They were joined there by a fourth boy who was regarded as the neighborhood bully. The four of them came to a pond, and one of the boys jumped in to look for golf balls. The bully asked the youngest member of the group if he could swim. "No," the eight-year-old replied, but the bully pushed him into the water anyway and then jumped in himself. The bully came up, but Chris DiLullo never did.

The thirteen-year-old threatened to beat up the other two boys if they ever told what really happened. He warned them that they would all end up in jail if the truth came out about Chris who drowned. So they made up a story that Chris accidentally had fallen into the water.

For almost two years they kept their secret. But during that time the bully began hearing voices and seeing visions. He barely talked to his parents. For a while he was admitted to a hospital for emotionally disturbed children. The other two boys became withdrawn. They experienced nightmares, sleeplessness, and crying spells.

Finally, a friend of the bully squealed. Police spoke to the other two boys, and they told the truth. The bully was charged with involuntary manslaughter. The other two were not charged. All three of them began to experience a measure of freedom from the prison in which they had lived for two years. (*Boston Globe*, 6/3/1984)

That mental and emotional and spiritual prison had been created largely because of the refusal of these boys to confess wrongdoing. God gave them, and God gave all of us, a conscience, which is designed to sensitize us to right and wrong and to point us toward an accountability to God. When that conscience is violated, as in the case of the three boys, life can become difficult, unless the art of confession is discovered and practiced.

When conscience is violated in a regular way and confession is not practiced, the conscience itself can be dulled and weakened. But even then a gracious and sovereign God sometimes chooses to intervene and force people to recognize their wrongdoing, especially with those who call Him their God.

That is just what He did in the Old Testament with the nation of Israel. The people as a whole had strayed away from God to the point that their consciences did not seem to bother them when they worshipped idols, honored false gods, committed adultery, and forced their fellow countrymen into slavery. They turned their backs on the God who had blessed them greatly.

So the God of Israel brought a series of judgments upon the nation that culminated in three invasions by the Babylonians. Thousands of people were killed. Most of those who were left alive were hauled off to Babylon to live in captivity. A number of years later the most prominent of these Jewish captives, Daniel, whom we have been studying in recent weeks, turned his attention to the sins of his people. He resorted to prayer. We are going to examine that prayer this morning and the situation that prompted it to see what we can learn from it.

I.

One of the questions which the Book of Daniel answers for us is this: IS GOD WORTHY OF OUR TRUST? (PROJECTOR ON--- I. IS GOD WORTHY OF OUR TRUST) Can I really trust God? This passage tells us that we can trust Him. We can trust Him for the forgiveness of sins. This passage reminds us that we are accountable to a righteous God for our sins, but it also tells us that this righteous God is merciful and that He will forgive all of our sins, even the worst imaginable sins, even those things that we would never want anyone to know about.

Verse 1 identifies the time setting for Daniel's prayer as the first year of King Darius. Darius may have been a title for Cyrus, the Persian emperor. Or this may have been the title for the governor of the province of Babylon. Whether it was Cyrus or the Persian governor the first year of the Persian ruler would have been about 538 BC. (PERSIAN EMPIRE) It was just after the Persians had conquered Babylon and about the time of the "Lion's Den" episode in #6. It was about twelve years after Daniel's vision in #8. Our hero was probably now in his early eighties.

During Daniel's long life of obedience and faithfulness he had learned much about the character of God. (PROJECTOR OFF) Notice the two characteristics of God that are singled out in Daniel's prayer.

First, in v. 9 he says, "**To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness...**" The Hebrew words for these two adjectives are in the plural form. The Jews used that form when they wanted to stress a particular quality. So Daniel is, in effect, saying, "**To the Lord our God belong great tender mercy and great forgiveness.**" God is a loving God. To those who turn to Him His love is boundless. They find Him to be compassionate.

Daniel also recognized that God is a righteous God. In v. 7 he declares, "**To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness...**" Righteousness is an essential characteristic of God. The violation of this righteousness on the part of His creatures creates a problem. Thus Daniel goes on to say in v. 7, "**...but to us [belongs] open shame.**" Why? Because His people had turned away from Him. They had fallen into idol worship and worship of other gods. They had rejected the God who had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, who had brought them through the wilderness, and who had miraculously enabled them to conquer the land of Canaan.

People today in our culture like to think of God as a loving God. But most of the time they don't like to think of Him as a righteous God. For the realization that there is a righteous God around implies that we are accountable to someone beyond ourselves for our actions. We can't just do with out bodies what we want to do.

Commenting on a survey that he did several years ago on the values and religious beliefs of Americans, George Barna says, **“Gone, too, is a sense of necessity for accountability for our actions. Over the last 25 years we have consistently built a mindset which allows us to view each person as responsible only to himself. Americans today generally ignore the aspects of confession or the deeper meaning and obligations associated with a vertical relationship with God.”** We Americans are losing our sense of accountability to a sovereign God. God is loving, and God is righteous. We must keep both of these attributes in view.

Just as God portrays those two qualities to us, we also are to portray them to our children. If we neglect either of these qualities in our parenting, we end up with trouble. Strict parents who lack love will tend to produce children who are resentful and angry and underconfident. Parents who are compassionate and loving but who do not require righteous behavior will tend to produce children who are undisciplined and disrespectful of authority.

It seems to me that American parenting tends to reflect the general American view of God. God is loving, but He is not righteous. So the danger that we Americans more often face in our parenting is that we do not insist on righteous behavior from our kids. We are afraid to use discipline or to impose our will on the children. Thus we tend to have a problem with undisciplined and disrespectful kids and children who drive their parents crazy in the process. If we Christian parents can find the right balance, we can display an important testimony to our kids and to people around us about the character of the true God.

The death of Jesus is the ultimate example of both the righteousness and the love of God. Because God is righteous, sin is an abomination to Him. It demands death. Yet because God is loving, he wants to provide a way of escape for His judgment. The only satisfactory way out of judgment is the provision of a substitute. To satisfy the demands of a righteous God, that substitute must have infinite value and must be sufficient to pay the penalty for the sins of the world.

Enter in Jesus Christ, God who became man, the Second Person of the Trinity. Because of God's love for us, He sent His Son to provide deliverance for us. Because God is righteous, he required payment, or judgment, for our sin. Jesus as a human being could serve as our representative. Because He was God, his sacrifice has infinite value. Thus the death of Jesus Christ is where ultimate justice and love meet. To enter into the benefit of this sacrifice, this provision of forgiveness for our sins, we must accept this provision as a gift. We must trust in Jesus.

II.

(PROJECTOR ON--- HOW SHOULD WE LIVE IN AN OFTEN GODLESS SOCIETY?)

The second question that the Book of Daniel answers for us is: HOW SHOULD WE LIVE IN AN OFTEN GODLESS SOCIETY? This passage teaches us three lessons in that regard.

A.

First, WE NEED TO MAKE PRAYER A PRIORITY. (II. A. WE NEED TO MAKE PRAYER A PRIORITY.) In chapter 6 we saw that Daniel had a practice of praying three times each day. Here we see him praying again. We also find that his devotional time included Bible study. In fact his prayer life, at least this day, was centered upon God's Word. Sometimes we don't know how to pray effectively because we haven't learned enough about the character of God which is revealed to us in the Bible. (DANIEL'S PRAYER)

Here in this model prayer we find at least three elements. Daniel includes praise (v. 4), confession (vv. 5-14), and petition (vv. 15-19). This would make a good outline for his prayer.

In v. 2 we find that Daniel was studying Jeremiah's prophecies. Notice what he says: **"I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years."**

There were two places in Jeremiah's book where the prophet made reference to a seventy year exile. One was in #25 vv. 11-12 (JEREMIAH 25:11), which says, **"This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. (JEREMIAH 25:12) Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the Lord, making the land an everlasting waste..."**

The second passage is #29 v. 10 (JEREMIAH 29:10), which says, **"For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place."** As Daniel read these words, I imagine that he wondered about the exact time period to which they referred. We saw earlier that there was a series of three invasions of Israel by the Babylonians. Did the Lord intend that this 70- years should begin at the first Babylonian invasion, when Daniel was taken into captivity in 605 BC? That was 67 years earlier. Or did the Lord mean for that time period to begin at the second invasion (597 BC), or maybe the third invasion in 586 or 587 BC, when the temple in Jerusalem was leveled?

(PROJECTOR OFF)

Daniel believed in the literal interpretation of God's prophecies. So I suspect that he was praying that the Lord might regard that first invasion of Judah in 605 BC as the

beginning of the 70 year period. That would mean that the exile could be coming to an end soon. In the middle of v. 19 in our passage he cries out, **“O Lord... delay not.”**

The Lord heard Daniel's prayer. For we read in Ezra #1 that in the first year of the reign of Cyrus the Persian, the same year in which Daniel prayed this prayer, the king issued a decree that the Jews should be allowed to return and rebuild the city of Jerusalem. A group of exiles returned shortly thereafter, about 70 years after the first Babylonian invasion. The temple itself was finally rebuilt in 515 BC, 71 years after it had been destroyed in the third Babylonian invasion. The Lord may have had both of these intervals in mind, perhaps rounded off a year or two, when He made the original prophecy about the 70 years.

The question also naturally arises: If we have a sovereign God who has decreed everything that comes to pass, what difference does Daniel's prayer make, and what difference does our prayer make? The answer is that God has chosen to use our prayers as a means of accomplishing His sovereign purposes. In Jeremiah 29 v. 10, when the Lord prophesies the 70 year captivity, He goes on to say (PROJECTOR ON--- JEREMIAH 29:12-14A) two verses later, **“Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. 13 You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you...”** Prayers of his people were central to His plan.

Prayer does make a difference. In an often godless society we need to make prayer a priority. It needs to be part of our personal devotions, and it needs to be part of our church life. We would love to have you join us on Wednesday mornings at 11 AM by Zoom. We would be happy to set you up for that. We also have prayer at 9:15 on Sunday mornings in my office. As we pray we can remember that the most effective prayer is that which is based upon the promises and the teachings of God's Word.

B.

The second thing that this passage teaches us is the that WE NEED TO CONFESS SIN. (II.A.B.WE NEED TO CONFESS SIN.) The Lord had very carefully laid out to the nation of Israel what would happen to its people if they disobeyed His commands. In Leviticus #26 and Deuteronomy #28 He warned that if they turned away from Him, He would bring disease upon them, He would cause famines, he would enable their enemies to defeat them, he would make them become few in number, and he would scatter them among the nations. Israel turned away from God, and eventually He brought all of these bad things to happen to the Jews.

So what could Daniel do about it? According to v. 3 in our text, **“Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.”** In v. 4 he adds, **“I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession...”** It seems to me that the key word here is “confession.” The original Hebrew word meant “to throw, or cast.” In this grammatical formulation it means “to confess.”

The same passages in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 which spoke about the curses that would come upon Israel for apostasy also spoke about the remedy of confession. In Leviticus #26 v. 40 and following (LEVITICUS 26:40,42) God said, **“But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me... then I will remember my covenant...”** In other words, “I will forgive you.” The remedy was confession. God required from them that they admit their wrongdoing.

When we believers in Jesus sin, we also erect barriers that disrupt our ongoing relationship with God. If we continue to turn away from God, He will also discipline us, as a good father disciplines His children. He is patient at first, but if we continue to be resistant, He will use harsher methods to get our attention. The remedy for our situation is the same as for that of the Jews. (1 JOHN 1:9)

In 1 John #1 v. 9 the apostle says, **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness..”** Our need is for confession. As Christians we still have sin natures, and we still sin regularly. So our confession also needs to be regular. (PROJECTOR OFF)

There are two primary things that this passage teaches about confession that is pleasing to God. The first is the importance of sincerity. When I sin against my wife in some way, and she points it out to me, my inclination is to make a quick apology and move on. That doesn't always cut it. In order for a proper relationship to be restored with her, I have to display some measure of sincerity.

Daniel was sincere with his confession. In v. 3 we are told that his prayer was accompanied by fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. Daniel's sincerity seemed to stem from his recognition of the seriousness of Israel's sin.

In v. 4 Daniel begins by recognizing that God is great and awesome and loving and faithful to His covenant with Israel. But in contrast to this Daniel's people have been sinful, and their sin has been three dimensional. It has been deep and wide and high.

It is deep in that it is serious sin. Chapter 9 is the only chapter in the book in which the personal name for God, YHWH, appears. That name is used seven times in the chapter. That name was especially used in the Old Testament in contexts dealing with God's personal care for Israel. Among all of the nations of the world Israel was the only one that was chosen to be the object of God's special covenant. But Israel had rejected YHWH, its covenant God. As v. 6 notes, it would not listen to the prophets whom He had graciously sent to warn the Jews. Israel's sin was serious. It was deep.

Not only was it deep, but also it was wide. Israel was guilty of all kinds of sins. Notice the different terms that Daniel uses to describe the sins of His people. Verse 5: We have sinned. We have done wrong. We have acted wickedly. We have rebelled. We have turned aside from Your commandments and rules. Verse 6: We haven't listened to your prophets. Verse 10: We have not obeyed. Verse 11: We have transgressed Your

law. We know from Old Testament history that Daniel was referring to sins of the nation that ranged from idol worship to ignoring the Sabbath to mistreatment of the poor to immorality.

Israel's sin was deep, and it was wide and it was also high. The lowest segment of society to the highest segment of society were guilty. Verse 8 says, **"To us, O Lord, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you."** Verse 11: **"All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside."** Israel's sin was deep and wide and high. It was serious sin.

When we Christians confess, we too need to recognize the seriousness of our sin. Sin is serious. It is a violation of the character of God. The wages of sin is death. Ultimately God sent His Son to die on the cross because of our sin.

The sincerity of Daniel's confession is also seen in that he does not try to pass off the blame. I don't see any "buts" in Daniel's prayer. "We may have sinned Lord, but certainly not as bad as those Moabites over there." Or, "We may have sinned Lord, but I wasn't involved in it." Daniel refuses to minimize guilt or personal responsibility. He does not try to pass the buck. His confession of sin is sincere.

In an often godless society we need to learn the art of confession. One of the primary things that God desires from us is sincerity. "O God, I have sinned, and I acknowledge that my sin is serious, and I am responsible. I am to blame."

I don't like to do that. Most of us don't like to do that. Our sinful nature doesn't like to be accountable to anyone beyond ourselves. But as Christians we are accountable to God. So we need to confess our sins to Him, and we need to do it with sincerity. Sometimes our sin requires us to confess to others. The response from Him is always forgiveness, full and free. We are forgiven and cleansed.

The other thing that Daniel's prayer teaches us about the need for confession has to do with the basis that we have for any expectation of forgiveness. Verse 18 says, **"O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy."** There is nothing in and of ourselves that provides forgiveness for our sins. That is why we need confession. It is entirely God's gracious and merciful character and our turning to Him that provides us with forgiveness of sins. When we trust in Jesus as our Savior, we have eternal forgiveness of sins. Our eternal destiny is secure. But to maintain a proper ongoing relationship, we need to confess our wrongdoings to Him.

The mother of a French prisoner once went to Napoleon to plead for the life of her son. She said, **"I do not plead for justice, I plead for mercy."** He replied, **"He does not deserve mercy."** **"Sir, if he deserved mercy, it would not be mercy."**

Because of that response the son's life supposedly was spared. We do need to confess our sins to God, realizing that the basis for that forgiveness is God's mercy and that what God requires of us is sincerity.

C.

The third lesson that we need to grasp to live in an often godless society is that **WE NEED TO BE CONCERNED FOR GOD'S REPUTATION.** (PROJECTOR ON--- II.A.B.C. WE NEED TO BE CONCERNED...) In the last four verses of the prayer we see the genuine concern that Daniel has for God's reputation. Daniel was concerned because God had chosen to bless the Jewish people. He had identified Himself with them. He had made Jerusalem a holy city. He had caused the Jews to build a temple there so that this would be a unique place of worship to the one true God. But now His chosen people had been humiliated. His temple and His city had been wiped out. What would other people think about their God?

Thus Daniel prays in v. 19, **"O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name."** So often the focus of our attention is our own reputation. How am I coming across? What does this person think of me? Did he like what I wore? Did I say something stupid? Did I say something clever?

In an often godless society the Lord desires us to have regard for His reputation. The Lord's Prayer begins, **"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name..."** In other words, "May Your name be holy. May your reputation be excellent in the world around me." The implication is that we should have concern for how we promote the reputation of the true God. How did I reflect the Lord in my conversation with this person? Did I encourage this person in the faith? Did I make Jesus attractive to this unbeliever? How is my Christian family or group or church doing in presenting a good testimony to the world? Are we presenting a fragrant aroma to those who are perishing? (PROJECTOR OFF)

One final thought. There are few characters described in the Old Testament who do not have noticeable flaws. Daniel is an exception. He is presented as a man of integrity and faithfulness with no obvious flaws. This makes it all the more notable that he identifies himself so completely with his fellow countrymen in his prayer of confession.

There is a kind of parallel here with our Lord Jesus Christ. Unlike Daniel our Lord was totally sinless. Yet this Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God, chose to so identify Himself with us that he became a human being. Not only did He become a human being, but He also bore our sin by dying on the cross in our place to pay the penalty for our sin.

That sacrifice alone does not make us a Christian. In order to have eternal life, we too must confess. We do not need to confess all of our individual sins but rather the fact that we are a sinner and are totally unable to save ourselves from the penalty of our sins. When we make that confession and then put our trust in Jesus as our personal

Savior, we receive the gift of eternal life and become a true Christian. If you have never done that, make that decision today.