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| Topic | Prayer for forgiveness |
| Reference | Daniel 9 v1-19 |
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What spiritual postures should we adopt when we pray, not only when we pray for forgiveness but also generally whenever we pray. In our text today we see Daniel pouring his heart out when he comes before God in prayer and confession. It sounds like he is praying and confessing on behalf of all Israelites like a sort of corporate prayer, but in verse 20

**20** While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the LORD my God for the holy hill of my God,

So it appears that as much as it is a corporate prayer, it is also a private prayer for Daniel himself, Daniel is without sin and this prayer of Daniel chapter 9 is one of the most instructive passages of the Old Testament.

Daniel 9:3-4

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

**4** I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed:

I got married to my wife in 1994 thanks to our Japanese MD, because if not for him I wouldn’t have met the woman who would later become wife. Over my 22 years of marriage, my wife and I have been having this growing sense that it was God who brought us together and that our boss’s action was merely a part of his sovereign plan, which is to say, we came to believe in a God who intervenes in our lives, who arranges things in our past. So that everything happens according to His sovereign will.

The first two verses give us the historical background to the chapter.

**1** In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom —

Whenever necessary it is worthwhile to read certain portions of scripture in their historical context, so that we can get more out of our study of God’s word. In the Book of Daniel, Daniel was not in Jerusalem but he was held in captivity in Babylon. In 606 BC he was exiled as a young man to the capital of the Babylonian kingdom. At that time the east empire was at the height of its power. There was a king in Judah at that time, King Jehoiakim but he was a weak king and he was subjugated by the more powerful and famous Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, who took many Israelites as captives to Babylon and these deportation of the Jews to Babylon took place in four waves from 606 BC to 581 BC and Daniel was amongst the first wave of captives.

There are some clear tablets kept at the British Museum known as the Babylonian Chronicles excavated in the 19th century more than 100 years ago in modern day Iraq. Interestingly, there is a particular piece of tablet because it records the events in the Babylonian empire from the year 605 BC to 594 BC and it mentions the captivity of the Israelites in Babylon. It proves that Bible is not a collection and myths and fables, it is well authenticated by archeology.

Between Daniel chapter 1 and chapter 9 today, Nebuchadnezzar have already captured the city of Jerusalem and completely destroyed the temple and that happened in the year 586 BC, a very important year in Bible history as Jerusalem and the temple was completely destroyed and that happened 20 years after Daniel arrived at Babylon and just two decades and the city was gone, but the Babylonian empire did not last very long after that, only for another less than 50 years. So by the time we get to Daniel chapter 9 verse 1, the Babylonians have just been conquered by an even more powerful Medo-Persian empire, led by another powerful king, Cyrus the great and they covered an area even larger than the earlier Babylonian empire.

To summarize,

**Timeline** from Daniel 1 to Daniel 9

**1) First wave of exiles** (including Daniel) **606BC**

**2) Second wave of exiles 597BC**

**3) Destruction of Jerusalem & Temple 586BC**

**4) Third wave of exiles … 586BC**

**5) Fourth wave of exiles … 581BC**

**6) Start of Medo-Persian Empire** (Cyrus the Great) **… 539BC**

**7) Daniel’s prayer in Daniel 9:1 … 538BC**

So 20 years from the time Daniel arrived at Babylon in 606 BC until the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 586 BC, makes it 20 years. And then another 47 years before the Babylonian empire was conquered by the Medo-Persian Empire. So at the point in Daniel chapter 9 verse 1, the year was 538 BC and the Israelites have been in captivity for 68 years.

Darius was a governor appointed by Cyrus the great to take charge over by Babylonian territory within the large empire, who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom. Darius was a king from a region known as Media, which is south of the Caspian Sea.

**2**……… 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.

The Israelites especially Daniel were very distressed over the disaster that had fallen upon them, exile to Babylon and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. They had been taken by force to a foreign land and their own city, Jerusalem has been destroyed, their temple was gone but Daniel knew his Bible well, he had been diligently studying the word of God. Specifically from

**Jeremiah 29:10**

This is what the Lord says: “When **seventy years** are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place.”

Daniel knew that this disastrous period known as the Babylonian captivity would only last 70 years. At the point of Daniel chapter 9 verse 1, 68 years has passed, so there are two years to go. There is another passage in the Book of Jeremiah which states that God’s promise of 70 years was conditional, “if the Israelites were not repentant and were still disobedient then God might extend the exile and they might as well forget about Jerusalem and the temple”. Hence we have Daniel coming to the Lord in this intense prayer in and as he approach God in deep confession because two more years to go before the exile was supposed to end and Daniel pours his heart out and beg God to keep His promise.

The end of the story was, Cyrus the great was sympathetic to the plight of Israelites and in 538 BC, the year that Daniel prayed this prayer and after he prayed this prayer, Cyrus the great issued a decree to allow the Israelites to return to Judah and to rebuild their temple and two years later in 536 BC, the foundation stone of the second temple was laid marking the end of 70 years of Babylonian captivity.

***Some Thoughts for Reflection***:

The Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar was famous for taking the Israelites out of their land and destroying their temple. Cyrus the great, the Persian king on the other hand is well known for allowing the Israelites to return to their land and helping them to build the temple. Now both of these kings in their respective place and time in history they did what they did. They acted in accordance to their plans and their strategies and their objectives, yet at the same time scripture is so clear that it was the mighty hand of God moving through the pages and chapters of history, intervening in the lives of his people, so that everything turns out exactly according to His will. People do what they had to do, they act according to the plans they have for themselves or their businesses and yet behind the scene, unknown to us at that particular time, it is God who is arranging things, intervening in our lives.

How should be our attitude about prayer? There are four key lessons that we learn from this passage.

1. Pray with Fear & Trembling
2. Pray with Confidence
3. Pray with Humility
4. Pray with Expectation

1) Pray with Fear and Trembling:

Our God is a great and awesome God. When Daniel starts his prayer, he begins by declaring in verse 4

**4** Lord, the great and awesome God,

So from the onset he acknowledges that the God he worships is mighty and powerful, He is in absolute control and there is nothing that has happened or is happening or will happen that is outside the bounds of His will. The Bible often speaks of the mighty hand of Gog, including this chapter in verse 15

“Now, Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand

How do we take in the greatness and awesomeness of God?

It is not easy, may be it is impossible, perhaps not in our lifetime, not in this current state, but there will be one day when we approach the throne of God physically we will be able to gain a full measure of God’s glory and majesty.

Isaiah chapter 6 and Revelation chapter 4 describes the throne of God in heaven and when we see what is happening around the throne of God, you cannot help but respond with awe and wonder. We will start to use the term almighty God differently and more seriously. The acknowledgement of God’s power and sovereignty, His glory and majesty, if we would acknowledge these attributes of God it will launch our prayers in a different trajectory that will bring us to a higher level of communion with God.

When we acknowledge God’s power and greatness our soul lips and respond to who He is. Hence when should always start our prayer like Daniel by worshiping his greatness and awesomeness, by acknowledging His power and sovereignty, His glory and majesty.

The first lesson that we learn is that we should pray with fear and trembling. These two words appear often in the Bible and they can be misunderstood. What the term fear and trembling really means is more of respect and reverence. To respect means to have a deep sense of admiration for someone because of his abilities or qualities. To revere means to hold someone in high esteem or to think highly of someone and this is the tone we find in Daniel’s prayer. Daniel’s prayer is first and foremost marked by reverence for God. Paul himself also used this term fear and trembling in

Philippians 2:12

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence — continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,…

This verse is sometimes wrongly used to frighten Christians that they can lose their salvation if they fail to do this or that, but what Paul was trying to say is that as we press on, as we strive to be more Christ like and to be more obedient and that is what he means by working out your salvation. As we continue to grow and mature, we do so with a healthy dose of a sense of awe or in attitude of respect and reverence for God for who He is.

2) Pray with Confidence:

The basis of this is that our God is a loving God. In verse 4 after he addresses God as a great and awesome God, Daniel describes God as a God who keeps His covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments. In other words, our God is in the covenantal relationship with his people and that relationship is based on love or in short, God loves us and wants to have a relationship with us.

Daniel 9:23 (NIV)

As soon as you began to pray, a word went out, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed.

So Daniel is told that he is highly esteemed. In the NKJV it says, you are greatly beloved and in the NLT they have it as you are very precious to God. The angel is telling Daniel that God loves you. What does this mean to us when we come to God in prayer, God loves us and if we are in an intimate and functioning relationship with God it changes everything including our prayers. The trouble with us is that while we profess we love God, our actions in our lifestyle indicate otherwise. In reality we only love God to a certain extent, only to a degree that is convenient to us according to our terms. Our relationship with God often is not as deep as it should be, so it isn’t it any wonder that our prayer life is also weak and it has been ineffective.

Year after years statistics show that the number of atheist is increasing and church attendance is dropping. The world is not what is supposed to be. We see acts of terrorism on a monthly basis nowadays. Why the world is descending into chaos? We often look out the window and we tend to say that this is not what is supposed to be. Why the world is descending into chaos? But there is also a suggestion that instead of just looking outside the window we should also look into the mirror. We should also look at ourselves and ask, “Are we the person that we are supposed to be?” Are we in a close relationship with God that we are supposed to be in?

If we are in an intimate and functioning relationship with God it would change everything. How can we expect to live our lives the way it should be lived without reading the Bible and without praying? How can our lives be purposeful? How can our prayer life be effective without an intimate relationship with our manufacturer, our God? When we are in an intimate relationship with God we can approach God with confidence, just like our children, they come to us in confidence because they know we love them and they love us. God loves Daniel and Daniel loves God and he is in a close relationship with God. That’s why Daniel’s prayer here is also marked by a sense of confidence that you can detect throughout the prayer. His motivation is that he knows God personally and he can come before God confidently.

3) Pray with Humility:

Our God is a righteous God. Daniel in his prayer says this three times in verses 7, 14 and 16.

**7** “Lord, you are righteous,

**14** the Lord our God is righteous in everything he does

**16** Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts,

When we say God is righteous it means that He is holy, He is pure and perfect meaning, He cannot tolerate the slightest sin and not a trace of sin can be found in him or near him. It also means that he is a fair and just God and He did and will punish all sins and wrongs. If God does not hold sinners accountable for their sins, if God does not meet out judgment against evil then this God is not worthy of our worship, He would not be God by definition.

In our text five of the verses point to God’s judgment upon the Israelites

**7** “………you have scattered us …..

**11** …… curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, ……

**12** ……..bringing on us great disaster.

**13** all this disaster has come on us,

**14** …… bring the disaster on us, .

Why did God punish them? In the years and even centuries before the events in the Book of Daniel, the Israelites have turned away from God, they have rebelled against him. They worship idols and broke many of his commandments. God was super-patient with them, He sent prophet after prophet to warm them but to no avail and finally He had to act. In His righteousness He acted through the Babylonians. God is love and at the same time God is righteous. They are two sides of the same coin. Now it is easier to appreciate the loving God but is much harder to grasp or to take in the idea of a righteous and holy God, but how does an awareness of God’s righteous help shift our attitude during prayer, by making us realize the sinfulness of our sin, so that we can remove any trace of self-righteousness and self-justification, so that we can draw even close to God. The more we perceive God’s righteousness, the deeper will be our prayer. Isaiah chapter 6 describes the throne of God. From that passage we will notice that in a close encounter with God a person realizes the depth of his sins. When Isaiah saw God in all His holiness he reacted by crying out,

Isaiah 6:5

“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”

It is important to note that in the presence of God who is righteous Isaiah suddenly became very aware of the sinfulness of his sins. It is also important to note that Isaiah was no ordinary person, he was the prophet of God, yet he describe himself as unclean and this is what it means by praying with humility.

The key to a more intense prayer is to be aware of the immense gap between the exalted height of God’s righteousness and the utter depth of our sins. The bigger we perceive this gap the deeper will be your prayer and this gap would seem smaller if we harbor any measure of self-righteousness and self-justification and the result would be a half-hearted confession or a half-cooked remorse. Confession is admitting you have done wrong, remorse is regretting you have done wrong and confession is meaningless without remorse.

In our text we see Daniel in deep confession and sincere remorse. Because in 11 of the 19 verses, he list the sins of his people by using to pronounce, we, us, our, he is including himself as the amidst of all the wrongs that he and his people have committed.

**5** we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws.

**6** We have not listened to your servants the prophets,

**7** we are covered with shame, we have been unfaithful

Verse 8 to 11 and 13 to 16 he repeats and repeats the mention of all of these transgressions over and over again. So this is not to say that we should employ reputation in our confessions, no we should avoid meaningless reputations but here we get the sense that Daniel keeps repeating himself because he is truly sorry for what he and his people have done. He reflects the sincerity of his remorse. When you are sincerely remorseful like Daniel you do not attempt to mitigate the punishment. There is no hint of mitigation in Daniel’s prayer. We only see humility in the face of righteous God. Daniel says in verse 18

We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy.

For us we often try to excuse our mistakes. When sorry is followed by but then it is not sincere remorse; because confession and mitigation cannot go together.

Isaiah 66:2

Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?” declares the Lord. “These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word.

We should lower ourselves and pray with humility.

4) Pray with Expectation:

Our God is a merciful and forgiving God. Daniel mentions this in his prayer in verse 9.

**9** The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving,

He repeats this in verse 18

**18** ……..because of your great mercy.

Earlier in our lesson 2 we saw how God is a God of love. He loves us but He hates sin at the same time. However, because of his nature as a merciful and forgiving God we sinners have hope yet, because of what Daniel knows about God and His mercies and His forgiving nature, he decides to beseech God to turn away from His anger and His wrath from verse 16. He is counting on God’s mercy. As lamentations 3:23 tells us

His mercies are new every morning…

Daniel is so optimistic that God will act according to his merciful nature. It gives him a sense of boldness towards the end of his prayer. The last three verses of our text are pretty remarkable. Daniel concludes his prayer with amazing audacity.

**17** “Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary.

**18** Give ear, our 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 we are righteous, but because of your great mercy.

**19** Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.”

Even as Daniel prays he can only hope that God will relent. As explained earlier he knows from Jeremiah 29, the exile was supposed to end in 70 years but he also read from Jeremiah 18 that suggest that this promise may be conditional. So he was thinking to not have, they have been punished sufficiently for their evil and wickedness has the wrath of God been satisfied. It is the only hope and there is no guarantee because they still might be sinning in their midst.

The temple that Israel built in 516 BC was again destroyed later by the Romans in 70 AD and the brutal Roman army worse than the Persians, they completely desolated the temple and not a stone was left standing. This was under a separate and a different more severe judgment from God and in that year 1870, another important year in Jewish history the Jews were expelled mostly to Europe but later they were found in many parts of the world. The second exile of Jewish lasted from 70 AD until recently in 1948 when God again in his mercy allowed the Jews to return once again to the Holy Land. This second exile lasted almost 1900 years. If we compare these both exiles, the 70 years of Daniel exile is quite short, nevertheless he still appeals to God’s mercy and he hope that his compassion will pre-gain.

If Daniel would have prayed after the atoning work of Christ on the cross, he would have prayed not just with hope but with expectation because when Jesus died on the cross he bore the punishments for all of humanity sins including the Israelites. We on this side of the cross, we can come before God with a blessed assurance that not only is He merciful and forgiving but He has already showed his mercy and he has already forgiven because of the work of Christ on the cross, so we need only to embrace his mercy and forgiveness.

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

That is why we can pray with expectation.

In our journey of life God may not hold back the rain all the time (metaphorically speaking), but when we pray deeply and earnestly with the right attitude it would lead us to a higher level of trust and faith in God, so that we may rest in his faithlessness.

How do we acquire the right attitude during our prayers?

Keeping up with God’s commandments is not easy, we have to allow Holy Spirit to work in us, to counsel us and to help us to love God and obey His commandments.