

A Prayer for Other People

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Date: 01 November 1998

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service on November the 1st 1998. The preacher is Phil Millman. His sermon is entitled A Prayer for Other People and is from Daniel chapter 9 verses 1 to 19.

Amen.

Prosperity for ourselves, for our families, for friends. Do we pray for our holidays? Times of sadness? Times of great atrocities perhaps that we see throughout the world?

While all these things are not wrong in themselves to pray for, I wonder what motives or agendas that we have when we are praying for these things.

Dear God, I pray for my exams, that I will do well and that I get good marks to get into university. Dear God, I pray that you will provide enough money for my retirement, a good house that is maintenance free and that you will provide me with good health so that I can travel and see your beautiful world.

[1 : 42] Dear God, I pray for my family, that we would all be kept safe as we holiday in Hawaii this year. Dear God, I pray for X who has been caught stealing. I pray that he would not be like this anymore and that he would be like me, a good and upright person in the community.

Or perhaps these are prayers that people pray as they feel moved. And while they are not necessarily wrong in themselves, after all, God wants us to bring all our needs before him in prayer, I wonder whether our prayers go any deeper.

Does our prayer look beyond ourselves and to the needs of others and especially to God's promises being fulfilled?

That's what we see here as we look at Daniel's prayer in Daniel chapter 9. And you may like to turn to page 726 as we have a look at this this morning.

Daniel's prayer in this chapter is a prayer of confession, corporate confession and supplication to God. It is also a prayer that God's people will bring honour to God's name.

[3 : 15] Now, Daniel is a prophet who lived during the time of Israel's exile. As a young man, he had been taken prisoner by the Babylonian army when Jerusalem was captured.

The city of Jerusalem has been destroyed and the temple has been destroyed and basically it's lying in ruins. So Daniel and a few of his friends are carted off in their early years to Babylon where they become important officials in the Babylonian government.

Now, the worldly influences around him and his friends at that time would have been very strong. The temptation to abandon God was perhaps a real possibility for them.

But they remained completely faithful to their Lord, even when it meant risking their lives. And I'm sure you can think of some stories in the book of Daniel which we'll attribute to that.

They also would no doubt have been a very prayerful people, coming before God with their own needs as well as the needs of others.

[4 : 29] And now here in chapter 9, we see that Daniel is driven to pray for Israel. And what is it that causes him to pray?

The answer, I think, is seen in verse 2. Let me read. In the first year of his reign, Darius, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that according to the word of the Lord to the prophet Jeremiah, must be fulfilled for the devastation of Jerusalem, namely 70 years.

What is happening here? Daniel is reading the scriptures or the scroll that he probably had. And he's reading from the writings of the prophet Jeremiah about how long Jerusalem will lie in ruins for.

And as he is reading the scriptures, his mind is gripped by what he is reading, by what it is saying to him. And for him it must have been an enormously enlightening experience.

For the facts that he observed around him clashed with the words that he sees written here in scripture. Israel is in exile. Jerusalem lies in ruins.

[5 : 52] And he must say to himself, God has foretold this situation through the prophet Jeremiah. This has been written about the circumstances that they are in. So his mind here is gripped by the written word.

It is gripped by scripture. And as a result, out of reading scripture and out of understanding it, the desire and the urge to pray was born.

What causes him to pray then? God's written word causes Daniel to pray. The situation before him creates conflict within.

And it is expressed visibly as he decides to fast. As we read on a little bit further. That he decides to fast and wear sackcloth to bring his prayer and supplication to God.

Just like our society wears black to mourn. The people of that society back then adorned sackcloth in times of trouble or great sorrow. Now I suspect that or I doubt any conflict would have arisen had Daniel taken the scriptures lightly or lacked concern for his people.

[7 : 05] But he takes scripture seriously. I wonder whether we take scripture seriously or whether scripture just drifts over us as the world drifts by.

The sort of conflict I'm talking about could be focused on a specific circumstance. For example, we may be reading the Bible and a command or a promise of scripture may bear upon an immediate situation in our own lives.

So, we ought according to scripture, as the scriptures say, be able to forgive such and such, someone who's done something wrong to us. Scripture says, but you may say to yourself, I can't forgive that person.

I can't, it's just too hard, the pain is just too much. I've tried, but my feelings don't go away. Yet the scripture brands your conscience.

Colossians chapter 3 verse 13, for instance, says, Bear with one another, and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

[8 : 26] Where scripture and your experience clash, don't run away from the tension or the conflict that it builds up within.

Let it become the energizer of earnest prayer. In the Christian life, you need, perhaps we need more tension, not less, if you are able to do the will of God.

And that's what Daniel did. He grappled with the tension between God's word and reality, the situation that was confronting him. He dealt with the tension and the conflict it created for him.

What did he do? He took it to God. He turned to God in prayer. He didn't let what he read go in one ear and out the next. Rather, he paid attention to what scripture said.

And in doing so, as he read the scriptures, it drove him to prayer. So what is the content of his prayer? Well, as I said a few moments ago, it's a prayer of confession.

[9 : 35] Not just for himself, but for other people as well. Daniel here is interceding on behalf of the nation Israel that is lying in exile, that is scattered and so on.

And his prayer begins in verse 4 by acknowledging whose presence he has come before. And we read here in verse 4 the words, These are words which are virtually a repeat of Nehemiah's prayer in a book earlier on in the Old Testament.

It perhaps reflects a prayer, a liturgical sort of prayer of confession used by God's people in those times. And we see here in the words, covenant and steadfast love of the Lord here, that they show up, the covenant, the faithfulness and the steadfast love of the Lord, that they show up in contrast to our own human fickleness and disloyalty.

And what this does is appropriately introduces a prayer that depends for its appeal on the reliability of the word of God.

So you get the sense here that Daniel knows just who it is that he is coming before to pray. Please note that the predominance of this prayer here is his confession, and it is corporate in nature as well.

[11 : 10] Let me just look at a few verses. He says in verse 5, We have sinned and done wrong. Verse 6, We have not listened to your servants.

And verse 8 fills out who they have sinned against. They have sinned against God. We learnt that in last week's Psalm 51, where David says he sinned against God and only against God.

Here, Daniel says, We have sinned against God. In verse 11, He says, All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside.

In verse 14, The Lord our God is right in all that he has done, for we have disobeyed his voice. In verse 15, We have sinned. We have done wickedly.

Now, when people come into the presence of God, this is nearly always the first thing that pours out of them. Because the presence of God means the presence of holiness, in face of which people always feel sinful.

[12 : 19] We feel unworthy. The prophet Isaiah felt just like Daniel. When he was in the temple, he too met God.

The only words he could speak were a cry of pure confession at this time. Woe is me! Woe is me! For I am lost!

For I am of unclean lips! Yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts! I can remember very well being overwhelmed on occasions by God's holiness after having read the Bible.

Something has really made sense as I have read it. Or God's Spirit convicts you of something. It has led to a time of confession, for me, of my sins, of my own sin, as well as the sins of other people.

As I think about humanity and all those sorts of things, when these sorts of things grip us. And as you have a time of confession and pouring out your soul before God, it has also led to a time of searching the Scriptures or reading the Bible to help me understand the nature of human beings, the nature of the reasons why we are like we are.

[13 : 45] And this is perhaps what happens to Daniel here. He reads and he hears God's voice speaking to him through the Scriptures. Now, in previous times, you know, God spoke directly to Abraham or to Moses.

Now, here we see God speaking through the Scriptures to Daniel. And Daniel is driven to prayer. And in doing so, he comes before his Creator, God, troubled at the state of the nation and of his, as well as Israel's, sinful condition.

And in his prayer, he confesses all of these things to God. And in Daniel's prayer, acknowledgement of Israel's guilt is seen from the Scripture as he knows it.

He says that they have turned away from God's commandments and ordinances. In verse 6, we have not listened to your servants, the prophets. Because they hadn't listened, then God is right in pouring out the judgment that has come upon Israel.

He is a righteous God and all his acts are righteous, as verse 16 points out. You see, God had forewarned this coming destruction that Israel is now in through Moses hundreds of years before.

[15 : 06] And the book of Deuteronomy tells about the blessing that Israel would receive if they obeyed God. And in within a space of two chapters, it also talks about the curses that would come their way if they were to disobey God.

Well, they had disobeyed God. Israel had disobeyed God and the consequences of their disobedience is evident. Daniel's prayer acknowledges and confesses all these things and he knows that he and the community of Israel are unworthy of being in a relationship with God due to their disobedience.

They are deserving of the full penalty of the Mosaic Law. But God isn't to blame for their position. Israel is. So Daniel's prayer is firstly a prayer of confession.

Secondly, it is also a prayer of supplication. Even though Israel deserves all that they are going through, Daniel's prayer is also one of supplication.

That simply means that he asked God for what he felt he needed most. In verses 15 through to 19 then, he asks for forgiveness and for deliverance from this ordeal that he and Israel have been through.

[16 : 28] And believe me, it's been quite an ordeal. His reading of the book of Jeremiah seems to suggest that the time of exile for Israel is almost up.

His request and plea is then that God's wrath and anger would turn away from your city, he says, God's city, Jerusalem, from your holy mountain, God's holy mountain.

His prayer is that God's name would be restored among the peoples and that just as he delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt all those hundreds of years before, he prays now that God would again deliver his people Israel from this exile that they are going through and that his name, that God's name would be made great, would be made renowned again.

Now this sort of thing can't be done by anything that Israel might do but only through an act of God. So he prays in verse 7 and he says, For your own sake, Lord, let your face shine upon your desolated sanctuary.

Daniel's prayer is that God's name would be made great. That too should be a goal of our prayer life. We should be seeking to make God's name great in all that we do when praying for other people as well as for ourselves.

[18 : 00] And our prayers and supplications are made before God not on our own righteous standing before him but on the grounds of his great mercies shown to us.

Will God in his mercy hear Daniel's prayer for himself and for others and responds because it is the will of God to do so. Scripture records for us the great and awesome deeds that God has done throughout the ages.

We see in the Bible how God's mercy and righteous judgments have been poured out on his people. Sometimes as we read Scripture there are things that we just don't understand.

we need to keep on asking God's Spirit to help us in those times. We need to ask that God's Spirit would help us understand and we need to approach some aspects of Scripture with faith in believing trusting in God a God who keeps promises.

Most of all we need to be praying the Scriptures and as we read them asking God to teach us how to live out what we read in our lives so that we may honour him and bring glory to his name.

[19 : 23] Well today most Australians would not know what it's like to live in exile as Daniel situation is. So perhaps a light-hearted reading of this chapter of even the book of Daniel may cause us to think that the book of Daniel or this particular passage is irrelevant to us and so what we do is we skip onto something else and we just think of these as good stories that we can tell our children and so on.

But if you were to ask someone who has been caught up in the fighting of Kosovo or Serbia and Croatia they might be able to understand and identify just perhaps how Daniel is feeling we should be praying for people throughout the world who are struggling for people who perhaps are in exile praying for them that the truths of God's word would be made known and that they would know of his life-saving work through the good news of Jesus Christ.

But we too as Australian Christians can learn from this prayer that we need to be a prayerful people looking out for the needs of those around us as well as ourselves.

More than ever we need to be a praying community asking God to show mercy on the many many thousands of people who do not know God's love and mercy shown through Jesus Christ.

Because surely judgment is coming upon every one of us. And for those of us who do not accept God's offer of eternal life through Jesus Christ eternal life does not belong to them.

[21 : 16] Scripture is quite clear about that. Now the temptation I think among many Christian leaders in the church today, our current church is to preach about God's love, mercy and social justice.

But it is politically incorrect, or it's incorrect to preach about God's righteous judgment. No, we don't do that. It's as if we've thrown out those parts of the Bible which talk about it.

Well, there wouldn't be much of the Bible left if we did that. And there is a warning here to those who add or take away from the Bible in the very last book of the Bible.

The book of Revelation says in chapter 22, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city. John is warning here of judgment and the loss of God's kingdom.

We are not to add to or to take away from scripture. We as God's people need to repent of this sinful action which is filtered into many parts of the church and into our society like a cancer, asking God's forgiveness on all of us, not just those who do it.

[22 : 34] Now, as Bible-believing Christians, we can have assurance and know that God forgives those who turn to him in faith through Jesus Christ. God's saving grace is seen in him and him alone.

Well, let me conclude by saying that Daniel reads the scriptures. He read the scriptures and as he understood them, he was driven to prayer for himself and for others.

We too need to be doing the same, reading the scriptures carefully, understanding them in the context that they are written as well as applying them to our current situation.

We also need to pray to God as he speaks to us through the Bible for ourselves and for others. But most of all, we need to be praying in our ever-changing world just as Daniel prayed, that God's honour, that God's reputation and name would be seen by all people.

let's pray. O Lord, the clouds are gathering, the fire of judgment burns how we have fallen.

[24 : 05] O Lord, you stand appalled to see your laws of love so scorned and lives of many people broken. Have mercy, Lord.

Forgive us, Lord. Restore us, Lord. Revive your church again. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
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Amen. Amen.