

Jan. 21, 2018

Lesson 8: Prayer for Obedient Faith

Scripture: Daniel 9:1-19

Context:

Out of all the chapters in the Book of Daniel, this is the one that reads as less as an action story than any of the others. Instead, it is a prayer said by Daniel in conversation with the messenger Gabriel. However a closer look sees that it is also a history lesson. Chapter eight concludes with a vision that occurs in the reign of the Nebuchadnezzar's reign (546 B.C.) and the account of chapter 9 is set in the first rule of Darius (ca. 539 BC) with a gap of seven years.¹ This prayer was probably written in the in between time as a reflection of the seventy years until Jerusalem would be restored as it passed from nation to nation with exiles still away from home.

For Daniel, this prayer would have been what we call today a prayer of confession. The prayer names that all are sinners who have ignored the laws and commands of God. The people have not listened to those who represent God, the prophets and loyal servants. The effect multiplied as kings, leaders, parents, and all the people rebelled. They feel the affects of the day as they realize that they are in exile due to their own sins and decisions to rebel.

The closing lines of the prayer plead for God to listen to this servant's prayer and to turn upon the ruined sanctuary of Jerusalem and to restore the city. The heart of the prayer is not in the righteousness of the people, but for the people to experience the great compassion of God. It is a plea for help and deliverance, for God to intervene and restore the people that have strayed.

This perhaps is one of the longest prayers in the Bible. Much like the Psalms, we hear the writer make it clear that humans have but words to offer up to God. There is a desperate hope for God to intervene, but also a confession that the writer and the people of God have not been who they were called to be. They have missed out on the grace of God and the wonder of God. They have focused solely on themselves and have not listened or done any self-reflection until the moment of exile. There they can look back and see where they missed the writing on the wall and also see how decisions affect the future.

Application:

Perhaps what stands out to me is the line that the author makes about praying our prayers for help not because of any righteous acts of their own, but because of God's great compassion. This is a beautiful line that prays for faith and acknowledges human finality in controlling the world.

As I read this chapter, I thought about how prayer really is a discipline. We know how to ask God for things and how to lift up so and so in the hospital. Those are wonderful things. Yet the prayer that Daniel prays is a lot bolder. It is a prayer that can be considered vulnerable as it names the fact that humanity is flawed and needs help with

¹ W. Sibley Towner, "Daniel," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press: Louisville, KY, 1984), 127.

everyone as part of the problem.

Often, I think that we should pray these types of prayer that Daniel offers up in this chapter. Prayers where we confess that we are all sinners and that we mess up. We need prayers for God's grace and that we need forgiveness for the things we've done and the people we've hurt with words said and words left unsaid. We need prayers as a nation for our focus on wealth, materialism, power, and arrogance. We need to pray for leaders who care about all people in this country and those outside of our country's borders. We need to pray for other country's leaders and ask that God endow them with the same wisdom we pray for our leaders. We need prayers that God will send us people who can be honest with us about our strengths and our growing edges. We need prayers where we pray for those in our church including not just the sick and dying but those with whom we disagree on issues yet our are still our brother and sister in Christ. And we need prayers where we simply give thanks to God for the fact that God is great and in charge.

What do your prayers look like? I hope that as all Christians mature in their faith journey, their prayers are like those of Daniel. The prayers are bold in naming sins, and yet calling upon God to grant faith in all things. May we all pray for an obedient faith, one that holds and sustains us on our journey in life.

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