

Daniel

People of Prayer

By Dr. Derek W. H. Thomas

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Bible Text: Daniel 9:1-23
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First Presbyterian Church
1324 Marion St
Columbia, SC 29201

Website: www.firstprescolumbia.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/fpccolumbia

Well, good afternoon and welcome and if you turn to the bulletin that's on the table, we've got a lengthy reading so without any further delay, let's read these 23 verses. Oh, we haven't got the end of verse 23. That could be tricky. Somebody look it up for me, somebody has cut and paste and missed out half of verse 23. I just have seen that. Let's begin at verse 1.

1 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans-- 2 in the first year of his reign, 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. 3 Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. 4 I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, 5 we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. 6 We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. 7 To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, as at this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. 8 To us, O LORD, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. 9 To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him 10 and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God by walking in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. 11 All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. And the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him. 12 He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers who ruled us, by bringing upon us a great calamity.

For under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what has been done against Jerusalem. 13 As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us; yet we have not entreated the favor of the LORD our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth. 14 Therefore the LORD has kept ready the calamity and has brought it upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in all the works that he has done, and we have not obeyed his voice. 15 And now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and have made a name for yourself, as at this day, we have sinned, we have done wickedly. 16 "O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy hill, because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people have become a byword among all who are around us. 17 Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate. 18 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. 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." 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, 21 while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. 22 He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, "O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. 23 At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved. Therefore consider the word and understand the vision."

Well, the most important part of the text was actually left out, "you are greatly loved." Now if you have a pen, write that in in verse 23 because what he says is, Gabriel says to Daniel is, "you are greatly loved," and that's going to be an important point in a moment.

Well, let me give you some context here. Daniel is about to unravel something called the Seventy Weeks. Now we're not going there. The 69th week and the 70th week and so on, that's for another day, another time, another place. But Daniel has been reading his Bible, he's been reading the book of Jeremiah. Now Daniel, well, he was probably 15 or thereabouts when he went into exile and it's now the 68th year of the exile. He went into exile in 605 BC and it's now 539-538 BC, 68 of the 70 years of exile have already been spent so Daniel, doing your math, is 83.

So let me pause here. He's 83 and you may be wondering what in the world can you do that's at all significant at 83? If you're 83, you're probably not asking that question but if you're in your 60s and contemplating being 83, you may be thinking of it as, "What use

will I be at 83?" And here's the answer: that God can use an 83 year old in prayer, in writing something that will end up in Scripture for all time, one of the most important and significant works that anybody could be asked to do and it was at 83 years of age. So my application out of the gate is what's all this talk about retirement? Where is retirement in Scripture? Where is retirement from service in the kingdom of God in Scripture? So just bear that in mind. Tuck it away somewhere. Here's an 83 year old and he's telling us about a prayer that he offered to the Lord.

Now as I said, he's been reading Jeremiah and in the 29th chapter of Jeremiah he comes across the prophecy of Jeremiah about the exile and the exile was going to be 70 years and they've already been in exile for 68 years so, again, doing your math here, there are two years to go. According to the word of God, according to the prophecy of Jeremiah written before the exile, Daniel now discovers or he's been reminded of the fact that in two year's time this exile is going to be over.

So what does he do? If God has prophesied it, if God has written it in his word that the exile is going to last for 70 years and 68 years have already passed, what does Daniel do? Does he just sit back and say, "Let me wait now to see the Lord fulfilling his promise"? No, he does not. He engages in earnest prayer that God would fulfill his promise. Even though it's written down in Scripture, even though he can put his finger in the very place where God has said, "This is how it's going to be," he still engages in prayer that God would fulfill it.

So my first point is simply this: that the Bible stirs us up to pray. The Bible stirs us up to pray. Daniel is reading his Bible and it results in prayer. So you find prayer difficult. You say to yourself, "Sometimes I don't know what to pray for." Well, here's an answer for you: pray the Bible. Read a passage of Scripture and turn it into prayer. Is the passage giving you comfort? Then ask the Lord that you might receive that comfort. Is the passage asking from you something that you should do? Then ask the Lord to give you strength to do it with all of your might. Is the passage asking for a demonstration of faith on your part? Then ask the Lord for strength to demonstrate that faith on your behalf. Is the Bible modeling to you the life of godliness and discipleship? Then pray to the Lord that you might model that life of discipleship and godliness patterned after God's own word.

Read the Bible and turn it into prayer. It's what the saints have been doing for thousands of years and it's no different for you than it was for Daniel. But of course, you have to be reading your Bible for that to work so let me ask you the question: are you reading your Bible? Are you reading it every day? I don't want to be legalistic so for some of you it might be in the morning and for some of you it might be in the afternoon and for some of you it might be in the evening, but I'm asking are you reading your Bible?

So if you miss breakfast and, "I'm sorry but I missed breakfast this morning and I'm sort of hungry and my stomach is rumbling," and it's saying you need some protein or something, I wonder if we get that feeling at 12 o'clock or 1 o'clock in the day because

we haven't read our Bible yet? And if we don't, what is that saying about our appetite? What is that saying about our spiritual health?

So the Bible stirs us up to pray. Secondly, and I want to focus here on verse 4, the beginning of the prayer itself, and it begins, "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments," and it begins with adoration. Before Daniel asks something, he wants to focus on who it is that he's speaking to.

I was in Pittsburgh one time and I was in a hotel, I was actually booking into the hotel, and I looked across to my left and standing to my left was John de Lancie. Actually I had no idea what his name was. I knew him as Q from Star Trek. Now four of you understand this is an actor. He plays the part of Q in Star Trek and he's famous for it and there are maybe a dozen episodes of Star Trek with Q and the part is played by John de Lancie and I looked across and I said, "You're Q." And he said, "No, I'm not. I'm John de Lancie," he said to me. And I said without thinking, I blurted out, I said, "Oh, I don't know your name. I just know you as Q." Which was not a good introduction and then I asked for his autograph and the only thing I had was that slip of paper that I was given checking me into my room with the key in it and I said, "Would you sign this?" So I have it. I still...

I was so focused on him that I didn't really know what to say. Sometimes it can be the other way around. We know what we want to say, we've got questions, we've got questions, we've got specific requests, but we don't focus on him. So Daniel is teaching us here: before you ask your questions, before you ask for your requests, your petitions, focus on him first; take some time to think about the person it is you're talking to. Just as Jesus taught his disciples to pray saying, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." Yes, there are some requests that are coming but before you do that, focus on him just as you would a lover, a friend, a sibling.

Ralph Davis in his commentary on Daniel tells the story of Russell Johnson and Russell Johnson was the op-ed, one of the op-ed contributors to the New York Times during the administration of J. F. Kennedy and during the time when the Vice-President was Lyndon Johnson. And one day Lyndon Johnson is coming by and he grabs hold of Russell Johnson, knows him to be one of the reporters in the White House often, and Lyndon Johnson is going on and on and on, holding him by his lapel, wanting him to make sure that the headline in the newspaper tomorrow was that Lyndon Johnson was fully supportive of J. F. Kennedy. But as he's doing this, he pulls out a piece of paper and then writes on a piece of paper, presses the button, a secretary comes in, hands her the piece of paper, and continues with this diatribe about wanting this headline in the New York Times to be "Lyndon Johnson fully supportive of President Kennedy." And the secretary comes back in, hands him the piece of paper, he screws it up and throws it on the floor and then leaves. And of course, Russell Johnson, as you and I would, picked up the piece of paper and written on the piece of paper was, "What is this man's name?" Well, don't be caught doing that when you're talking to God. Think about who he is and think about his name and spend a few moments saying, "Lord, you are awesome."

Then in verses 5 through 19, you've got the basic prayer itself and all the way down verse 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, the beginning of verse 13, 14, it's all about sin and transgression and law breaking. In verses 5 and 6 you've got: we've sinned, done wrong, acted wickedly, rebelled, turned aside from your commandments, not listened to your servants, the prophets, who spoke in your name, and so on. In verses 7 and 8 you've got the consequences of sin using this word "shame," which of course, is a garden of Eden word. It's what sin immediately produced in Adam and Eve. They were ashamed. Then in verses 9 and 10 there is only one hope and that is mercy and forgiveness. Then in verses 11, 12, the first half of 13, you've got an exposition of God's anger referenced to God's covenant curses, probably a reference to Deuteronomy 28, that the calamity that has come upon them, the exile in Babylon, the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, is unspeakable calamity that has come upon them. It's all the result of God exercising his wrath upon their sin, upon their law breaking.

Look at the second half of verse 13, "yet we have not entreated the favor of the LORD our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth." They've gone through 68 years of this calamity and still they haven't repented. Sixty-eight years of calamity and still they're not really sorry for their sins. Sixty-eight years of calamity and still there is no godly grief and sorrow. Staggering, isn't it? They really have no idea what sin is.

I was a young minister, I was 29-30 years of age a long time ago in a place far far away. I was in Belfast in Northern Ireland near to Queens University and I visited one day the home of a lady, she was probably in her 80s, she was confined to the house, she was in that time of life when movement outside of the home was probably very difficult for her, but she was still in the home she had more or less grown up in and lived in all her life. She was a widow and she lived alone. I called and it's a terraced house, maybe the second street away from where the church was, and I went in and began to talk to her and began to talk to her about, well, I used the word "sin." I'm 29-30 years of age and she said, "My dear boy," I remember that's how she put it, "My dear boy, how can I possibly sin?" She says, "I never leave this house."

I think I quote her verbatim, "My dear boy, how can I possibly sin? I never leave this house," and I thought to myself, "She has no idea. She has absolutely no idea what sin is, any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God and it begins in our hearts and in our minds and in our thoughts and in our aspirations and in the goals that we set and in the motives that drive us to do whatever it is that we do, and all have sinned and come short of the glory of God and there is none righteous, no, not one." And here's Daniel saying about Israel, "Even after 68 years, we still haven't got it, why we need forgiveness, why we need God's mercy."

Now, I want you to notice one more thing in the prayer and it occurs on a couple of occasions beginning in verse 15, "now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and have made a name for yourself, as at this day, we have sinned, we have done wickedly." Then, "for your own sake," you see that halfway through verse 17, "and for your own sake," and then you see it again halfway

through verse 19, "Delay not, for your own sake." Verse 15, you've made a name for yourself. God had made a name for himself in the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt. These were the people whom God had rescued so what he's doing in his prayer is pleading, pleading the name of God. It's as though Daniel is saying, "Look, if you won't do this for any other reason, do it for the sake of your own reputation. I mean, what are people going to say if you don't fulfill your promise? I mean, what kind of God are you? You've written a promise. You've given your word." It's like a child saying to a parent who has gone back on a promise and the little child with a quivering lip says, "But you promised! You made a promise!" I think that's what Daniel is doing here, "If for no other reason, do it for your own sake, for your own reputation."

I wonder if we're bold enough to pray like that? What Daniel is saying is, "Your reputation is going to go down the drain if you don't do what you promised." That's bold praying, isn't it? That takes faith and courage but it is the God that we worship who cannot lie, who cannot go back on his promise. He never ever breaks a promise that he makes. He promises never to leave us nor forsake us, so you feel as though God has left you, then go to him and say, "But you promised never to leave me. So make me feel your presence. Make me know at this time that round about and underneath are the everlasting arms."

One more thing and it's in that little section right at the end, verses 20 through 23, that contains in verse 23 the statement of Gabriel, "you are greatly loved." So Gabriel comes to him. "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, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice." Now I have a ton of questions and no answers. Where did Gabriel come from? How long did it take him to come from wherever he was to where Daniel was in Babylon? I have no answers to those questions. I've been thinking about them all morning. How long did it take Gabriel to come from wherever he was? The point of the passage is to say: at the moment Daniel started praying, God started answering.

He sent Gabriel. He arrived at the time of the evening sacrifice, the daily burnt offering which was around 3 o'clock in the afternoon. So Gabriel comes and Gabriel has come to teach Daniel some things, to give him some instruction about the Seventy Weeks, which we're not going to go into today. My point, my first point here is simply to say: you know, God hears us from the moment we start praying. That's a beautiful thought, isn't it? We may be in the midst of distress. We may be beside ourselves. It may be a prayer that almost has no rhyme nor reason to it because our emotions are so out of sorts and yet God hears us and begins the process by which our prayers will be answered.

He sends Gabriel at the time of the evening sacrifice. What is Daniel doing thinking about the time of the evening sacrifice? You understand there was no evening sacrifice in Babylon. The evening sacrifice was something that took place in the temple. The temple has been destroyed for 68 years. Daniel is thinking about something that he remembered doing when he was 15 in the temple. Sixty-eight years have gone by but he is still

thinking in a way that he had thought when he was 15. He is still thinking liturgically even though he's been 68 years in Babylon. It was that important to him.

I find myself sometimes usually at home, usually when I'm listening to a piece of music, Brahms, Beethoven, and I'll say to myself, not out loud but I'll think to myself, "I miss Bompa." Bompa was my grandfather and he died when I was 5. I barely have any memory of him but I often find myself almost 60 years later saying, "I miss Bompa. I wish I could ask him what this piece of music meant to him." I know he liked this piece of music because another story for another time, because I inherited his record collection. "I wish I could ask him about this or that or the other. I miss him." And Daniel is saying here, "I miss the time of the evening sacrifice. I miss it. It was 68 years ago but I still think about it and it still forms a part of the rhythm of my everyday." His internal clock still worked according to a rhythm that was 68 years in the past.

Well, we Christians can understand that. We have an internal clock that says it's Sunday and whatever the world is doing and whatever the world thinks about Sunday, for us it's the time when we gather together for worship collectively and as a community to give worship to Almighty God. It's an internal rhythm that we have.

Then one more thing, did I tell you the piece of verse 23 that isn't in the bulletin? Did I tell you that? What is it that Gabriel said to Daniel? "You are greatly loved." I want it louder. What is it that Gabriel said to Daniel? "You are greatly loved." You are greatly loved. Philip Doddridge, the hymnwriter, he wrote, "O God of Bethel by whose hand." He wrote, "Grace, 'tis a charming sound/ Harmonious to the ear/ Heaven with the echo shall resound/ And all the earth shall hear." One of the great hymnwriters, lived from 1700, thereabouts, to about 1750. He died when he was 49. He died of consumption. He was advised to go to the Mediterranean and he died in Portugal, but on his way, he spent a few days with the Countess of Huntington and the morning before he departed for Portugal and what would be his death, she found him in tears and she asked him why was he crying? And he said, "I've just read Daniel 9:23 and these words, 'you are greatly loved.'"

Gabriel is bringing a word from Almighty God to Daniel to say to him, "you are greatly loved." If you're a Christian today, if you love the Lord Jesus, you're trusting him, you have been greatly loved from before the foundation of the world. No matter what mess you may be in, you have been greatly loved. "O love that will not let me go/ I rest my weary soul in thee." Well, some thoughts from Daniel's great prayer in Daniel 9.

Let's pray.

Father, we too are amazed that you have loved us so and that you continue to love us so. We thank you that you are a God who makes promises and keeps promises. We thank you that you are the hearer and answerer of prayer so teach us to pray. For Jesus' sake. Amen.