



HG11: Daniel (5/5) 'Daniel's Prayer'

Daniel 9:1-19

Home Group Sermon Notes

8th March 2009 - Pauline Woolnough

This prayer offered by Daniel is a beautiful example of a passionate man confessing sin and seeking forgiveness. It's similar to the penitential prayer of David in Ps 51, and is a classic example of how to confess our sins and seek forgiveness of the God who forgives on the basis of his loving-kindness and mercy and not our own righteousness.

Daniel's Prayer Life: In Chapter 6 we saw that Daniel's prayer life was vital and disciplined, he prayed 3 times daily and he was steeped in the scripture of his day. He didn't just do his "Everyday with Jeremiah" daily readings minutes before turning off the lights at night, verse 2 tells us he was studying the writings of the prophets, he learned from the word of God, and it was these scriptures that directed his prayers. He had been studying the words of Jeremiah and this is what he would have read - *Jeremiah 25:11 (NIV) This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years (Read also Jeremiah 29:10-14)*. We know that in the first year of King Darius, there would be only two years left that Israel would be stuck in Babylon. Daniel didn't know for sure but he had a hunch - because he believed the Word. He was now close to 85 years of age. He had come into Babylon's service as a teenager, and now on reading these scriptures he did what came naturally to him - he prayed. *Daniel 9:3: "So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes."*

Daniel's Passion: Daniel believed what the scriptures said. He believed that the prophesy in Jeremiah would come true, that he was living within the period of the fulfilment of this prophecy and he knew that the time was fast approaching when the Lord would make it possible for the Jews to go back to their homeland. So with the Word of God fresh in his mind and his heart humbled by his own sins and those of his people, Daniel begins his penitential prayer. He turned to the Lord, dropped to his knees and prayed with energy and passion, he pleaded, he wore sackcloth, sprinkled himself with ashes, a classic Jewish expression and response. Daniel reminds us of the need to search the scriptures to find out what God is saying. God didn't say something new to Daniel, it had already been foretold in Jeremiah. Daniel had to read it, understand it, believe it and then respond to it. Daniel challenges us also to soak ourselves in scriptures, if our knowledge of the word is weak, if our study of it is haphazard then we will be unable to rest on its promises to us and in times of need we will be unable to gain strength and comfort from them. Daniel allowed the scriptures to shape his life and he reacted and responded accordingly to the Word.

Why Pray? But why, you may say, did Daniel have to pray and fast and get mucky with ashes if the prophesy was there and it was God's intention to return his people home. Why did Daniel not simply rejoice, do a little celebratory dance, put the house up for sale, and start packing, why the need to pray? Daniel read the scriptures expecting God to speak to him through them. A quick cursory glance though a passage will generate little excitement within us, falling behind with readings, trying to catch up and do a week's worth in one night will not have any meaningful effect on us, its when we approach the scriptures as the living Word of God able to speak into our lives and situations that we find ourselves responding to God as Daniel did.

Pronounced Guilty: Although Daniel believed that God was going to deliver his people, he had had plenty of time to reflect over the many years of exile. He had been able to see how God had warned Israel and Judah about the impending exile, he'd also been able to see how the people had ignored God's plans for them, he'd read the warnings of prophesy from such as Elijah, Isaiah, Amos and he understood that the exile was a result of the peoples failure to trust and follow God. He knew that they did not deserve to be rescued, they had placed themselves in this situation by their rebellion and sin. (*Daniel 9 11-14*)

Who is there like Him? Daniel started his prayer by remembering what God is like, He is perfect, He is holy and faithful in keeping his promises to those who love him, He is able to do mighty and miraculous things there is no god as great as our God, but He is also a jealous and awesome God deserving of reverence.

Confession: He moves on to remember what the people are like and what they had done. They had been wicked, they had rebelled, and worshipped other gods, they had refused to listen to the prophets that God had sent to them and Daniel was ashamed at how they had behaved towards God.... he *felt* their shame. He didn't however exclude himself from guilt and place it elsewhere, he knew that although God was perfect, he himself wasn't, he understood that that there was a collective guilt which had to be borne by the people. By Daniel not simply turning to God and saying: "soon Lord, do it today, do it now Lord" shows Daniel's understanding of his people's guilt, the need to repent and God's infinite goodness and mercy. Daniel confessed on his peoples behalf because he knew that the people were still not interested in obeying God's commandments and he also knew that God's blessings would only come when the people repented and turned back to listening to God and obey his word. Psalm 66:18 "*If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me*" 1 John 1:9 "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" Daniel knew that his nation had done wrong and that God had been just in punishing them. Does this ring any warning bells in your ears as you consider the state of our own nation? More worrying, should the Church feel any sense of unease.

There is a belief that Christians should be radically different, risk takers for Christ with one foot in eternity, our behaviour should be dictated by love, justice and untiring non-judgemental service, but when we take a look at ourselves that's not always the image we see and so like Daniel we also need to face up to the fact that we too are numbered among the guilty ones. Although God loves us and is on our side we need to keep short accounts with him. Its easy to judge other people as guilty yet see ourselves as blameless.

Look at vs13: *Just as it is, all this disaster has come upon us: yet we have not sought the favour of the Lord out God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth.* God's people had failed to pray. There's no shortage of things to pray about in society today but do we? If we don't, we cant say that we have no reason to repent or that we have no responsibility for what's happening today. Perhaps we have lost confidence in the power of Almighty God and his ability and willingness to answer them. Daniel prayed as if God was listening and as if his prayers would make a difference and perhaps he was reminded of the scripture from 2 Chronicles 7 *"If my people who are called by my name shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways: then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and will heal their land."*

Accepting Responsibility: Daniel had been forcibly removed from his home and all that he knew and placed in the royal household of a foreign and hostile land, his life had been turned upside down, did he turn from God, blame God, accuse God, no, he realised that his nation and its people deserved judgement and punishment, God had warned his people about the consequences of sin yet they still disobeyed him and ultimately they deserved the punishment God meted out. (11-14).

Deliverance: In vs18 we read: *"We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy."* Daniel prays with passion urging God to act, he admits that they have got it wrong and that God is right, they are weak, wicked and rebellious but God is merciful, and that is the secret, Daniel prays that as individuals and as a nation they are rightly under judgement, he cries out to God to set them free, not because they deserve it, but because God is merciful and righteous.

Top Priority: In Stephen Covey's book 'Seven Habits of Highly Effective People', one of the habits speaks about putting first things first. He quotes Goethe who said 'Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things which matter least.' You can tell what your priorities are by how you spend your time, you can work out other peoples priorities by how they spend their time. In today's passage we see what matters most to Daniel, it was his relationship with God, studying his word, prayer and the fate of his nation, these were Daniel's priorities, what are yours?

What about today? Is Daniel relevant for us today 2 ½ thousand years later, we've come such a long way, with all our technology and knowledge what can this early man teach us. Look at *Daniel 9 : 5 (NIV)* *"We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws."* Doesn't it all sound so familiar? Look at our own country. Recently a 13yr old boy fathered a child with his 15yr old girlfriend, the UK has the worst rate of child pregnancy in Europe, many young girls have 2/3 children with guesting fathers. There is an epidemic of immorality, God sees sin as tragic, the world sees it as trivial, but its results are devastating, drunkenness, abortion, adultery, crime, drug abuse and so on, surely Daniels's story is our story and Daniel's prayer needs to be our own. But there's a cost, reading Daniel's prayer you can almost feel the beads of sweat on Daniel's forehead, it looked like hard work, you feel a bit like a voyeur intruding in a very personal act of repentance watching Daniel, an old man bent over with the weight of his nation's shame before a holy God who only asked that his people might honour Him and follow his commands. Do we come anywhere near that level of care commitment and responsibility towards the people in our community and in the UK, because if we did then Daniel's prayer would be our prayer and we would be on our knees before God repenting and pleading with him to have mercy, not because we deserve it, but because God is merciful and righteous. In December 2008, 80 leaders from churches, politics and business, met in the House of Lords in response to their concern about the state of our nation to seek what God is saying to us today this. Those present unanimously agreed that:

- ⇒ The current financial situation is primarily the result of the pursuit of moral choices and values that don't accord with the word of God.
- ⇒ God is calling all churches in Britain to a season of prayer and fasting for the nation.
- ⇒ The Christian church should reach out to those who are already suffering as a result of the present financial crisis.

God has told us to pray, Jesus taught us how to pray, Jesus also told us to repent. If we fail to pray and repent then nothing happens, things stay the same, or worse, God looks away. Prayer is not trying to talk God into doing something, it's about God allowing us to be part of what he is doing. It's not about changing His mind, its about discovering His purpose and working with Him through prayer which then becomes a channel for God to fulfil his purpose.

A Good News Story: I want to finish on a good news story where prayer is making a huge difference, South Korea has recently held its biggest ever Alpha course, with over 11,000 delegates held in the biggest church in the world Yoido Full Gospel Church which has over 780,000 members. In South Korea over 1 million people have attended an Alpha course over the past 10 years. Why have they been so successful.... oh I wonder.. is it that they have good guest speakers, is it the meal they put on, have they nothing better to do one night a week? Maybe all these things help but the success will be down to prayer out of a deep concern for people to come to know the Lord Jesus, it is the knowledge that unless they do something in partnership with the Holy Spirit then the people that they live alongside are lost and without hope of salvation. Apparently the Christians in the East have plans for us in the west, plans to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to our doors. Shouldn't that make us ashamed, shouldn't that force us our knees to confess and repent and seek God's mercy. There are plenty of places Eastern Christians could go to take the gospel, lets pray that they don't need to bring it here, surely we need to pray that the church will rise up, church meaning us and with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, meet the challenges facing us and maybe we can start by making Daniel's prayer our own.

Jeremy Vine said in a recent programme, "It's not just the banks that are in trouble, the whole country is on its knees." Isn't that where church should be?



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Home Group Sermon Sheet

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COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to House Group along with any previous/other notes that might be helpful.

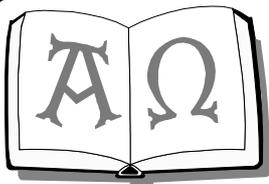
Welcome/Icebreaker (10 mins)

Masterchef viewers will be familiar with the "Passion Test" where contestants have to prove how much winning the competition means to them. Is there anything in your life you are passionate about?



Looking Upwards - *Worship* (10 mins)

Songs of Worship; Prayers; Bible Readings; Meditations etc.



Looking Upwards - *Bible Study* (40 mins)

Read through the above Bible reading (and any readings below and the references in the sermon notes) and answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers in your Home Group.

- 1:** We say a form of confession most weeks in church. "Lord I have sinned" What depth of meaning do these words have for you, do you experience a great sense of guilt when you say them or are they simply familiar words?
- 2:** Would you describe your prayer life as passionate? How can we help one another to be more fervent and passionate in our praying, or is it a case of "no passion please we're British!"
- 3:** "*The current financial situation is primarily the result of the pursuit of moral choices and values that don't accord with the word of God.*" Discuss this statement. Is it just the banker who is to blame or are we all culpable?
- 4:** Daniel prayed on behalf of his people, do you believe that a prayer group can make an impression on the sins of the whole world? Do you see any value in corporate prayer meetings?
- 5:** "*Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things which matter least.*" Stephen Covey. As Christians what should our priorities be?

6: Does Daniel's prayer and his example... move you, excite you, challenge you, stir you into action, drop you to your knees?

7: God is the Great Forgiver of sins, is there anything that you feel you need to repent of as a result of this study and Daniel's prayer?

8: Our series on Daniel has touched people in many different ways. What, for you, has been the most significant aspect of this study? What has helped and/or challenged you the most? What will you 'carry' with you into your future Christian life as a result of this series?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards - Caring for each other (15 mins)

Is there anything you would like to share with the group:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for help from the group?

*(Reflect with the Lord on your life at the moment and think if there is anything you would like to share and which you feel is appropriate. This is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however - 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!')*



Looking Outwards - Concern for others (15 mins)

Is there anything concerning someone in: church; family; friends; or neighbours which you would like to share:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for possible action by the group?

(Please be careful not to pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared).

