

War of the Gods

Messages from the Book of Daniel

Message 10

The Key to Revival

Daniel 9:1-23

Introduction

Daniel entered the strange city of Babylon a captive. He did not calculate the pros and cons and decide that, on balance, going to Babylon was the best plan for his life. He was a prisoner of the king who killed his people, destroyed his city, and mocked his God. Daniel was a prisoner in a hostile land. In the course of studying this book we have seen how Daniel came to terms with his situation and managed to serve God in this pagan city. Surrounded by vile idolatry and disgusting morals, Daniel remained true to God. What is more remarkable is that he did so without becoming angry and bitter. Even more amazing is that he surpassed the native Babylonians in learning and became the chief councilor to the king. Then his supreme accomplishment was in converting two pagan kings to worship his God. But yet even more amazing was the proclamation of those two kings that all the earth should worship the God of Daniel. At the pinnacle of Persian power, when the empire stretched from Egypt to India, King Darius issued an irrevocable decree that everyone should worship the God of heaven and earth.

Along the way we have applied these lessons to ourselves. We who live and work in a modern university are immersed in an environment that is inherently opposed to our God. We are surrounded by professors, administrators, and colleagues who refuse to worship God and sin openly. The ordinary course of events at Lehigh is to reject God, pursue personal advancement, and indulge in pleasure. If you will be faithful to God, you must consciously resist these temptations. We have been encouraged to believe that the God who was present with Daniel in Babylon is also present with us at Lehigh. If Daniel could remain faithful, so can we – not in our own strength, but by relying on the power of God. And if Daniel was able to move a whole empire to worship God, how can we set any lower goals for ourselves? It was not easy and it was not quick. Several times it nearly cost Daniel his life, and it is fairly clear that during Belshazzar's reign Daniel was thrown out of his job. If we are to see Lehigh University acknowledge God, some of us may have to suffer greatly. And, like Daniel, it may take us a lifetime to accomplish this goal. So where are you? Are you nodding absentmindedly, or are you ready to take up this challenge? But perhaps you are not called to have a lifelong impact here at Lehigh. Most of you will take jobs and settle elsewhere. So are you willing to devote your life to radical change in whatever community you settle in? Or are you treating this book of Daniel as an inspirational fairy tale?

The Problem of Jerusalem

Daniel was an old man. By the time Darius overthrew the Babylonian empire Daniel was over 80 years old. You might think at his age, and after such an amazing career, Daniel would retire and enjoy his accomplishments. But if you thought this, you would be mistaken. Now, at the end of his life Daniel began his most important role. He got involved in the restoration of Jerusalem.

What caused Daniel to take on this monumental concern? All his adult life Jerusalem had been dominated by foreign powers. Most of that time his home had been in ruins. There was no reason to think this might change. The only people living there were a handful of poverty-ridden peasants. Jerusalem was a wasteland. Why, in the final years of his life, would Daniel pursue such an extravagant dream? What could an 80 year old man do about Jerusalem's plight?

Daniel approached this issue the same way he tackled everything in life. He was unfazed by appearances, and he relied entirely upon God. He began by studying the scriptures, and then he prayed in

response to what he read.

Discovery in the Scripture

Daniel was a prophet. God spoke to him directly in dreams and visions. We might have expected him to have little use for scripture. Sometimes it can be inspiring to read the Bible. Scripture can be comforting when you are going through difficult times. But scripture can also be difficult to understand. Bible study can be real labor. Why should you struggle through chapter after chapter of difficult text when you can hear God's voice directly? Furthermore, why bother with old stories when you can get the latest installment from God Himself? Writings that are hundreds or thousands of years old cannot be nearly as valuable as up-to-date revelation.

But this was not Daniel's attitude. Even though he was a prophet, Daniel diligently studied the old books because God speaks through them. Some people neglect the Bible because they are lazy, and others neglect it because they think prophecy is superior. This is false. The Bible is God's word. That means that He speaks through it – just as clearly as when He speaks in a vision or dream. Waiting for a dream or vision from God is foolish when a message from God is available right at your fingertips. Daniel loved God, and He loved to hear God's voice. This happened every day when he read the Bible. So even though the Bible can be hard to understand, Daniel was devoted to diligent study of the scripture because He was devoted to God.

What Daniel discovered in studying the scripture was revolutionary. He found that the prophet Jeremiah had predicted that the Jews would remain in exile in Babylon for 70 years. Listen to Jeremiah 25:8-12.

Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Because you have not heard My words,'⁹ behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' says the LORD, 'and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations.'¹⁰ Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp.'¹¹ And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.'¹² Then it will come to pass, when seventy years are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity,' says the LORD; 'and I will make it a perpetual desolation.' (Jeremiah 25:8-12)

Isn't that a wonderful prophecy? Don't you think Daniel was thrilled that the exile would last only 70 years? But there is more. Later Jeremiah explicitly promised that God would bring the Jews back home from Babylon. Listen now to Jeremiah 29:10-11.

For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place.'¹¹ For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. (Jeremiah 29:10-11)

Did you catch that? God said He would visit the Jews, lonely in Babylon, and bring them back home! If I had been a captive in Babylon, I would have been terribly excited to read such a promise. Think of it! The end of exile! Seventy years and the people could go home. But Daniel was not excited. Our text tells us that, instead of throwing a party at this discovery, Daniel put on sackcloth, sat in the ashes, fasted, and prayed. What ever is wrong with him?

The problem is in the verses following this promise. Let's continue reading in Jeremiah.

¹² Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive. (Jeremiah 29:12-14)

Daniel discovered, to his enormous distress, that when God restored Israel, they would turn from their sin and seek Him. God's promise to bring the Jews home was linked to His call to repentance. Daniel recognized that the return to Jerusalem would not happen apart from a return to God – and his people were far from turning to God.

All Christians want to see God's Kingdom grow. We long for our friends to know God. We desire our churches to expand. We wish that Muslims and Hindus and others who do not know the true God would come to recognize Him and worship Him. Christians want everyone to have eternal life. The big question is how to go about accomplishing this goal. Everybody has their own ideas. Campus Crusade has a very detailed method for growing God's Kingdom. It includes sending teams of evangelists around the world with a certain method of presenting the gospel which is geared toward maximum response. Youth With A Mission (YWAM) is a large organization which has teams on every continent using a huge variety of outreach methods. Our own denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America, has its own approach to growing the church. For many people these days, the key to growth is found in the type of music in your church or ministry. In certain quarters it is axiomatic that substantial growth cannot occur without a relaxed atmosphere and upbeat music. All these ideas have some merit, but none get to the heart of the matter. The real key to the growth of God's Kingdom is demonstrated by Daniel in this chapter.

The key to revolutionary growth of God's Kingdom is very simple and is the same in every generation. What music you use, how you package your message, or how you organize your ministry are of small importance compared to diligent scripture study and prayer. Now if you are like most normal people and are still paying attention you are thinking, "Duh! All Christians study the Bible and pray." True. But if that is what you are thinking you missed critical qualifier. I said the key is *diligent* prayer and study of scripture.

Did you know about those verses in Jeremiah? I admit, I did not know where they were. I had to look them up. The Bible is a big book. Jeremiah is a big book. The basic message is easy to grasp, and anyone can learn the stories of creation and salvation. But it takes long and careful study to become well acquainted with all that is in the Bible. Are you committed to serious Bible study? Or are you satisfied to skim some encouragement off the top? I do not know how long it took Daniel to discover those verses where God promised to return the Jews to Jerusalem. But when he found them, Daniel seized upon them and made them the bedrock of his prayers.

Earthmoving Prayer

The largest portion of this chapter consists of Daniel's prayer. This is one of the greatest prayers in the history of the world. I recommend that you read it over and over. Tonight we are not going to examine it verse by verse. Instead we are going to identify its chief characteristics.

The most obvious characteristic of Daniel's prayer is that it is built around the covenant. A covenant is like a treaty. It is a legal document which specifies the nature of a relationship. A king would impose a treaty upon a conquered nation; but unlike our treaties, it was a personal bond between the conquering king and the defeated king. The conquering king would promise to protect and provide for the defeated king, and

the loser would promise to obey the victor. The covenant would specify punishments for the loser if he failed to obey the laws of the covenant. The relationship between God and His people is defined by a covenant. When God visited Adam in the Garden of Eden after he had sinned, He made a covenant with Him. God made covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses and David. The Old Testament is the record of these covenants and the success or failure of God's people to keep their end of the agreement. We immediately see Daniel referring to the covenant in verse four, where he praises God for keeping the covenant. God kept all the promises He had made in his covenant with Israel. Beyond the letter of the law, God was also merciful. In stark contrast to God's covenant faithfulness, Israel was shamefully disobedient.

So the second characteristic of Daniel's prayer is that he began with praise. This is natural since covenant documents always began with praise for the wonder and glory of the conquering king. Daniel recognized that he was praying to the "Lord, the great and awesome God." Jesus taught us to do the same in the prayer He gave us. When we say, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name," we are praising God for being our Father, even though He is lofty – and we are praising Him for His holiness. The most fundamental reality is that God is the majestic, uncreated Creator and Ruler. It is fitting that we begin our prayers recognizing this.

Third, we see Daniel confessing sin. Verses five to 15 are primarily a catalogue of Israel's failures to obey the covenant and the admission that God was just to punish her for these sins. You see, Daniel did not merely confess vague wrong-doing. He even went beyond listing the sins that came to mind. Israel's sins were far worse than a set of bad actions. Her core sin was rebellion against the Lord to whom she had sworn faithfulness. Daniel had studied the scripture so well, he was able to put his finger on the specific sins Israel had committed. And he was also able to identify in the scripture the punishment provided for those sins. My point here is that the foundation of Israel's relationship to God is the covenant with Him. So when Daniel came to God about the fracture in this relationship, he approached God on the basis of the covenant.

Fourth, Daniel's confession was not merely for his own personal sins. He confessed the sins of all Israel. Some people notice this pattern in scripture, and conclude that there is something superior about confessing group sins. No, each person must deal with his sins before God. But also we are bound together in the covenant, so we all share the guilt of each other's sins. This is illustrated in the book of Joshua. Someone in Israel had sinned, and when the army went to fight the town of Ai, God allowed them to be defeated. One man sinned, but all suffered. In the New Testament, Paul says the church is like a body. When one part suffers, all parts suffer. Even though Daniel himself was a very good man, he recognized that he shared the guilt of Israel's sin. So he confessed the sins of the nation.

A fifth characteristic of Daniel's prayer is his use of scripture. Scripture drove him to prayer, scripture guided his prayer, and scripture provided the language of his prayer. Daniel borrowed so many phrases from earlier books of the Bible, some unbelieving scholars use this as evidence that this prayer did not originate in Daniel's own experience. What it really shows is that those well-educated scholars do not know the Bible as well as they think they do!

Sixth, notice the vast scope of Daniel's prayer. He did not ask for small favors! Daniel boldly asked for nothing less than a complete reordering of spiritual and political reality. At the time of this prayer, the idea that Jerusalem would be rebuilt was ludicrous. Why would the pagan Persians give a fig about the Jews and their pathetic city? And even if the Jews should be allowed to return to Jerusalem, how would they get the money and materials to rebuild? Look how hard it is for us, and how long it is taking for the wealthiest country in the world, with unparalleled freedom, to rebuild New Orleans. Rebuilding Jerusalem then would be equivalent to Afghan peasants constructing the twin towers under the rule of the Taliban. Impossible! But Daniel was not deterred by the impossible nature of his request.

Seventh, Daniel reasoned with God. He gave God a compelling reason to answer his prayer. In verses 18 and 19 He appeals to God's own reputation among the nations. Daniel has already praised God for His awesomeness. Now, in effect, Daniel said, "Your awesomeness looks a bit tarnished while the city that bears your name is in ruins." This is an important move on Daniel's part. The prophets often appealed to God on the basis of His glory. Abraham appealed to God to spare the wicked city of Sodom if it had a few righteous people in it by saying, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" Moses argued with God after Israel had committed idolatry by saying, if you kill these people, the nations will say you were unable to bring them to Canaan. So Daniel is following in a venerable tradition by appealing to God's glory as the basis for granting his request.

Finally, Daniel's prayer was passionate. This was a serious matter! The future of Israel was at stake. God's glory among the nations was at stake. The hope of a Messiah was at stake. Daniel believed that this was so urgent, he could not possibly fail. So he concluded his prayer with this desperate cry,

"O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive!
O Lord, listen and act!
Do not delay for Your own sake, my God,
for Your city and Your people are called by Your name." (Daniel 9:19)

Eight vital characteristics of powerful prayer: based on God's covenant with us, praise, confession, corporate interest, use of scripture, vast scope, reasoning with God, and passion. So what happened? I am sure you are dying to find out if it "worked". In response to Daniel's prayer the angel Gabriel was sent out to give him a message. And in verse 25 we find that God *did* plan to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. Daniel's prayer was answered.

Does this describe your prayers? Are your prayers based on scripture? Are praise and confession a regular part of your prayers? Are your prayers concerned for the whole church? What do you pray for? It would be a mistake to imply that it is wrong or immature to pray for health and assistance in our daily work. God really is interested in those concerns. But do you pray for big, impossible requests? Do you pray for the collapse of Islam as a powerful international force? Do you pray that every language group in the world (several thousand of them) will have its own Bible? Do you argue with God? Do you plan how to persuade and convince Him to increase His glory? Do you care about any of these things?

Prayer Myths

- Need high energy, excitement
- Must be extemporaneous
- Should not ask for specific requests
- Prayer conflicts with God's sovereignty
- Right method -> results

Examples

- Drexel – Dave Stelzl
- one person can change the prayer life of a whole community

Key to revival: serious scripture study, serious prayer

