

Daniel 9:1–19

Introduction

This morning, we come to what we can call very simply, “Daniel’s prayer,” in Daniel chapter 9. We’ll come back next week to see how this prayer fits within the larger context of Daniel. In other words, what’s the meaning of this prayer *right here, in this place*? What special part does it play in the big picture of Daniel? For right now, we’re just going to look at the prayer itself and ask God to teach us, too, how to pray.

I. Daniel 9:1–3a — In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans— 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. Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

“Then I turned my face [*pa-neh*] to the Lord God...” (cf. 2 Chron. 6:42; Ps. 132:10). In the book of Jeremiah, we hear the Lord saying of the people of Israel: “They have turned their back to me, and not their face” (Jer. 2:27; 32:33). So what the Lord desires is that we *all* turn our faces to Him – and not our backs. This is a picture of transparency; of honesty before God. It’s the opposite of hiding. At the end of this prayer, Daniel will speak not of his own “face,” but of the Lord’s “face”: “O Lord, make Your face [*pa-neh*] to shine upon your sanctuary” (9:17b). In verse 13 Daniel speaks of “entreating the favor [‘the face’; *pa-neh*] of the Lord our God” So as we turn our faces to the Lord God, what we desire is an unhindered, unbroken fellowship with God and the enjoyment of His gracious favor – of His face shining on us as our faces are turned toward Him.

“I turned my face to the Lord God,” Daniel says, “seeking (*ba-qas*) Him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.” To seek after the Lord isn’t just an exercise in feelings and emotions. It requires a turning away from our sin (when it was our backs that were toward the Lord), an honest confession of our sin, and a true repentance with our faces lifted up to Him. “Seeking” the Lord requires a real humbling of ourselves before him. Daniel visibly expressed this humbling of himself with “fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes.”

Daniel sought the Lord, he says, by “prayer” [*ʿ-pil-lah*] and “pleas for mercy.” “Pleas for mercy,” is just one word in the Hebrew (*ta-ha-nun*) and that one word sums up every part of what Daniel is about to pray. The point of these “pleas” is not that Daniel thinks God is unlikely to be merciful (the opposite is true), but rather that the full recognition of one’s own sin and spiritual poverty leads us to feel deeply that we have no claim upon God in ourselves; we can only plead with Him for mercy. This is the essence of what Paul means when he speaks in Romans of “calling upon the name of the Lord” (cf. Rom. 10:13). In verse 17 Daniel will conclude his prayer with these same words:

□ Daniel 9:17 — Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer [*t^e-pil-lah*] of your servant and to his pleas for mercy [*ta-ha-nun*]. . .

Have we known what it is to be so spiritually destitute and bankrupt that all we feel we can do is to seek the Lord by *prayer* and *pleas* for mercy? This isn't a feeling that we artificially work up inside us. As we'll see in a moment, it's God's word that causes us to know and feel these things.

The word that Daniel uses for “seeking” [*ba-qas*] is first used in a context of seeking *the Lord* in Deuteronomy chapter four.

□ Deuteronomy 4:25–27, 29 (cf. 2 Chron. 7:12-14) — If you act corruptly by . . . doing what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, so as to provoke him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess . . . The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you . . . **But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.**

And in the very passage that Daniel has just been reading in the prophet Jeremiah, we read:

□ Jeremiah 29:10–14 — Thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. **You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.**

Why does Daniel “seek” the Lord “by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes”? On what ground does he do this? It's always the Word of God that produces in us and sustains in us any true seeking after Him. So Daniel continues:

II. Daniel 9:3b–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 . . .

When Nehemiah prayed a similar prayer he began in the same way:

□ Nehemiah 1:5 (cf. Neh. 9:32) — O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments . . .

The simple point of these words is that there is no fault in God. He is “great” and “awesome” in all His ways – including in His perfect faithfulness. And it's against the backdrop of His perfect faithfulness that our unfaithfulness is revealed to be all the more blameworthy. *He* is the God who *keeps* covenant and steadfast love [*hesed*; covenant loyalty and faithfulness] with those who love him and keep his commandments (cf. Exod. 20:5-6). *We* are those who by nature break the covenant and utterly fail to truly *love* Him by keeping His commandments.

The “covenant” is the covenant that God made with Israel at Mount Sinai – summed up in the “Ten Commandments.” Even the Gentiles who lived *outside* of the covenant were guilty of sin., but it’s the covenant, in the Old Testament, that brings into such bold relief the true depravity of our sin. The people of Israel didn’t *just* break God’s commandments; they broke those commandments in the context of a relationship of sworn covenant commitment and faithfulness. It’s this unique sin of Israel that reveals the true depravity of all our hearts apart from God’s sovereign grace. God is not simply a law-giver, He’s a covenant-maker. *We* are not simply law-breakers. We are all of us, by nature, covenant-breakers. There is no fault in God. He is only, always faithful. It’s against this backdrop that we feel the full weight of these next words:

III. Daniel 9:5–6 — ...we have sinned and committed iniquity and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. 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.

If there’s one thing this prayer of Daniel teaches us, it’s the vocabulary of confession. Each one of these first six expressions is just a single word in the Hebrew.

- *Ha-ta-nu* [*ha-ta*]. “We have sinned” (cf. 9:8, 11, 15, 16).
- *A-wi-nu* [*a-wah*]. “We have committed iniquity” (cf. 9:13, 16).
- *Hir-sha-nu* [*ra-sa*]. “We have acted wickedly” (cf. 9:15).
- *Ma-rad-nu* [*ma-rad*]. “We have rebelled” (cf. 9:9).
- *Sur*. “We have turned aside” (cf. 9:11).
- *Lo sa-ma-nu* [*sa-ma*]. “We have not listened/obeyed” (cf. 9:10, 11, 14).

Daniel uses these six different words a total of eighteen times in his prayer. And if we look ahead, we’ll see that he adds two more. In verse 7 Daniel speaks of Israel’s “treachery (*ma-ala*) in which they have acted treacherously (*ma-alu*) against [the Lord].” And in verse 11 he says that “all Israel has transgressed (*a-b^eru*) [God’s] law.” Daniel’s point in piling up these synonyms—all the biblical vocabulary for our law-breaking and our covenant faithlessness—is to fully emphasize and acknowledge our guilt. Much of the Christianity of today might ask Daniel if this is really necessary. Is it really necessary to focus so much on our sin? Do we really need eight different words repeated no less than twenty-one times to describe and identify in detail our sin and our guilt? YES. We do. We must learn to own up to our sin *and* our guilt — all of it, in its full extent, not whitewashed, not excused, not minimized, but for what it really is.

For Israel, in covenant with God, their sin was a purposeful “turning aside” from God’s “commandments” (*mis-wah*) and “rules” (*mis-pat*). In verse 11, it’s a transgressing of God’s “law” (*to-rah*; cf. v. 10). Notice the vocabulary again. The point of these synonyms is not to emphasize that God’s laws are somehow burdensome, but rather to prove and drive home our guilt. God’s “commandments” and “rules” and “laws” were all plainly laid out in the covenant. Daniel will say in verse 10 that God “set [all His laws] *before our faces* [*pa-neh*].” Even as Gentiles who were never in covenant with God (like Israel), we still knew God’s law from when we were first in covenant with God in Adam. We all knew full well the Ten Commandments, and yet we, too, “turned aside” and “transgressed.” Have we learned not just to speak these

words, but to confess from our hearts, “I have sinned” (cf. 9:8, 11; cf. 9:7, 9; Ps. 51:4)? “I have committed iniquity”; “I have acted wickedly”; “I have turned aside”; I have not listened or obeyed.” “I have acted treacherously.” “I have transgressed.” Isn’t it in being able to speak these words from our hearts that we’re enabled to truly call savingly upon the name of the Lord?

IV. Daniel 9:7–8 — To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame [lit. “shame of face”; public disgrace and humiliation], 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 their treachery in which they have acted treacherously against you. To us, O LORD, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you.

Daniel doesn’t complain about the terrible consequences of Israel’s sin. He doesn’t question whether the punishment has been too severe (like Cain does; Gen 4). He sees the exile of the remnant of Israel in all the lands to which God Himself has driven them (cf. Jer. 29:14), and when he thinks on this all he can do in response is to ascribe “righteousness” to the Lord.

Whenever we think on the judgments of God, as fearful and as terrible as they may be, we should always be led to the same conclusion – to see in all of these judgments the perfect righteousness of God (cf. Rom. 3:5-6; Rev. 16:7; 19:2). This righteousness (this *s^e-da-qah*) of God is found in two things. First, *His* perfect fidelity and faithfulness to the covenant. God is never, ever unfaithful to His covenant – to His word, to His promise, to us, to Himself. He is the one who *always* “keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments.” Second, this righteousness of God is found in the treachery that *we* have committed against the covenant. Therefore, as David says, God is wholly “justified in [His] words and blameless in [His] judgment” (Ps. 51:4). In all of God’s judgments against us we see unveiled in all of its glory His perfect righteousness. In our condemnation is revealed His righteousness. And so, in our condemnation God can only be glorified. That’s unsettling to us, isn’t it? And yet it’s in understanding this that we’re able to see our only hope of salvation. When we can confess with Daniel in verse 7, “to you, O Lord, belongs righteousness,” then we can understand the necessity of also being able to say with Daniel in verse 9:

V. Daniel 9:9–10 — **To the Lord our God belong mercy and pardon**, for we have rebelled against him 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.

What is our only hope? As law-breakers and covenant-breakers by nature, we know we can’t merit anything from God. Therefore, we can only encourage ourselves with these words – and we *ought* to encourage ourselves daily with these words: “To the Lord our God belong mercy (*ra-ha-mim*) and pardon (*s^e-li-hah*).” Both of these words are plurals in the Hebrew. “To the Lord our God belongs a multitude of mercies and pardons.” The point is liberalness and lavishness and abundance – the opposite of anything stingy or miserly. David writes in Psalm 51:

□ **Psalm 51:1** — Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; **according to your abundant mercy (*ra-ha-mim*)** blot out my transgressions.

And we read in Isaiah chapter 55:

□ Isaiah 55:7 — Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, **for he will abundantly pardon [sa-lah]**.

What's so important for us to understand, here, is that mercy and pardon are not any part of the terms of the covenant. In other words, God did not obligate Himself in the covenant to be abundantly merciful and forgiving. And yet wonderfully, amazingly, astoundingly, in spite of all our sin and wickedness, He *is* abundantly merciful and forgiving (*ra-ha-mim* and *s^e-li-hah*).

Ra-ha-mim comes from the Hebrew word for “womb” (*re-hem*). And so it reminds us of a mother's tender compassions and feelings for the child that she gives birth to. Isaiah speaks of “the stirring of [God's] inner parts and [His] compassions [His *ra-ha-mim*]” toward us (Isa. 63:15). And it's as a result of these abundant compassions that God also abundantly pardons. Brothers and sisters, have we known the joy of daily encouraging ourselves with these words: “To the Lord our God belong *ra-ha-mim* and *s^e-li-hah* – mercy and pardon.” But now Daniel continues:

VI. Daniel 9:11–14 — 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. 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. 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. 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.

Daniel comes back again to the theme of God's righteousness (*sa-da-kah*). Only now we see this righteousness revealed in *three* things. *God's* perfect faithfulness to the covenant. The treachery we have committed against the covenant. And now, the reality that we were fully warned from the very beginning about what the consequences of our sin would be (cf. Lev. 26; Deut. 28).

Daniel says,

“The curse and oath **that are written in the Law of Moses** the servant of God have been poured out upon us.”

“**He has confirmed his words**, which he spoke against us and against our rulers who ruled us, by bringing upon us a great calamity.”

“**As it is written in the Law of Moses**, all this calamity has come upon us.”

Israel could never say they didn't know. They could never say, “Why didn't you warn us?” Not only were the covenant curses spelled out in the law of Moses, but God had also sent His servants, the prophets, over and over and over again to warn His people (cf. 9:6, 10). And so we see again the depravity of our sin and the perfect righteousness of all God's judgments. Even as

Gentiles who were outside of Israel’s covenant, we still knew full well the penalty that our sin deserved from when we were first in covenant with God in Adam. God said to Adam:

□ Genesis 2:16–17 — You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, **for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.**

We *knew* this, and we sinned anyway. We *know* this today, and we still sin anyway (cf. Rom. 1:32). As Daniel says, we refused to gain “insight” (*sa-kal*; cf. 1:4, 17; 9:22; 11:33, 35; 12:3, 10) by God’s “truth” (*emet*) and so we became the ultimate fools (cf. Rom. 1:22). We brought down *on our own heads a-lah* and *ra-ah* – “curse” and “calamity”; and in verse 16, *ap* and *he-mah* – “anger” and “wrath.” The people of Israel learned by experience—and so will all who refuse to call upon the Lord with humble pleas for mercy—that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31).

VII. Daniel 9:15 — 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.

That could almost sound like the end of the prayer, couldn’t it?—Like there’s a hopeless finality in these words. But we’d be wrong to think that. There’s a sense in which everything Daniel has said so far has been a “plea for mercy” (*ta-ha-nun*; cf. v. 3). And yet it’s also true that to this point, Daniel hasn’t formally *asked* a single thing of the Lord. All Daniel’s done so far—for the first thirteen verses of this prayer—is confess the righteousness of God and the spiritual poverty and bankruptcy of his people. And so there’s also a sense in which everything that’s been said to this point has been the prelude, preparing our hearts and minds to cry out now with Daniel:

VIII. Daniel 9:16–19 — “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. Now therefore, O our God, **listen to the prayer [*ʾ-pil-lah*] of your servant and to his pleas for mercy [*ta-ha-nun*]**, and for your own sake, O Lord, **make your face to shine upon your sanctuary**, which is desolate. 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 [*ta-ha-nun*]** before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy [*ra-ham-mim*]. **O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive [*sa-lah*]. 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.”

Have we known what it is to cry out to God like this? Have we known what it is to be so spiritually destitute and bankrupt that we feel deep down inside us that all we can do is come before the Lord with pleas for mercy?

□ Luke 18:9–14 — [Jesus] told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax

collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Am I that man who went to his house justified?—Pardoned, and forgiven? Are we those who have humbled ourselves in order that it might be God, and *only* God, who in His great *mercy* lifts us up?

Daniel anchored all his pleas for mercy not in his own righteousness, but in God’s zeal for the glory of His own name.

**“For your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary...
Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name...
Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called
by your name.”**

Today, when we “call upon the name of the Lord” (Rom. 10:13) we call upon the one who’s very name *is* “Jesus,” Savior – the one who shed His own blood *for us* and *in whom* we have redemption, the forgiveness—the full and free pardon—of *all* our sins.