Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Elements of True Prayer, Part 1
Scripture: Daniel 9:1-3
Code: 27-21

Let's share in prayer as we come to the Word of God tonight. Father, thank You again for the thrill that enters into our hearts as we meet together knowing we can sing Your praise and...reach out to touch Your people and hear You speak through Your Word fills us with great joy. And so bless now as we listen to You speak. And may, indeed, it be You and not a human voice, and we'll thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

Daniel 9 is our chapter for tonight. And I don't think we'll get all the way through what the Lord has laid upon my heart to say to you about the first 19 verses, but we'll get a good start on it tonight. And Lord willing, we'll finish it up next Lord's day evening. Daniel chapter 9. I'm not going to take the time to read the entire...first 19 verses, because we'll do that as we go along in the study. And I want it to kind of unfold to you like a flower, stealing none of its majesty before you understand the flow as it moves. And so we'll just take it as it comes. I really believe that the Spirit of God governs the way the Word of God is brought to the people of God. I believe God has control of those kinds of things.

People ask me all the time, "How do you know what to preach on?" And I tell them, "Well, I just spend time in prayer and listen to the Spirit of God and try to evaluate where the church is. And as the Lord seems to open up my understanding, it becomes relatively clear to me what I oughta teach." It's rather subjective, and it's under, really, the direction of the Spirit of God as He leads. And I don't have any doubt in my mind but that God does lead us into the study of those things that we study.

Now, not many weeks ago, we were spending a great amount of time examining the disciples' prayer in Matthew 6:9 and following. And we studied that, well, actually, for 12 weeks. I don't know if you remember, but we were 12 weeks in what is known as the Lord's Prayer. We spent a tremendous amount of time studying that. Last Sunday morning, we were studying another element of prayer from the 7th chapter of Matthew where it said, "Ask, and you shall receive. Seek, and you shall find. Knock, and it shall be opened unto you." And here again tonight, we come right back to the same theme of prayer. I don't believe that's by accident. I believe that's by divine design for reinforcement. I don't think we can underestimate the need and the value of prayer. And I think the longer we study the Word of God, the more we're going to come back to this theme, because it is a repeated theme in Scripture. And I frankly believe that Daniel chapter 9 verses 1 to 19 is perhaps the greatest Old Testament passage on prayer. And I don't mean by that that it gives us instruction how to pray. I mean that it models for us what prayer really is in a majestic and fulfilling way.

There may be other chapters that are its equal, but I don't know whether there are any that surpass it. It doesn't teach us about prayer by precept. It teaches us about prayer by letting us in on somebody's praying. And that's the best way to learn, I think. And so what I want you to do is to couple this model prayer with the model prayer of the Lord Jesus in Matthew chapter 6 and see how the two will come together in your thinking to reinforce what the Spirit of God has taught you already in that series. And, by the way, that will soon be released as a special tape album, and should be one that is part and parcel of the library of every single Christian, where we go back again to that periodically to hear again what it is to be that characterizes the prayer life of a Christian.

Now, Daniel, as you well know if you've studied the man and the book, has set for us a standard of spiritual excellence in almost every conceivable area. As we studied particularly the opening chapters of this wonderful book, we were very much aware of the fact that Daniel was a remarkable man. The levels of commitment and dedication were very unlike even the best of other men. He stood head and shoulders above everybody around him, even the most committed, his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. There was just something about Daniel that was head and shoulders above all other men. And as he has modeled for us a standard of spiritual excellence in so many other areas, we shouldn't be surprised that he would model for us in the area of prayer, as well. That he would set for us a pattern and a standard and an example as he has in those other areas of his life.

Just to remind you, for example, we have seen him to be uncompromising, bold, full of faith, unselfish, humble, completely resistant to the world around him, persistent in his commitment. We've seen him be holy, incorruptible, consistent in his living style, trustworthy, virtuous, obedient, worshipful. And now we find, as found in chapter 6, that he's a man of prayer. He is so much a man of prayer, if you remember chapter 6, that he wouldn't stop praying, even though it meant that he would be thrown into the den of lions. He was a man of prayer. And especially in the prayer in chapter 9, does he model for us that he was a man with a very deep sense of sinfulness. A very deep sense of sinfulness. An amazing man. And, yet, not so amazing, for he was a man like other men, except that he was utterly and totally committed to God from his youth up...And that's an alternative that is offered to everyone.

Now, in this chapter, chapter 9, Daniel prays. And as we examine his prayer, we find in it the elements of true intercessory prayer. It's a message that can stand alone apart from the Book of Daniel, just as a treatise on prayer in and of itself. And, yet, it has a wonderful link with the total book and the total context. Let me show you how.

First of all...there is a Biblical context that I want you to note. Daniel chapter 9 includes a prayer and its answer. The prayer is a prayer regarding 70 years. The answer is an answer regarding 70 weeks of years...The prayer is a prayer for restoration. The answer is the answer of ultimate restoration in

the coming of Messiah. So the chapter is divided into two parts, the prayer and its answer. And while the prayer occurred at one point in time, one day in the life of Daniel, the answer extends to the Kingdom of Christ. And I think God answered in such a magnanimous way because of the great virtue of the man who prayed.

Most people, when they go to study Daniel chapter 9, go directly to the 70 weeks prophecy, how that there is a prophecy that from the rebuilding of the city to the coming of Messiah will be a certain period of time. And following that, there will be another seven-year period of time, and then the Messiah, the Prince, will come, and the great Messianic prophecy occupies the attention of most people who study the ninth chapter of Daniel.

But that's unfortunate, in a way, because that's the only the answer to the prayer. The prayer is the main thrust of the chapter. In fact, there is twice as much attention in verse numbers given to the prayer as there is to its answer. Prophecy is important, but it cannot substitute for prayer. God never calls us to be so speculative or so attached to the future that we lose sight of the present. That's the essence of the significance of the prayer.

Now, God has already given to Daniel the whole prophetic sweep of Gentile history. But in this chapter, He gives to him the future of Israel's history. And so this one man in the Old Testament is granted by the Spirit of God the understanding of all of the sweep of Gentile history, and the great and glorious climax of Jewish history, as well. He already has heard that Israel will suffer, that it will suffer during the time of Gentile rule, that Jerusalem will be trodden down, that Antiochus Epiphanes, an antichrist, will come and slaughter the people. And now the final result of that is going to be not negative, but positive for, ultimately, the Prince will come and set up His Kingdom. And so Daniel is given the Gentile sweep of history and, ultimately, what God is gonna do with Israel, as well. And that comes to consummation here in the 9th chapter.

There is a flow here, for at the end of chapter 8 we find that Daniel, at the end in verse 27, was sick...and astonished at what he saw. Seeing the terrible sweep of Gentile history, the terrible oppression of the people of Israel made him sick and faint...Physically, he was bearing a burden that was just very hard for him to carry, and it caused him to collapse. And as you move into chapter 9, from the point of physical extremity, he comes to a point of great spiritual compassion. It is his brokenness over what is going to happen to Israel, as indicated in chapter 8, that makes chapter 9 flow so easily following it, because here he begins to pray on the behalf of Israel. Knowing what will happen, the prayer flows, and perhaps that why the Spirit of God has placed chapter 9 after chapter 8.

Now, let's look not only at a Biblical setting, but a historical one. Verse 1 gives us that setting. "In the first year of Darius, the son of Ahasuerus, the seed of the Medes, who was make king over the realm of the Chaldeans." Now, this tells us when the events of chapter 9 occurred, and they occurred in the

first year of Darius. It is the same Darius as in chapter 6...and since this is the first year of Darius again, it's really taking us all the way back to the same period of time as chapter 6. This must have happened around the same time as the lion's den experience. So the prayer life of Daniel here would've been connected in time to the kind of thing he was praying in chapter 6, in the face of potential disaster, and even losing his life in a lion's den.

This is, again, the first year of Darius, as was the time of the lion's den experience. Now, just as a footnote or two, Darius is the name that, as I suggested to you when we studied chapter 6, probably is just another name for Cyrus, the first great monarch of the Medo-Persian Empire. The Babylonian Empire ended in chapter 5 with the terrible feast of Belshazzar, a drunken orgy, you remember. And, at that point, there was handwriting on the wall, "Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting, and this night the kingdom is taken from you." The Medes and the Persians came in and set up their kingdom, and the first phase of Gentile power moved out. The second phase moved in, the Medo-Persian Empire. It was ruled by Cyrus.

Darius is a title, and it could be translated the holder of the scepter, and just may be a title like king or monarch or pharaoh or sovereign or something like that. And that, perhaps, is the best way to explain it. It tells us that Darius was the son of Ahasuerus. But there were so many people, so many kings in the Medo-Persian time who took the name Ahasuerus. It was such a common name that we really don't have any idea who this is. It tells us also that he was of the seed of the Medes. And if Cyrus was in view, Cyrus was a Persian. But as the ruler of the Medo-Persian Empire, he was given status as if he was the seed of the Medes, as well. In other words, apparently, by ruling the Medo-Persian Empire, he could claim...descent from both the Medes and Persians and, therefore, commend himself to both groups of people who were amalgamated in the Empire.

And then it says, finally, in verse 1 that he "was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans." The realm of the Chaldeans would be the territory of ancient Babylon. So the Medes and the Persians had their area. And when they conquered Babylon, they took over the area of the Babylonians or the Chaldeans. The ruler then took his descent identity from both the Medes and the Persians that he might be acceptable to both. And this is the individual we know perhaps best understood as Cyrus, the first ruler.

Now, the dates of this man vary from 536 BC to 539 BC. Around that time, Daniel would be about 80 years old plus. So he's been around for a long time. When he came into the land, he came as a teenager, didn't he? If he came in at about 14 or 15, he'd be there 65 years or better. Some say even 67 years by this time he had been in that place of captivity. Daniel was famous. Even though the Babylonian Empire had passed away, Daniel still maintained his position in the palace, and the Medes and the Persians heard about this amazing man who could tell dreams. This amazing man who, in that very experience in the lion's den, had been able to withstand the fierceness of wild beasts. That incredible man. There's no question in my mind that the Medes and the Persians

understood the character of this man. And as a man of great years, he would be a man of great wisdom, the wisdom that comes through the years that only time can bring to add to that which comes from the law of God.

And so Daniel was a special instrument of God during the first year of Darius...Look at verse 2 for a moment. "In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood by the books...and the definite article is in the Hebrew, the books, not any book, but the books, you can write it in there...the number of the years, concerning which the Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish 70 years in the desolations of Jerusalem."

Now, Daniel, 80 plus, been in the land 65 to 67 or 68 years, is doing what every man of God does reading the Word of God. Just because he received divine revelation, just because he was an instrument through which God revealed future events did not waylay the responsibility that he had to be a student of the Word of God. Nothing does take that responsibility away. Nothing. And so he was involved in reading the books. Now, it is apparent by this statement here that the Jews in exile in Babylon, and they had been there in exile for all these years, had no doubt brought together scrolls of the Old Testament law and the writings and the prophets, which they had. And they had compiled them together to make up the Old Testament books or the Books of God. And perhaps these had been copied by certain scribes in the exile and were made available. And no doubt Daniel had a set of these books. And among other things, they included the Books of Jeremiah. And Jeremiah wrote two, Jeremiah and what? Lamentations. All you have to remember is he was the weeping prophet, and that's what Lamentations means.

And so Jeremiah, you'll remember, had prophesied prior to the captivity. And Jeremiah had been told by God to write down his prophecy. He did it once, and it was destroyed. So he had to rewrite it a second time, and he says this in own prophecy. And so the writing of Jeremiah would be available to him. Now, as he was reading in Jeremiah, no doubt he was reading two passages. Let me show them to you. Jeremiah 25:11-12. Fascinating. He was reading along in Jeremiah, and he read this: "'And this whole land shall be a desolation...talking of the land of Judah...the whole land shall be a desolation and an horror. And these nations shall serve the king of Babylon...how many years?...seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation,' saith the Lord, 'for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldean, and will make it perpetual desolation.'"

Now, he was reading along, and he said, "God says that the desolation of Jerusalem is to last seventy years." Now he was either reading that, or he was reading chapter 29. Because in chapter 29 in verse 10, you find the very same prophecy. "For thus saith the Lord: 'After seventy years are accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good Word toward you, in causing you to return even unto this place.'" Now, get the picture. Daniel's reading along, and he comes to this remarkable prophecy. And he believes without a shadow of a doubt that it is the inspired Word of

God...and indeed it was. And he makes the tremendous discovery that seventy years is determined for the captivity. And you don't have to be a mathematical genius to figure out that he knew he'd already been there at least 65 to 68 years...

He had longed for the end of Judah's captivity. He had longed to see God's people restored to their land. And he knew now that it was nearly over. It had to be nearly over. I mean if the Lord started in 605 when he was taken captive, it was well nigh seventy years. And if the Lord started in 597 at the second great deportation, it still was pretty nigh. And if the Lord started in 586 BC, it was a little further off, but it was still getting close. And Daniel knew that it was gonna end at seventy years or near seventy years. He just didn't know when it was gonna start. At the first deportation when he was taken, at the second deportation, or the third one when the city was finally and utterly sacked. He really didn't know. But he began to sense in his heart that it was well nigh the time for the restoration of the people of Judah to their land. And that...marvelous and exciting discovery is what set up Daniel's prayer. And it is a tremendous truth that we wanna see as we move along and study this prayer.

Daniel understood the Word of God, and he began to pray. I wanna show you one other thing. I've given you the Biblical context, how it fits into the Book of Daniel; the historical context, how it fits into the scheme of history. One other thing is the spiritual context. I want you to see something of the heart attitude of Daniel as he comes before God. And all I need to say about that is in verse 3 and 4. "And I set my face unto the Lord God to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes. And I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession and said, 'O, Lord, the great and awesome God.'"

Now, what do you see there about his attitude? What do you see about the spiritual context? First of all, in verse 3 I see humility. In verse 4 I see confession. And in verse 4 I see reference...Humility and confession and reverence, that's the proper attitude of prayer. To come with that kind of a heart to seek God. The burden of his prayer was his own sinfulness, and God's great and awesome majesty...

Now, as you see the Biblical, historical, spiritual context, I want you now to see the prayer itself. And as we go through, I'm gonna give you a little list of eight things...we'll see how many we can cover tonight...that tell us the nature of true intercessory prayer. And, beloved, these are principles you can write down in your Bible somewhere. Principles you can write down on a sheet of paper and remember and memorize. Write 'em in the margin, and remember that these are the elements of prayer. They are timeless. They go on through all ages to govern and guide our communion with God.

Number one, prayer is in response to the Word of God. Prayer is in response to the Word of God. That, to me, is the first striking reality that hit me as I studied this passage. Verse 2 again, "In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years, concerning which the

Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And then I set my face to the Lord God." Daniel's prayer was born out of an understanding of the Word of God. That's why I've said so many times that it is most important to study the Word of God, and prayer follows that. Because, unless we understand the word of God, we do not understand the purposes and the plans of God in order to govern and guide our prayers. It was when Daniel saw the plan that he began the prayer. It was when Daniel perceived what God had in mind that he began to commune with God...

In fact, I'm sure Daniel even believed that his prayer was an element in the fulfillment of the Word of God itself. Now, on the one hand, he recognized with certainty the divine purpose. Daniel believed utterly and absolutely and totally in the sovereignty of God. Daniel believed that this, the writing of Jeremiah it says there was the Word of the Lord, and he knew it would never be altered. It would never be changed. God will fulfill His Word. And, yet, Daniel still prayed.

Now, human reason would say this: You're reading along in Jeremiah, and you read it will be seventy years, and God always fulfills His Word, right? So your response would be what's to pray for. What are you gonna pray for? It's cut and dried. Seventy years, it's over. What are we praying for? Now, that's the typical response of human reason. It doesn't make sense. But that is not Daniel's response. Even though we don't understand the relationship of prayer on the human level to sovereignty on the divine level, Daniel somehow felt the responsibility. And that's really the issue. I do not know. I never will understand the relationship between God and man. I don't understand it in any level. I don't understand how God can get together with man on anything. I don't understand how God can write the Bible and men can be used as instruments. I don't understand how God can become a...a man and be God at the same time. I don't understand how I can be saved by my own choice, and yet it's God's sovereign will before the foundation of the world. I do not understand how God can do His sovereign work and my prayers have any part. But that is not for me to understand...

But when Daniel read of the plan of God, rather than becoming fatalistic about it and slamming shut those...the book or closing down the scroll, and saying, "Well, that's that. Lemme get my rocker, man. It's almost over." He went immediately to his knees in brokenness and penitence and cried out to God in sackcloth and ashes on the behalf of his people. That God would do it. You know what the request of his prayer is? He never says the request until verse 19. And you know what it is? One word. "Do!" You see it there? "Do! And don't don't do." That's what defer not means. "Do it, and don't not do it."

Now you say, "Well, what are you praying that for? I mean God says He's gonna do it." Well, Daniel's not interested in being a logical human, reasoning theologian. He's simply pouring out his heart. You say, "Why?" Lemme tell you why. You know why we oughta pray when we find out God's purposes in His Word? Not because God needs our prayers to do it, but because we need to line up with God's causes. Prayer is for us. It's for us... We line our hearts up with His causes. We see our sinfulness. We see the need of His grace and power. And we submit ourselves to His plan.

So prayer and the Word are inseparably linked. I don't think you can pray properly unless you're in the Word of God. Lemme illustrate it to you. The longest Psalm, Psalm 119, expresses this at least in three verses. Let me just read them to you, and then we'll look at some other Scriptures. Psalm 119:24, "Thy testimonies are my delight and my counselors." "Thy testimonies are my delight and my counselors." In other words, when I read Your Word, Your testimonies, they become the counselor. They become that which instructs my mind. And that's utterly necessary.

Go on to verse 99 of the same Psalm. "I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Thy precepts." In other words, the Psalmist is simply saying, "If I wanna get in on Your plans, if I wanna understand Your precepts, I have to commit myself to Your Word. And then in prayer, it isn't that I'm praying for God to change what He's gonna do. It's that I am identifying myself with His plans." Prayer and the Word are inseparably linked together, for I cannot pray intelligently about His plans unless I understand what His Word says.

I think of the Apostle John. Jesus says to him in chapter 22 of Revelation, "Behold, I come quickly." You know what John does? He prays. He says, "Even so, come Lord Jesus." You say, "John, that's dumb. He just said He was coming. What are you praying?" And John will say, "Because I'm identifying with the need for Him to come." It's a point of identification with the purpose and the plan of God. Reading of the Word and prayer go together wonderfully and beautifully in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah. It might be worth just to look for a moment in Ezra chapter 9 verse 4, "Then were assembled unto me every one who trembled at the Words of the God of Israel." Boy, when they got the law of God, and they read it, people began to shake. And "Everyone who trembled at the Words of the God of Israel...Ezra 9:4 says...because of the transgression of those who had been carried away; and I sat appalled under the evening sacrifice."

Now, when the people came back to the land, they came under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah. And when they began to read the Word of God, and the people began to hear what got 'em in that captivity in the beginning, boy, they began to shake. And so they read the Word of God. And then verse 5 says, "And at the evening sacrifice, I rose up from my heaviness; and having torn my garments and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and I spread out my hands unto the Lord my God, and said: 'O, my God.'" And then he launches into a prayer. And it is a prayer as all true prayer is, that is born out of a comprehension of the standards and the plans and the principles and the precepts of God as revealed in His Word...

You find in Nehemiah chapter 8 a similar situation. "All the people gathered themselves together before the gate...called the Water Gate...and spoke to Ezra, the scribe, to bring the Book of the Law of Moses." He read from it facing the street, and he read from morning until midday. And they made him even a...a pulpit, a podium. In verse 5, "He opened the book in the sight of the people, for he was

elevated above the people; and when he opened it, everybody stood up." And he read, and he read, and he read to Word of God. And then he explained it, and he told 'em what it meant. And what was their response? If you read further, you'll find that, first of all, they began to examine their own hearts. They had some praise, and they had some confession.

Chapter 9 tells us they were "assembled with fasting and sackcloth, and they threw dirt upon themselves, and they separated themselves from foreigners, and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their father." You see, again, you have the same response. When the law of God was read, the people were driven to their knees.

Listen, if you can read the Word of God and not be driven to prayer, then you're not listening to what you're reading. Because whatever you read should be cause for confession of sin in your life. Or for praise and gratitude to God for the blessedness of which you read. Or thankfulness for the plan that's unfolding. That's why in Acts chapter 6, it tells us that the apostles had to give themselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word. They go together.

For another illustration, the Apostle Paul in Ephesians chapter 3. In Ephesians chapter 3, Paul says, "I have been given the dispensation of the grace of God. And by revelation, God has made known unto me the mystery...which essentially is the New Testament understanding of Christ...and God has given me the mystery, and I'm passing the mystery on to you. The mystery which was not revealed in ages past, but is now revealed under the holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." And he goes on to describe all the truth of the Word of God. And then he says, "For this cause, I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...and then he says...I pray that you may be able to comprehend." You see, this love that is revealed in the revelation of God. And so we find that Paul received the Word and it drove him again to his knees.

The Word generates prayer. When it speaks of God, we long to commune with Him. When it speaks of blessing, we long to praise. When it speaks of glory, we long to receive it. When it speaks of promise, we long to realize it. When it speaks of sin, we long to confess it. When it speaks of judgment, we long to avoid it. When it speaks of hell, we pray for the lost. So the Word of God is the cause of prayer. And just because we know something is inevitable doesn't mean that fatalistically we get up off our knees and walk away in some kind of a sickly, theological indifference. Daniel's prayer, as all prayer, is born out of a study and understanding of the Word of God. That is what frames our prayer life and shapes it.

So first of all, prayer is generated by God's Word. Second point, prayer is grounded in God's will. It is grounded in God's will. It is generated by the Word. It is grounded in His will. Now, in chapter 2, or rather verse 2 of chapter 9, Daniel says that, "I know the Word of the Lord through Jeremiah says it will be seventy years during which Jerusalem will be desolate." Clearly revealed, but, nonetheless, there is no sign of resignation on the part of Daniel. He believed prayer was, as I said, an element of

the fulfillment.

If God...has a purpose, His people identify with His will. I don't ever pray, and I don't think anyone ever should, as if we were changing the will of God. We are praying to line our hearts up with His will. And His will is always to bless those who are obedient.

Another illustration that I was thinking of in this same idea. In chapter 6 of Revelation verses 9-11, you find some souls under the altar. And these are the saints, the martyrs. Perhaps the martyrs of the Tribulation time. And they're crying out, "How long, O Lord, how long until you avenge us on the earth? How long will evil have its sway?" And you know, as I read that, I thought to myself, "Well, what do you mean how long? You gotta know how long. It's three-and-a-half years. It's all over the Bible."...

But even so, even though they could've read Daniel's prophecies, and they could've understand the writing of the New Testament by that time in the future and known all of what God had planned for that time of Jacob's trouble, that seven years, that three-and-a-half of Great Tribulation. Nonetheless, even though they may have known exactly how long, there was still the longing in their heart that it end. They were identifying with the injustice being done to God, and they hungered and thirsted that His will would be done.

Lemme show you one other illustration, 1 Samuel, that I think is very, very interesting...1 Samuel chapter 12 and verse 19. And I hope you can catch this as I read it. "And all the people...1 Samuel 12:19...said to Samuel, 'Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not. For we have added unto all our sins this evil: to ask for ourselves a king.'" You know, they were big on getting a king, and they got one. They got a tall, good-looking one who was a loser. They got just what they asked for. And no, they said, "Now pray for us, pray for us, because we know we've defied God in this."

"And Samuel said unto the people, 'Fear not. Don't be afraid. Ye have done all this wickedness; yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but served the Lord with all your heart. And turn ye not aside; for then should ye go after vain things which cannot profit nor deliver, for they are vain. For the Lord will not forsake His people." Why? For His peoples' sake? No, for what? For His own namesake. Because it's pleased the Lord to make you His people. Hang in there, folks. God will never forsake His people...

Verse 23, "Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." What? What's to pray for? You just said that God'll never forsake them. That God established a covenant with them. That God has His own Name at stake in the keeping of the covenant. What do you mean you...might sin in ceasing to pray? What's to pray? Well, you see, that's human reason. Samuel prayed because he was identifying with God's will for the people that they live within the

covenant blessed. He says in verse 24, "Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider how great things He's done for you. But if you shall do wickedly, you shall be consumed, both you and your king."

That's...that's a strange consequence. God won't forsake His covenant. God won't change His plan, but you could die. The only way to understand that is that individuals who sin would miss the promises, though God would be faithful to the nation as a whole. The point that I want you to see in that is simply that Samuel, even though he knew the will of God to be inevitable, still recognized that a failure to pray about it was sinful. Now, I don't know how to harmonize all that. I just know that's how a man of God reacts. To pray consistently with the will of God...

I never pray. I'll say it again. I never pray for God to change His will. I don't want what He doesn't wanna give me. Right? I don't want it. I only want His will done. And that's not bitter resentment. That's not some kind of passive resignation. That's not theological reservation. That's an honest, genuine statement. We seek God's will. I know Jesus is coming, and I know He's gonna come at the exact hour the Father determined that He would come. And yet ever and always, I find in my heart the prayer: Even so, come, Lord Jesus...that You might be glorified.

Even Jesus was no fatalist. Jesus was going to the cross; and even going to the cross, He asked in the Garden, "Father, let this cup pass from me." He rebelled against sin. He rebelled against the consequence of fallen man. Yet He said, "Nevertheless, not My will but...what?...Thine be done." He rebelled when He cleansed the temple. He was no fatalist. To pray for God's will is to pray that God will be honored and glorified and lifted up. And so we pray as it's generated from the Word of God and as it's grounded in the will of God. We said a lot about that in our study on Matthew 6, so we won't say any more than that.

But lemme give you a third point, and we'll stop. Prayer, then, is generated by God's Word, grounded in God's will, and characterized by fervency. Characterized by fervency. Verse 3, and I think here you have a magnificent picture of fervency in prayer. Daniel didn't pray like two ships passing in the night. "Lord, by the way, I got this little thought I wanna drop on You while I'm passing by." That's the way so many pray. Daniel verse 3, watch this. "I set my face unto the Lord God." In other words, he didn't just take a passing nod. He fixed his gaze on the Lord God. There was a passion. There was a persistence. There was an intensity in his prayer. And he says, "I set my face unto the Lord God. I fixed my gaze to seek by...and watch this...by prayer and supplications...that's extended petitioning...with fasting...he went without food. We don't know how long...and with sackcloth and with ashes." All of those cultural indicators of humility.

"And I went on praying to the Lord my God." Now, you say, "Daniel, this is a little ridiculous. I mean He says it's gonna be seventy years. What in the world are you getting so upset about? It's gonna be seventy years. Put your ashes back in the pouch."... But there's a seriousness here. The Bible says to

pray without ceasing, and that's about as persistent as you can get. In Luke, we remember the story, don't we, of the man who came, in chapter 11, he kept banging, banging, banging, banging on the door, and the guy gave him some bread, and the Lord said, "If a...if a man who runs a bread store, a bakery, is gonna give you bread for your much banging, what is God gonna do when you pray with great persistence?"

I don't know how it works, but we become a part of God's plan. James 5:16 says this, "The effectual, energetic...fervent prayer of a righteous man...what?...availeth much." Now, I don't think the much is necessarily in changing eternal plans. I think the much may be in changing us. I think the great value of prayer is what it does for me, not what it does to God...

Fervency, "I set my face...that's resoluteness...unto the Lord God." And he uses the term not Yahweh here, but Adonai, Adonai, which means Lord, master, sovereign, in submission to the authority and the sovereignty of God. And yet even realizing that God is utterly sovereign and utterly authoritarian. "I still, by intercession and by entreaty, constantly for mercy, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes continue to pray."...It's a tremendous thing.

Down in verse 20, you'll note that he's praying for a long time. And even in verse 20, he says, "And while I was speaking and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God — yea, while I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me." Now I don't know how long it was going on, but he prayed and he prayed and, while he was speaking and praying and confessing and presenting his supplication. This is an ongoing thing. Finally, Gabriel touched him...

And so we see that there is a constancy in Daniel's prayer. This is hard for us, isn't it? It's hard for us. We live in a society that...comes to us in short spurts. It generates thinking patterns in that way. Our attention spans are limited. We watch half-hour television programs. We listen to one little song on a record that lasts three minutes. We watch a 60-second commercial. We live life in little short spurts. And the art of meditation and persistence and prayer is extremely difficult for us. But Daniel was one who gave himself to it with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

And for what? To confess his sin? I mean, my goodness, this man, Daniel, could get that upset about his sin? Where...where should I be most of the time? I don't come up to his standard, but I say it, and will say it again next week, the greater your knowledge of God, the deeper your commitment, the more overwhelmed you are with your sinfulness. Hear Paul, who said, "I am the...what?...chief of sinners." From our vantage point, we say it's ridiculous. From his, because he perceived sin in all of its heinousness, from that pure mind, it was a reality. And so Daniel employs every indication of persistence. He uses every possible act of humiliation as he comes before the heavenly citadel with the petition upon his heart. He wears sackcloth. Commonly, in the Old Testament, a sign of

humiliation. Pouring ashes on his head, another one. Particularly find that in Job 2:8. And fasting as he prayed. He was fervent in prayer, and I believe God responds to fervency.

I wanted to get to the next point, but lemme just sum up those three, and we'll take the next one next time. I don't know why the Lord continues to stress this matter of prayer with us. There are a lot more things that I could talk to you about that might be more exciting or more dramatic. There's not a lotta things in here I can say to you, you don't already know. But I really believe the Lord has been speaking to us about the matter of prayer for the last few months for a very definite reason.

I think the Lord is calling us to prayer. These are very trying times. We tend to forget all of the battles that are on all the fronts that we're fighting these days. Grace Church is constantly under attack. I'm constantly under attack from unbelievable sources that you would be surprised to even know about. This is just part and parcel of life. We struggle in the spiritual area with the families in our church. We struggle financially trying to meet needs. We have many battles, and I really believe that it's easy for people to sit in this church with all that we have around us and figure it's all going so well, who needs my prayers.

And we say Jesus is gonna come anyway, and it's all gonna be well in the end, and we get very spiritual, but it's really fatalism. And we never get on our knees with a fervency, and we never really identify with the will and the Word of God in the way that this beloved Daniel did. And, consequently, we miss that intimate communion.

You know, when you pray, you don't always have to come to God for an answer. Sometimes you can just come to God to carry the weight of the plan of God in your own heart, so that you can be identified with His great and eternal purposes...I suggest to you, beloved, that the Lord isn't telling us this all the time just so we can sit and walk outta here and forget it. The Lord is telling us this because He wants us to react to it. I don't believe we've ever seen in this church what God could do if we became totally committed to prayer.

If your theology messes up your prayer life, then you've got a bad theology. Bad one...If you're studying the Word of God, then the natural response is that you commune with the God of the Word. You know, I find in my own life that, as I prepare a message, the whole experience of preparation is a combination of prayer and the ministry of the Word. I can never separate the two. For example, I come to a verse, and I read it, and I say, "Lord, what a truth." And I usually get up and walk around, because I have to move because I get excited about it. Or I'll come to a verse I don't understand, and I say, "Lord, I...I need Your help on this. Illuminate my mind. Draw me to a Scripture that'll explain this." And the whole process of the Word is prayer.

And even as I stand here and preach to you, there's a part of me that is pulling down the power of God all the time, 'cause I realize my human frailty. There's no way that I can be in the Word of God

without being in communion with God. And as you study the Word of God, if it's anything less than that, it's academics. No prayer should be generated by the Word. It should be grounded in the will of God. I get weary of people going around trying to force God to do something, claiming and demanding things from God. When God wants us to identify with His causes, which are already determined by His own absolute perfection to be the best causes...

And I believe that true prayer is characterized by fervency. Sure, I know only few are gonna enter the narrow gate, but that doesn't mean I don't pray...Sure, I know that the things in this world are gonna get worse and worse. That doesn't mean that I don't pray that God would still be glorified in the midst of all of it. Souls would be saved. Daniel prayed that way, even though he had an absolute prophecy in front of him.

Well, those are the first three things. Let's pick up the rest next time...Bow your heads with me as we close.

Father, help us, just in the simplicity of our time tonight, to focus again on the reality of the need of prayer...You know, it seems to me, Lord, as I look back on the Scripture...there's very little teaching about how to pray...There's just a lotta prayers...I think I hear You saying that it's not something academic, something outta the heart...Jesus...prayed a prayer that was a pattern. Daniel shows us a pattern. May we hear the words of Samuel..."Save us from sinning in ceasing to pray for one another. Make us people of prayer, so that You can...make us part of the fulfillment of the plans and the purposes that glorify Your holy name. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

I don't know whether it's the years of my life...or what it is, but it always seems to me that time goes faster and faster. Whether it's weeks or days or months or years or 45 or 50 minutes. I always feel like I...when I preach to you, you're so faithful, you come with such hungry hearts and open minds that I should drop out of heaven some great and glorious things that you've never heard before and send you out in absolute awe...But God seems to push me back to the basics, and I think very often you have to sit and endure what I have to learn. And in many of the things I preach, God is really after me. You're just the audience in His dealing with me. This may be one of those. But I trust, as eavesdroppers, you, too, will hear what the Spirit of God is saying. The man of God is the man of prayer.

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