



A PRAYER OF BROKENNESS

“1 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; 2 In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. 3 And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: 4 And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; 5 We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: 6 Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. 7 O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. 8 O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. 9 To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him; 10 Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. 11 Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him. 12 And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem. 13 As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth. 14 Therefore hath the LORD watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the LORD our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice. 15 And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly. 16 O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us. 17 Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. 18 O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies. 19 O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.”

- Daniel 9:1-19

A Prayer of Brokenness

I just want to draw to your attention a pattern of prayer that I find in the ninth chapter of Daniel, modeled by this great servant of God by the name of Daniel. By the time we get to chapter 9, we already know a lot about Daniel. It isn't as if we're just getting introduced to this man, by now we know very much about him. In fact, by now, he's probably over 80 years old. And so, and most of his life has already been lived. We have seen him to be an uncompromising man. We have seen him to be a bold and courageous man.

We have seen that he is full of faith, he is unselfish, he is humble and meek, he is resistant to the encroachment of the world. He is persistent in his devotion to God. He is holy. He is, as far as men can be, an incorruptible man. He has no price. He cannot be bought. He is consistent in his life. He is amazingly trustworthy making full use of all of his opportunities and building everyone's confidence in him. He is virtuous, he is obedient. He is worshipful.

But I think the dominant thing that comes out in this marvelous story of Daniel is that he is above all things a man of prayer and that, no doubt, was the reason for all those other things. The greatest indication of his prayer life, of course, we find in the incident in chapter 6 where he is told that he is not to worship his own God, he is not to pray to his own God. The princes of the land have set it up so that only the king is to be – is to be worshiped and adored and no other person is to be approached in prayer.

And yet Daniel, customary in his life, throws open the windows of his room and prays facing the city of Jerusalem as he always did, and does not hesitate, does not compromise in his prayer life. As a result, he was thrown in to a – a den of lions. And the marvelous story that you all know so well took place. God shut the mouths of the lions and he was greatly spared. But Daniel is a man of prayer. We see his commitment to prayer, his persistence in prayer in chapter 6. We see that uncompromising, bold, courageous, holy, virtuous character that really is born out of prayer.

But we go one step deeper into his prayer life in chapter 9. And what we see here is not an example of his persistence and non-compromising spirit, but rather we see a model prayer itself. This is Daniel doing his praying and it describes for us the very elements of his prayer as he himself prays it. By the way, I might note that it is the second half of Daniel 9 that gets

all the press. It is the second half of Daniel 9 that gets all the copy in books. It is the second half of this great chapter which is most often preached upon, the 70 weeks of Daniel and their great prophetic import. And because of the greatness of the second half prophetically, very often the first half is ignored and should not be so.

I believe it to be probably the single greatest model of prayer in all the Old Testament. In fact, it is to the Old Testament what Matthew 6 and the disciples' prayer is to the New Testament. It is instruction firsthand by example of how to pray. Now chapter 8 ends with the prophet being stricken physically. Verse 27, "I, Daniel, fainted and was sick for days. Afterward I rose up and did the king's business and I was astonished at the vision but none understood it."

Now Daniel had such an extreme burden for the restoration of his people, spiritually and physically to the land, he had such a deep heart-felt compassion that his people come back to God and back to their covenant place and back to fulfillment that he actually became ill over it. He had just had a vision of the coming disasters in the history of Israel, a vision of Antiochus Epiphanes, the one who would desecrate the temple, a vision that stretched even beyond Antiochus, who was a Greek who desecrated the temple in the intertestamental period between the Old and the New, but the vision also stretched forward to a vision of Antichrist and the terrifying reality of what was going to happen.

And when Daniel saw what was coming in the history of Israel through this tremendous really judgment of God through the vehicle of Antiochus Epiphanes and also Antichrist, though at that time he didn't know specifically their names and we yet don't know the name of Antichrist. But he could see this coming judgment, the coming disaster on his people. It broke his heart and made him physically sick. So in chapter 9 as God's compassionate heartbroken servant, he intercedes for the people whom he loves. It is a passionate prayer. It is the prayer that comes from the heart of the shepherd.

The Medo-Persian kingdom has come. The kingdom of Babylon has been overturned and the Medo-Persians have now taken over and they are the second great world empire, to be succeeded by Greece and then by Rome. Daniel, as I said, is over 80 years of age. He has been Prime Minister in the nation during the Babylonian kingdom and continues to be Prime Minister during the Medo-Persian kingdom which is quite a comment on his character. Very

few people would have lasted through such an over turning of government, to have the single greatest power in the world dethroned and destroyed and a new power put in its place and keep the same Prime Minister is indeed amazing and speaks of the integrity of the life of this unusual man of God.

We find then in verse 1 a setting. “In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans” Now the Medo-Persian kingdom has come. The man entitled Darius reigns on the throne. And this is the time in which Daniel makes his prayer. During this time – let’s look at verse 2, “In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books,” – not just any books, literally in the Hebrew, by the books. And what would be the books? A collection of Old Testament books, the books, which included the prophet Jeremiah. And he said, “I 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.”

The books, the scrolls which Jeremiah had – which Daniel had included the prophecy of Jeremiah. And Jeremiah had been given by God the message that Israel when taken into Babylonian captivity would be there 70 years. In Jeremiah 25:11 and 12 we read that, also in Jeremiah 29:10. So Daniel, at the time of the beginning of the Medo-Persian Empire under Darius in the first year, is reading the books and he comes across the word of Jeremiah which is also called, wonderfully so, the Word of the Lord. He comes across these promises that the captivity of Israel will – will last for 70 years. This then becomes that which spurs his prayer.

He longs to see the end of Judah’s captivity. He senses that the 70 years is up because he himself was taken into captivity. If God began the captivity with the first deportation in 605, then it was nearly the end of the 70 years. It was imminent. There were three deportations. If God started counting the 70 years from the second deportation in 597, it was a little further off but still imminent. And if God started counting by the third deportation in 586 it was yet a little further off, but still it was near.

And so, he senses that the 70 years will fast be accomplished and that sets up his prayer. And with that in his heart, compassionately wanting to see the restoration of his people, he intercedes on behalf of them. And it is a marvelous model of intercessory prayer and I want to draw out of it some elements of prayer that should characterize your prayer life and my

prayer life. In fact, we could be as bold as to say true prayer will always be marked by these elements. They are the marks of true prayer. This is a model of how to pray.

First of all, true prayer is in response to the Word of God. True prayer is in response to the Word of God. And we saw that in verse 2, “And 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 70 years in the desolations of Jerusalem.” Daniel frankly prayed in response to the Word of God. He prayed in response to the teaching of Scripture.

On the one hand, he could see the certainty of divine sovereign purpose and yet on the other hand he could see the necessity of prayer. And that is a very difficult tension to hold. To be able to understand on the one hand that God has a sovereign plan and that that plan is very clearly indicated in Scripture, even to the point of the number of years, 70 years, and on the other hand, to still be burdened to pray, is to hold that in perfect balance. Because the tendency is to say this, “Well, God has a plan for 70 years and at the end of 70 years it’s going to be accomplished so what’s the point in praying, right?” I mean, if you know what the plan is, why bother to intercede?

But that’s not Daniel’s spirit because one of the basic elements of prayer is this. Prayer is a means by which the believer lines himself up with the sovereign purpose of God. And it isn’t something that you do because it’s theologically correct; it’s something you do because of the compassion of your heart. The power of the Word drives men to prayer if they really respond to the Word.

I mean, it’s like John in the Revelation who has just gone through 21 chapters detailing the coming of Jesus Christ, giving us all the specifics that we can handle and even more, and when he’s done with all of that, he cries out from the depths of his heart, “Even so, come Lord Jesus,” and somebody would say, “Isn’t that a little superfluous? I mean, for 21 chapters you’ve been telling us He’s coming, now what are you praying like that for?” Because it isn’t something that you study theologically, it’s something that rises out of the desire of your heart that you are involved in desiring to see that very promise fulfilled.

I know Jesus is coming, but that doesn’t mean that’s not my heart’s desire. That doesn’t mean that I don’t cry out, “Even so, come Lord Jesus.” And Daniel knows the 70 years will be up

when the 70 years are up and yet he is compassionately involved with the tragedy of his people and he cannot restrain his heart and so he lines himself up in his own heart with the purpose of God. Prayer and the Word to the one who is devout are inseparably linked.

Go back for a moment to the eighth chapter of Nehemiah. “And all the people gathered themselves together” – verse 1 – “as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spoke unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel.” Then you know the story. He brought the book, they read from the book from morning until mid-day and everybody was standing and listening and all of that. Verse 5, “Ezra opened the book in the sight of the people; he was above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood: And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen.”

You know what “amen” means? What does it mean? Let it be, let it be, it is an affirmation. The Word says it, let it happen, let it happen. “They lifted up their hands, they bowed their heads, they worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.” In verse 8, “they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.” they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, gave the sense and caused them to understand the reading.”

It has always been part and parcel of the church of the redeemed and of Israel of old, those who were true-hearted Jews, to respond to the plan of God with the affirmation of an Amen. Let it be, let it be. That is true to the spirit of prayer. Even though we know the plan of God, it does not preclude our praying. It rather insights our praying because we have a heart’s desire to involve ourselves in the holy purpose of God.

If your theology precludes your prayer, you have a bad theology. Worse than that, if you’ve got every – everything dispensationally pigeon-holed, if you’ve got everything cut and dried in terms of Scripture so you see no point in prayer, you probably are betraying a very, very cold heart. Not only a heart that demonstrates a lack of concern for the lost, but a heart that demonstrates a lack of concern for the plan of God and a lack of desire of being a part of that coming to pass. I mean, as you study the Word of God it ought to generate prayer.

For example, when the Word speaks of God you ought to long to fellowship with Him. When the Word speaks of His attributes, your prayer should be that you should experience the reality of those attributes. When the Word speaks of blessing, it ought to bring prayer and praise. When the Word speaks of glory, we ought to long to give it to Him. When it speaks of promise, we ought to long to see it realized. When it speaks of judgment we should long that it be avoided. When it speaks of hell we should pray for mercy for the lost.

There's no – there's no true doctrine of the sovereignty of God or of the revelation of the Word of God that removes our heart's concern and cry from being engaged in that purpose coming to pass. So Daniel's prayer is born out of the study and understanding of the Word. I mean, for example, I read in the Scripture a thing like this. Jesus says in Matthew 16, "I will build My church and" – what? – "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Now if my theology says, "Well look, MacArthur, He said He'd build His church so what are you so worried about? Why are you so exercised? Why are you so passionately communicating to the church? Why are you so burdened to run across the country and send out tapes and messages and write books to try to help the church? And why are you calling all these pastors in here and why are you worried about who's saved and who is not saved? He'll build His church and the gates of hell, which is a Jewish euphemism for death, will not be able to prevent it. If it's going to happen, it's going to happen. What are you so concerned about?"

The point is this, as a believer, my heart is so knit with the heart of God and my heart is so knit with the truth of Scripture that I cannot divorce myself and maintain indifference. Do you understand that? I am engulfed in the same passion that engulfs the heart of God. So prayer is generated by the Word of God. It is not eliminated by that. As I see where God's going, I want to be a part of it. As I see the cry of God's heart and the plan of God unfold in Scripture, I want to get involved in that. I want to identify with that. I am constrained by that.

Secondly, and very closely related, prayer is generated by God's Word and it is grounded in God's will. It is grounded in God's will. He knew God's will. And he prayed according to God's will. The New Testament says, "If we ask anything according to His" – what? – "will we know that we have what we ask." Daniel knew God's will and he knew exactly what it was and he prayed within the framework of God's will.

That's basically what it means when it says in Galatians, "Praying in the Spirit," when it says in Jude, "Praying in the Spirit." Praying in the Spirit isn't some kind of ecstasy, it is praying consistent with the will of God. That is what we find is the ministry of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8. It says the Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered, and he who searches the heart knows the mind of the Spirit, that He always prays according to the will of God." We pray not to change the will of God.

We don't back off from prayer fatalistically saying, "Well God's already got His will," but rather our prayers are grounded in the will of God as they are generated by the Word of God. There's no place for fatalism. Fatalism is deadly to anyone's prayer life, and as I said a moment ago, betrays a heart of indifference and a theology that is a theology of indifference is no biblical theology at all.

In 1 Samuel, just something to share with you, chapter 12 verse 19, Samuel in verse 18 calls the Lord and then in verse 19, "All the people 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 us a king.' And Samuel said unto the people, 'Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve 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 for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people.'"

Now isn't that an interesting thing? He says to them, "Fear the Lord but don't be afraid of Him, for you've done all this wickedness. Don't turn aside from the Lord, don't turn aside from the Lord, don't go after vain things, they can't profit, they can't deliver." Then he turns right around and says, "And of course you won't be forsaken by the Lord because you're His people for His namesake He'll hold on to you, it's pleased the Lord to make you His people. Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you."

Now wait a minute. If you know they're God's people and you know they're going to be true – or God's going to be true to His covenant to them and God's going to maintain a relationship with them, then what in the world are you praying about? That's just the point. He knows what God's will is and he prays within the framework of God's will. He's uniting

his heart with the holy purpose of God. That's how we're to pray in Matthew 6. Our prayer is, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in heaven as it is in earth." David in Psalm 40 verse 8 said, "I delight to Thy will, O my God."

Jesus said in John 4:34, I think it is, in reference to His own relationship to the Father, "My meat, or My food, My sustenance is to do the will of Him that sent Me." And that is not a bitter resentment. We're not talking about saying, "Well, I'm praying and this is the will of God, it's all cut and dried," in a – sort of in a bitter resentful way, I just acquiesce to it. We're not talking about that. We're not talking about some kind of passive resignation that just flops and says, "I can't do anything about it, I give in." We're not talking about any kind of acquiescence at all. We pray within the framework of God's will as a part of the fulfillment itself.

Somebody said to me years ago as I was kind of developing in seminary, "God not only plans the outcome, but He plans the process as well." And our prayers are a part of the process. Prayer in God's will is a form of rebellion, really, against the world, a form of rebellion against Satan, against fallenness, against evil where God's will is not being done. And so, even as Jesus taught us, we are to pray that the will of God would be done on earth as it is in heaven. Once Daniel knew God's will, having drawn it out of God's Word, he knew how to pray. And I've often tried to teach you this through the years. I only refresh your mind. You can pray best when you understand the teaching of the Word of God and have a framework for the will of God. And so Daniel prayed, generated by the Word of God, grounded in the will of God.

There's a third thing that marks his prayer life and I think this, too, can be so instructive for us. His prayer was characterized by fervency. And all of these sort of flow together; they're overlapping. His prayer was generated by God's Word. Once he read the Word he was engulfed in the heart of God, then it was grounded in the will of God. Once he understood what the Word was saying specifically, he identified with that and prayed consistently with God's will. Then thirdly, his prayer is characterized by fervency. And here we move in to verse 3 and a marvelous thing. He says, "And I set my face unto the Lord God to seek by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes." What a beautiful intensity.

And somebody is going to come along and say to him, “What are you all worried about? You already know what the Word of God says, you already know what the will of God is. Why are you so concerned? Why are you so intense? Why are you so persistent?” And again I remind you that the heart of a man who draws nigh unto God is going to be parallel to the heart of God. And even though he knows the will of God and even though he understands the Word of God, he cannot be passionless.

The Bible says in spite of what we know to “pray without” – What? – “ceasing.” And the Bible says in James 5, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Now I don’t know how it fits in with God’s will, but it does. But that’s not a problem for me because there are a lot of things I don’t know. People say, “Well, if God’s already determined what’s going to happen, how in the world can He say the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much? How can we say the little epithet that we’ve seen as we grew up, “Prayer changes things”? How can we believe that God hears and answers prayer?

How is it in the Old Testament that God can say I’m going to do this, somebody prays and He says I’m not going to do that? How can He change His mind? How can we resolve that with His sovereignty?” The answer is we can’t. It’s impossible. But then there are a lot of impossible things. I don’t understand how Jesus can be God and man. I don’t understand how books in the Bible can be written fully by a human author and yet every word the Word of God. I don’t understand how it is that you can be chosen in Him before the foundation of the world and yet come to Christ on your own choice, and if you go to hell you go because you personally rejected Christ.

I don’t understand how you as a Christian can live your Christian life, beat your body to bring it into subjection, how I am called to obedience and commitment on my own, and yet every good thing in me is produced by the Spirit of God. I don’t understand how those things work at all. In fact, in most things in the Bible when there’s a divine truth reduced to a human mind, there’s so much left out that we can’t bring it to ultimate resolution. All I know is the Scripture tells me to be faithful to pray. And my heart tells me the same thing.

Yes, I know Christ will build His church and the gates of hell won’t prevail against it, but it is still the cry of my heart that He would do that. It is still the cry of my heart that He would purge His church. Yes, I know His desire is to present it as a glorious church, not having spot

or wrinkle or any such thing, but still it is the desire of my heart to pray that the church would be pure and holy and without spot and without blemish. So I don't understand how they resolve in the mind of God but I know where my heart is and I know what the Scripture tells me to do.

Now the stress in this third point of fervency is on the attitude of Daniel. He says, "I set my face," that's a – that's a colloquialism for a resolute focus. He zeroes in, he sets his face. We would say he set his jaw. There was a determination there. I set my face unto the Lord God, not Yahweh, but Adoni, the one who is the Lord and Master. I come in recognition of God's authority and God's sovereignty. And though I set my face toward a sovereign God, yet I seek, by prayer and supplication, intercession. Literally the idea is entreaty. I seek; I seek; I request. I come before Him with a burden. And he even indicates that he dresses himself in sackcloth and ashes and fasts.

Fasting, by the way, is the most natural response to a consumed heart. If you have trouble fasting, it is because you have trouble being concerned. I'm often amazed that when someone is in a dire situation, the loss of a loved one, some time of disaster, people always want to tell them to be sure and eat. Sometimes in a hospital situation where someone has lost a loved one, people are forever trying to tell someone, "You need to eat something, you'll feel better if you eat something." That – that's just the antithesis of what's really going on because fasting in Scripture is always connected to great importunity and fervency and prayer when the heart is so exercised over a spiritual reality that it has no desire for food.

And therein is the heart of Daniel described. Humility symbolized by sackcloth and ashes, a consuming fervency symbolized by fasting and a face that is set by prayer and supplication toward God. And by the way, he was persistent enough so that when the answer comes in verse 20 he's still doing it, he's still presenting his supplication. So his fervency was lasting.

Biblical prayer, the prayer that's modeled by Daniel is that which is generated out of the Word of God. When I hear these people today who pray prayers that are so unbiblical that know nothing of what the Scripture teaches, prayer that demands this and demands that out of God and corners God and tells Him He has to do this and has to do the other thing, I see that as a false kind of prayer not generated by the Word and not, secondly, grounded in the will of God but rather grounded in the will of the individual. I want a new car and I want this and I

demand my healing and I want the other thing. That's not grounded in God's will that's grounded in my will.

And then this matter of fervency, fervency in aligning oneself with the plan of God. And fasting indicates to me that here is a prayer of deprivation. True prayer is – the essence of true prayer is not self-consumption, the essence of true prayer is a heart that's so overwrought and burdened and broken that it is a heart given to self-abasement, a heart given to self-denial, not a heart given to self-consumption. Nothing could be further from the truth. A burdened heart, an anxious heart, a broken heart, like the heart of Jonah in chapter 3.

Fervency in prayer, by the way, in the Scripture is indicated by a lot of things. Wearing sackcloth, sitting in ashes, putting ashes on your head, shaving your head, smiting your breast, crying aloud, throwing dust on your head, tearing your garment, fasting sighing. We have examples in Scripture of groaning, loud crying, Christ sweating blood, of agony of a broken heart, a broken spirit like in Psalm 34 and Psalm 51 where David cries out with a broken heart; rending the heart, making an oath, making a sacrifice, a lot of things to demonstrate fervency in prayer.

And here we see Daniel with the fervency demonstrated in the fasting and the sackcloth and the ashes which were symbols of his humiliation. Every indication here is that he is fervent. And he is a living model of James 5:16, "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." It's a prayer not unlike that of our Lord in the garden who poured out His heart to God to the extent of sweating, as it were, great drops of blood. If anybody should have been resigned to the plan of God, Jesus should have. And people have often wondered, "Why did He go and pray with such compassion, pray with such a burdened heart, pray to the point where He almost died in the garden because of the intensity of His prayer? After all, He knew it had to happen. He knew it was going to go that way, He knew He had to go to the cross, He said that's the reason I came into the world, to die. What was all that about?"

And again I remind you that true prayer is prayer that is generated out of the Word of God and consistent with the will of God and still is fervent. And what He was praying there was an indication of His rebellion against sin. And He was rebelling against the world the way it was and the power of darkness and the power of evil. And even though He knew the day would come when the Father would break that power and even though He knew that the cross

was a place where that power's – where that power would be broken, yet He could not disassociate Himself from the intense desire on the heart of God to see that happen.

And God responds to that. You remember Luke and the guy who got what he wanted because he kept banging and banging and banging and banging. Finally the guy got up and opened the door and said, “What do you want? Go away, it's the middle of the night.” He said, “I need some bread.” And “for your much knocking you're going to get some bread.” And the point of the parable is that if a man will give you bread just because you beat on the door and the man is mad and the man doesn't like you, what do you think God will do who loves you when you have a need? He'll respond. So ours is not to try to resolve how sovereignty works with our passion, but to pour out our heart and trust God that it fits in the plan.

So true intercession is generated by the Word of God, grounded in the will of God and characterized by fervency. And I fear, people, that that is such a missing element in prayer today. As I looked at those three things and thought about that, I – all I could see – all I could see in my mind was prayer that is generated by self-desire, grounded in my own will and the very opposite of a self-abasing fervency, it's nothing more than a “gimme” kind of thing where people want to get something from God. And there are plenty of charlatans running around telling them God wants to make you healthy, wealthy, wise and happy and give you a new car and all of this, and not the kind of prayer we see here.

And that takes me to point four. True prayer is realized in self-denial. True prayer is realized in self-denial. In verse 4, “I prayed unto the Lord my God and made my confession.” My – Daniel, the best of men, the most honorable of men, the godliest of men is very meek, very meek. There's no self-confidence here. There's no self-seeking here. There's no self-righteousness here. There are no demands made on God because of who He is. He searched his own soul. He found there some positive wickedness. He found there deafness to the divine voice, disobedience to the clear and plain command of God. He found there times when he was contemptuous of sovereign lordship. And all of that brought him to humility. And he lays the ax to the root of the tree of his own life, the tree of pride.

And all true people of God have had that attitude. I'm reminded of – and you are too, I'm sure – of Abraham in Genesis 18:27. Abraham went before the Lord and he tarried in the presence of the Lord and he said, “Behold, now” – amazing statement – “I have taken upon

me to speak unto the Lord who am but dust and ashes.” I know I don’t even belong here. And so, Daniel’s soul is clothed in a just shame. And I see a self- denying spirit here. The very opposite of the Luke 18 Pharisee who goes in the temple and says, “I thank Thee that I am not as other men.” Remember that?

That’s not Daniel. Daniel knows that whoever ascends the holy hill must come with clean hands a pure heart. Daniel knew in principle what our Lord later said in words, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.” And as a representative of his people, coming to intercede for his people, his own purity was even more essential. And so, his heart is burdened with the fact that he is a sinful man and he is coming to confess for himself, first of all.

A prayer I read goes like this: “O God, I know that I often do Thy work without Thy power, and sin by my dead, heartless, blind service, my lack of inward light, love, delight, my mind, heart, tongue moving but without Thy help. It is my deceit to preach and pray and to stir up other spiritual affections in order to beget commendations whereas my rule should be daily to consider myself more vile than any man in my own eyes.

“Help me to rejoice in my infirmities and give Thee praise, to acknowledge my deficiencies before others and not be discouraged by them that they may see Thy glory more clearly. Teach me that I must act by a power supernatural whereby I can attempt things above my strength and bear evils beyond my strength, acting for Christ in all and having His superior power to help me. Let me learn of Paul whose presence was common, his weakness great, his utterance contemptible, yet Thou didst account him faithful and blessed. Lord, let me lean on Thee as he did and find my ministry Thy ministry.”

For all of us, prayer is only genuine and only powerful when it comes out of a pure life and an attitude of self-denial that says Thy will, Thy name, Thy kingdom. Should be our desire to have a deep repentance, a horror of sin, a dread of its approach, to pray as one Puritan prayed, “Plow deep in me, Great Lord, heavenly husbandman, that my being may be a tilled field, the roots of grace spreading far and wide until Thou alone art seen in me. Thy beauty golden like summer harvest, Thy fruitfulness as autumn’s plenty.”

And here this dear man of God does not parade his greatness. This man does not exalt himself above everybody else and demand things out of God but rather sees himself as one desperately in need of confessing his own failure. So again, we learn that true intercession is generated by God's Word, grounded in God's will, characterized by fervency and realized in self-denial. That's the spirit of true prayer.

And then fifthly, it is identified with God's people. It is identified with God's people. And I want you to notice, beginning at verse 5 – and I want to run this by you all the way down to about verse 14 or so perhaps, right before we're done. But I just want you to notice in verse 5 the word, "we," and then in verse 6, "we," "our," "our," "our." it's used three times. In verse 7 the word "us." In verse 8, "us," "our," "our," "we." Verse 10, "we," "us." Verse 11, "us," "we." Verse 12, "us," "us." Verse 13, "us," "our," "we." Verse 14, "us," "we." Verse 15 at the end of the verse, "we," "we." Verse 16, "our," "our," "us." Now the implication of all of that is very clear. Here is a man who identifies with his people. Always it's "we," "us," and "our." Always the plural pronoun is used.

He is not standing aloof from his people, praying for them as if he was detached from them, praying for them as if he was some holy creature and they some unholy. But rather he involves himself with their own sin. He engulfs himself in their own distress. He prays for others but encompasses them in his own prayer. In other words, here is a picture of a true servant of God, a true shepherd who is so intrinsically identified with his people that he doesn't ever divorce himself from them. It isn't, "Lord, bless those people and make them like me."

I remember sitting in a church in Connecticut one time and hearing a pastor pray, "Oh, God, I pray that the people would come to be as dedicated to you as I am." That just sent a chill up my back. Now it may be true that he was more dedicated than his people but that kind of flaunting of a supposed superiority is the antithesis of the heart of the shepherd who wants to come down where his people are and encourage their own struggle by the confession of his own. And rather than stand afar off in damning judgment of his people as if he is holier than they are, he embraces them in his own arms and with a plural pronoun incorporates himself in their own struggle and does, I suppose, what we could say is in the heart of Paul as he writes, "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ."

In fact, our identification with each other should be so complete that we feel the pain and the guilt of other's sin. And Daniel did. He regarded the sins of his people, the sins of the priests, the sins of the rulers, the sins of the judges, the sins of the kings as his own. There was a certain sense of solidarity. And, you know, beloved, until we have that spirit for the church, we're always going to have to deal with a critical and pious attitude until we realize that we need to embrace the church and pray for the church and incorporate our own weaknesses in the weaknesses of the church.

Until we realize that we cannot stand apart self-righteously judging them, we're not going to see God do what He ought to do, what He would desire to do through our prayers. And we can pray for the body of Christ today in the same way. I'm burdened that people want to stand back and damn and condemn and criticize as if they were without sin. Like Jesus said, "Let him that is without sin" – What? – "throw the first stone." Who do you think you are? God help you.

I'm not talking about embracing in your prayers the unregenerate. I'm not talking about those who willfully engage in sin, a violent flagrant sin and in some way confessing your own equal guilt. What I'm saying is the fact that none of us can stand aloof as if we are so pure that we need not be included in a prayer of confession and that we can stand in condemning judgment on all others as if we're unstained. And this wonderful identification with God's wayward people makes Daniel a true intercessor and not a critic. God, give the church intercessors in replace of critics. So, Daniel passionately intercedes for his people. That intercession is identified with God's people.

There's a sixth note here and that is that prayer has inherent in it a longing for righteousness. It has inherent in it a longing for righteousness. It is the very essence of prayer that it is not concerned with little things. I mean, prayer to so many people is so shallow. "Lord, solve my problem, Lord, fix my job up, Lord, I need transportation." And all of those things are okay, I'm not saying you shouldn't pray that. But some of us never get beyond that. And our prayers are very superficial. The essence of real prayer is a cry for righteousness, a cry for holiness. Look at it, and this is – this is what we hear in this prayer.

He's starting in verse 5. "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thine ordinances:

Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, who spoke in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness belongs unto thee, but unto us confusion of face” – distortion. Confusion of face means shame of things. Shame in the heart touches the face. We are shamed. – “As men of Judah, inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, that are near and far off – “because we have trespassed against thee.” In verse 8, “O Lord, to us belongs confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, we have sinned against thee.

“To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him; neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. 11 Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured on us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him.

“And he hath confirmed his words, which he spoke against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth. Therefore hath the Lord watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the Lord our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice.”

Beloved, I want you to know that this is really the essential part of prayer. Prayer more than anything else is the cry of the redeemed heart, the cry of the child of God for a righteousness which he knows should be true of his life, however, it is violated repeatedly by sin. That’s the stuff that real prayer is made of. And it’s fine to pray for physical things. I was on a talk program on television one time where a preacher was giving a testimony that Jesus had found him a parking place. In fact, he was asked, “How is it that you know He answers prayer?” And he gave a description of driving in to a crowded shopping thing and he found a parking place immediately because he asked Jesus.

And I thought to myself, I don’t know whether Jesus found him a parking place. Maybe just somebody pulled out and went home. I don’t know whether Jesus found him a parking space,

but I know this, I hope his prayer life is deeper than that. Because I really don't care about that. I don't think that's really what my prayers should be preoccupied with. What I'm concerned about is that if I'm the right person I'm going to be in the place where God's blessing is going to be part and parcel of my life. And if it's strategic to the advancement of the kingdom to find a parking place, that will happen. But the issue for me is a recognition that I'm not what I ought to be and my prayer needs to pour that out to God. The depth of that prayer is the issue.

A farmer one day went with his son to a wheat field to see if it was ready for harvest. And the young lad said to his father, "Look, Father, how straight these stems and how they hold their heads, they must be the best ones. And those that hang their heads down, I'm sure, couldn't be good for anything." The farmer plucked a stock of wheat of each kind and handed it to his son and said, "You're foolish, my son. The stalk that stood straight stood straight because it's so light headed and good for nothing. The one that hangs down is hanging modestly because it's full of the most beautiful grain." The heads that hang are the ones, I think, that appear the most beautiful and useful to God.

Well you got the message in verses 5 through 14, I don't need to detail it all to you. But you understand the heart cry of this man. God has cursed us and we deserve it and the key thing is we have failed to obey. And I love – I love what he – what he says in verse 13 and 14. We didn't make our prayer so the Lord brought evil, the Lord our God is righteous in all His works which He does for we obeyed not His voice. Literally, the Hebrew says we smoothed not the face of Yahweh. We didn't do anything to sort of smooth out the wrinkles of consternation in the face of God when He saw the way we were acting. We didn't agree with God about our sinfulness. And so we're being chastened.

Beloved, may I encourage you in your prayer life that your prayer should primarily focus on a hunger for righteousness? I'm telling you, if that becomes the dynamic in your prayer life, it will change your life. If all you ever do is ask for this little thing and that little thing and the other little thing, you're dealing in superficial realities. The cry of the heart is for true righteousness and to the one who is truly righteous comes all the blessing of God. Is that not so? True intercessory prayer then, generated by God's Word, grounded in God's will, characterized by fervency, realized in self-denial, identified with God's people and preoccupied with righteousness.

And may I add another thing? It is dependent on God's character, a seventh principle. It is dependent on God's character. In other words, when we go to God our whole petition is built upon the constant reality of who He is. Verse 4, "O Lord, the great and awesome God, keeping covenant and mercy to them that love Him, and them that keep His commandments," I'm coming to you and I'm pleading with you because I know You're a God of mercy and You're a God who keeps His promise and You're a God who rewards those who obey and we can trust in that. Prayer is predicated on an unchanging God.

Verse 7, "Righteousness belongs unto Thee." I know You'll do what's right. Verse 9, "Mercy and forgiveness belong to Thee." God is a God of righteousness. God is a God of mercy. God is a God of forgiveness. God is a God who keeps His covenant and His promise. And then in verse 15 he emphasizes that God is a God of power who brought His people out of the land of Egypt "with a mighty hand" and has become renown. Now we go to a God who is a glorious God. We cry out to a God who is righteous, a God who is merciful, a God who is forgiving, a God who keeps His promises and a God who is powerful.

We need to realize that our prayers are grounded in the character of God, His power, His awesome majesty, His covenant keeping faithfulness, His mercy which is really the Old Testament word for steadfast love, His righteousness or holiness, His forgiveness and His awesome power. It's wonderful that we're going to a God like that, isn't it? It would be one thing to ask God to do something and for God to want to do it. It's quite another for Him to be able, isn't it? And our God is able. He is able.

So the request for restoration, as he prays for restoration, as he asks that he might be righteous and his people might be righteous, he knows God is righteous and that's his desire. As he asks for mercy and forgiveness, he knows that God is merciful and forgiving. As he asks for a great power to be expressed among the people to turn them around. He knows that God is a God of power. So everything he prays is consistent with what he knows to be true about God. And we cannot in any condition ask God to do anything that is inconsistent with who He is. But if we pray for righteousness and mercy and forgiveness and God to be faithful and to love us with a steadfast love and to turn us from our sin and to cause us to walk in the way of righteousness, we know that God is not only willing but able to answer that.

And then there's a final thing. The last element of intercessory prayer that is true to the Word of God is that it consummates in God's glory. In other words, the intention of all of it is for the glory of God. Look at verse 16, "O Lord," – cries Daniel – "according to all Thy righteousness, I beseech Thee, let Thine anger and Thy fury be turned away from Thy city Jerusalem, Thy holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Thy people are a reproach to all those around us. Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Thy servant, and his supplications, and cause Thy face to shine on Thy sanctuary, which is desolate" – watch this line – "for the" – What? – "for the Lord's sake."

Not for us. For who? Why should God answer prayer? So you can get what you want? No, so He can put Himself on display. What was Daniel concerned about? God's reputation. People around were saying, "What kind of God have you got? What kind of a God can't even protect you? What kind of a God lets you all be taken into captivity? What kind of God makes you a byword in passing? What kind of God leaves your nation desolate, your land without inhabitant, your temple smashed to the ground, the walls of your city crumbling? What kind of God turned you into slaves in a pagan land? What kind of deity do you have who can't even protect you?"

And Daniel is saying, "O God, do You realize what's happening to Your reputation among the people around us? So Lord, take us back and make us what You want us to be that You might be glorified." That's the whole point. "O my God," – verse 18, "incline Your ear and hear, open Your eyes and behold our desolation in the city which is called by Thy name. Lord, that place has Your name." Have you prayed that way? O God, revive Your church because Your church bears Your name. O Lord, don't allow the church to fall in to disrepute, don't allow Your name to be besmirched by those who would tear it down.

"We do not" – verse 18 says in the middle – "present our supplications before Thee for our righteousnesses but for Thy great mercies. O Lord, O Lord, hear, O Lord, forgive, O Lord, hearken and do it and defer not" – here it comes – "for Thine own sake, O my God, for Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy name." We don't want Your name dishonored. Boy, there's so much integrity in that prayer. It's just amazing the instructiveness of this prayer. When you pray, do you pray this way? This is the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man. And it was all for the glory of God, totally selfless. Your name is being dishonored. Oh, God, don't let it happen.

Prayer then is modeled here, generated by the Word of God, grounded in the will of God, characterized by passion and fervency, realizing self-denial that identifies with others. Its essential ingredient is a longing for righteousness. It is built on God's character and it is consummated in God's glory. That isn't the end. The end is when you pray like this you get an answer.

Look at verse 20. "And while I was speaking" – I like that – "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" – that is for Jerusalem – "yea, while I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, began – being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation." You know what happened? God was sending the answer before he even said the Amen.

And while he was still praying, Gabriel in a human form dispatched by God, Gabriel himself, archangel, touched him as if to say, "I'm coming back with a message from God in answer to your prayer." And the message he gave him was an incredible marvelous thrilling message of hope in which God said to him through that angel, "Yes, there is determined upon Israel a time of trouble, but in the end, there will come a great time of everlasting righteousness," verse 24 says. And his heart was filled with hope, for God promised to answer his prayer. That kind of prayer always gets answered, by the way. Because it is praying according to the design of God.