

Last week we looked at the second chapter of Joel. Joel called Israel to “Blow the trumpet in Zion”, which is similar to an air raid warning. But the one coming to battle Israel was the Lord Himself. God’s people had become so like the world that God had allowed them to be taken captive by Babylon. But, they still hadn’t learned of repented. So Joel warned them of a more severe discipline. The only answer was to call for a “sacred or solemn assembly”, which is a time of prayer. But how do you pray for a nation or church in trouble. It is found in Daniel 9. We usually read this prayer and preach on it because it contains the prophecy of the seventy weeks of years. I won’t even mention the seventy weeks this morning. We want to learn how to pray for a desolate church.

Before we begin, I want to clarify a couple of things. First, God’s church will never be defeated or destroyed. God disciplined Israel, but the nation will never cease to exist. The same is true of the church, not America, the church. What happened to Israel was that she was not receiving the presence of God, which is the primary blessing of being God’s people. It is the most important thing in being a church.

The Church in America has grown weak and lethargic because of having man at the center of our attention and being man pleasers for the past fifteen years. Jesus is not pleased with that. He wants His bride (the church) to see Him, not creation as God. He wants the unsaved, and the weak church, to say, “They have a big God at that church.” That is not to exalt a church, but to exalt God. He wants to be God alone in the eyes of all the world. But it must begin with His church. Isn’t it sad that God’s enemies recognize Him as a “big God”, but his own people often fail to trust and see Him as He is? That is why God is shaking His own church and often is the cause of our defeat. He wants us to wake up and see our Great God. Revival refers not to the unsaved, but to the church.

The condition of Israel at the time of Daniel is similar to the church today. Israel had been taken captive by Babylon. The nation of Babylon fell about 500 years before Christ, but Revelation makes it clear that the spirit of Babylon is a spirit that usurps the presence and authority of God. We know from biblical prophecy that this force will continue to rise until it dominates the entire world.

After seventy years, the people of Israel were no longer praying for deliverance. They had accepted and many even liked living in Babylon. Today, the Christian church knows we are to be separate from the world, but we have become prosperous and there is no longer a cry for Jesus to return. We have become friends with the world, which James said is spiritual adultery and a sin.

Another reason the church is much like Israel of Daniel’s day is that the people were a reproach among the nations (**v. 16**). They were an object of scorn and mockery. The church is mocked today as Israel was then. There is no demonstration of the power of God. There is no fear of God in the world or in the church. The church should be ashamed even as Daniel said they were ashamed.

Daniel 9:17 *“Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord’s sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate”*.

Israel had become “desolate.” “Desolate” means “empty, uninhabited, ruined.” Here it has a physical and spiritual meaning. Physically, the temple, the place of God in Israel was ruined and standing empty in Jerusalem. To the church, it is not physical, but spiritual. Some churches empty of the presence of God, the Holy Spirit, and many do not even notice. Like Israel, the church has left the old paths given by God. We slaughter children in the womb, who are made in God’s image. We have distorted the God-ordained institution of marriage and twisted the clear God-given identities of male and female. We even ordain those who practice such things. Churches have watered down doctrines of hell, fear of God, holiness.

I realize not all churches are like that, but the problem is that the Church becomes guilty when they fail to take

a stand against such things. There was a day when the Church took a stand against false teaching, against immorality, but no more. Today, the Church is all-inclusive. We don't want to offend anyone. As a result, we have become a weak lazy church. So the church is guilty.

Now how do we pray for such a church? The answer is in Daniel 9. First, there must be a basis for prayer.

Daniel 9:2-3 *"in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. 3 Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.*

This is a very important part of prayer and where we fail and it becomes a cause for not praying in faith. In **Verse 2** Daniel is reading biblical scrolls and reads Jeremiah 25, where God said "I am going to let the Babylonians hold Israel in captivity for 70 years and then they will return to their own land." Daniel realized the time was about to be fulfilled and he began praying for God to do as He promised.

Prayers that are based on Scripture are the most effective prayers Jesus was referring to it in **John 15:7** when he said, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you." Praying God's word is affirming what God has said and asking for Him to do as He has already said. You may ask, "why are we to pray if Scripture says God is going to do it?" The answer is because all prayer is to be in accord with, and in response to, God's Word. At the end of the book of Revelation, Jesus says, "Behold I come quickly." And what is John's response? "Even so, come Lord Jesus."

Daniel recognized that **God employs means** to achieve His ends. Quite often, we are the means. Faith searches the Scripture to see what God has promised to do. That was what Daniel did.

1 John 5:14-15 *"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."*

Knowing the will of God gives faith to our prayers. God has revealed His will in His word.

But what can one person do? Several times in Israel's ministry, the intercession of one person brought about the nation's deliverance from judgment. Daniel and Moses are examples. God doesn't have to wait for the entire nation or church to repent and cry out for mercy; He will start to work when He hears the believing prayers of one faithful intercessor.

Next, Daniel began confessing Israel's sin. He hasn't asked for anything yet. (**vv 5-11**)

True intercessory prayer really is not preoccupied with self. It's hard to find a prayer in Scripture that's just personal. Daniel identifies himself with the sins of his people, using pronouns such as "we", "our", "us".

Examples: verse 5, **we** have sinned; verse 6, **we** have not listened to Your servants, verse 7, to **us** belongs open shame; verse 8, open shame belongs to **us**; verse 9, **we** have rebelled; verse 10, **we** did not obey the voice of the Lord our God; verse 11, all Israel has transgressed; end of verse 11, **we** have sinned against Him;

Out of 16 verses covered by Daniel's prayer, twelve confess sin and it is not "their" sin, but "our" sin. Perhaps the strongest statement comes in **verse 7**: "Lord, you are righteous, but we are covered with shame." That's not a politically correct statement. We live in a shameless society. We're not ashamed of anything anymore. But what was their shame (and this is important)? That they failed to exalt God. They had turned away from God, refused to listen to the messengers God had sent to them. Daniel makes no excuses for Israel. He doesn't blame the "sinful Babylonians" or the "pagan Philistines" who led them into sin. No finger pointing. No "Blame Game," no self-justification of any kind. Just, "I was wrong and sinned." Daniel says Israel deserved what happened to them (vv12-14).

Amazingly, this portion of the prayer (v.14) ends with the indictment, “But we have not obeyed Him,” Worse than the sins that brought captivity was the refusal to repent and confess their sins. Daniel cannot divorce himself from his people because he knows he's part of the problem. I can't pray a prayer, “straighten Your church out, Lord”, without saying straighten out me in the process. Daniel came to God pleading for **mercy and forgiveness** for himself and his people, and that's the kind of praying the Lord wants to hear. In the New Testament, especially in 1 Corinthians, we learn that as Christians we are one body. When one hurts, we all hurt. When one of us rejoices, we all rejoice.

Israel had become a reproach among the nations. "Jerusalem and thy people have become **a reproach** among all who are round about us (v. 16b)." "Reproach" or object of scorn and mockery. It means that the nations look at the defeated and scattered Israelites and they laugh. They mock God. That is the way it is with the Christian church in many places. We have made the name of Jesus an object of mockery by our unfaithfulness to God. So the world sees the name "Christian" as nothing radically different—everyone is a Christian today. James 2:7 says, “they blaspheme the holy name by which you are called.” Our name is “Christian”, God like, and we should be different from the world.

Then Daniel asks for mercy on Israel (vv 16-19). **True prayer appeals to the mercy of God.** Many in Israel no longer saw exile from their land as an issue. How different was Daniel's attitude. **To him the exile was the evidence of a divine curse (v. 11).** God in His grace gives us what we don't deserve, and God in His mercy doesn't give us what we do deserve. **v. 18** “We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy” **Having confessed the sins of the nation, Daniel goes on to declare that they deserved what happened to them.**

There is one final and most important element to prayer.

*“16 “O Lord, according to all Your righteousness, I pray, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people are a reproach to all those around us. 17 Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate. 18 O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies.”*

**Verse 16**, Daniel is saying, "God, turn away Your wrath, turn away Your anger." Then **verse 17**, here it comes, “and for **your** sake O Lord let Your face shine on You desolate sanctuary." Do you see it? Read it again. Daniel says, “God, we're not asking for our sake, we're asking for Your sake.”**What was the basic reason for his entire prayer? We are asking for Your sake.** There it is! Like a nugget of gold. Daniel came to the bottom line. His all-consuming desire and motive for praying was for **the glory of God. It should be the motive for all prayer.** Whatever glorifies You God.

Daniel says the same thing in verser 18. He doesn't say, “ take action because we deserve it.” No. "Do it for Your own sake, O my God. Don't delay because **Your** city and **Your** people are called by **Your** name. Your reputation is at stake.”

We should pray for the church and say, O God, purify Your church, it bears Your name." We are your people. Here is the true man of prayer. His one consuming passion is the glory of God. Daniel stated very simply and clearly what his prayer was all about. It was a heartfelt plea for God to be glorified in His city and in His people for His own great Name's sake.

His prayer reaches a crescendo as he cries out in **v. 19** O Lord, hear! Forgive!The last words recorded in the Daniel prayer are, “**Do it now Lord.**” How could Daniel be so sure? Because he read the will of God in Scripture and Scripture always glorifies God. God's glory refers to all He is. It is the sum of all His attributes.

God's goal and desire is that "All the earth shall be filled with His glory." True prayer always seeks the glory of God because it should be our motive for living.

Though Daniel clearly saw the need of the people, his prayer was God-centered, not people-centered. His praying was clearly people-oriented, but it was God-centered. The bottom line of his heart cry was: "Save your people, Lord, *'for Your own sake'* " We Must Cry Out, " For your sake and glory O Lord, Act!" (9:19)

God answered Daniel's prayer. The next year, Cyrus issued a decree that permitted the Jews to return to their land, take the temple treasures with them, rebuild the temple, and restore the worship.

Closing: God has said, "I will shake all things." When you were a child in bed, how did you mother wake you for school? She shook you, gently at first. If you didn't wake up, she shook harder. God is shaking His church to wake us up. His desire for this church and every church is for people to know that God is a big God. There is no other. We are calling the church to prayer. We will be giving the days and times next week.

Let me add one point for you to ponder and meditate:

David said, "Lord, you promised you would do this if we sinned. We sinned and you did what you said you would do. We have no complaints against you. We deserved what happened to us." That is acknowledging God's judgment on sin was deserved.

Then Daniel uses the same principle for praying for their deliverance. "You promised you would deliver us and return Your people to their land for your glory. That is knowing God's will and praying in faith.

(Clarification and added info: This sermon was on Daniel's prayer for a desolate church or nation. Although many of the principles are true for all types of prayers, it is not intended to infer that God always answers prayer for every need we have. We have to make sure it is in God's word (such as in the case of a desolate church). We also have to remember James' admonition "You have not because you ask not. You ask and receive not, because you ask amiss" (James 4:2-3). This in no way contradicts that God does answer his promises and Daniel's prayer is a model prayer for the church in America.)