

The Prayer of a Righteous Man

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Red Sea prayers are crisis prayers, emergency prayers, and tend to be very intense! In Exodus 14:10, The Egyptians were marching after them, and they became VERY frightened, so the sons of Israel cried out to the Lord". During seaside prayers like this, fear has a good result because it puts us totally dependent on the Lord. In his book, RED SEA RULES, Robert Morgan says God brings us to places that scare us so that He may bring us to our knees. Prayer tends to calm us, give us an outlet—a reliable place to go. When you can't go forward, sideward, and you can't go back, then its time to look upward and talk to the Lord. We are like David in 2 Samuel 22 when it looked like King Saul had him cornered. David later wrote Psalm 107 about this saying, "In my distress I cried out to the Lord...and He heard my voice." Crisis time prayers are intense, urgent, and even life threatening event prayers. Do we have a personal God who cares about our individual situation—Absolutely! C. S. Lewis wrote, "God has determined that His actions of love and mercy go hand in hand with His people's response and faith. God's plan to govern the church is like a partnership. God granted believers a role in causality. Think of a playwright who allows his characters to affect the play, and then incorporates all their actions into the final result He so determined. The scenes and the conclusion are fixed by the author (God), but the details are left to the actors to improvise." As a model prayer, I like to refer to Daniel's prayer taken from Daniel 9.

Daniel had been taken captive to Babylon in 605 BC. At the time of his great prayer in Daniel 9:1-19, Daniel was in his eighties. It was about 537-538 BC. Therefore Daniel had been a captive in Babylon for almost seventy years. He had seen the kingdom transferred to the Medes and Persians. Daniel was a student of God's Word and God's promises, therefore he remembered the words of Jeremiah the prophet, "When 70 years have been completed, I will fulfill My word to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans that I have for you...plans for welfare to give you a future. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart." (Jer.29:10-14) We know from Daniel 9:2 that he had a copy of Jeremiah's scroll. Therefore, Daniel hoped that the captivity of the Jews and desolation of Jerusalem was almost over. In his prayer in chapter 9, Daniel was humbly responding to this Scripture, and he was encouraged to pray for the restoration of Jerusalem. There are two main theories for the seventy year period. Daniel seemed to believe that the period started with his captivity in 605 and ended when the Jews arrived back at Jerusalem about 536, but others date it from 586, when Jerusalem was actually destroyed, to 515 when the Temple was rebuilt in Jerusalem. Ezra 1:1 seems to confirm 605-536 because it says that Cyrus allowed the return of the Jews as a fulfillment of the Word of the Lord by the prophet Jeremiah at that time. Ezra says that 49,897 Jews returned to begin rebuilding the Temple, and arrived about 536 BC. The important point is that Daniel believed that the Word of God would be fulfilled by prayer.

Prayer is the Sound that Faith Makes

Webster's defines prayer as an address or petition to a god in word or thought. Barna polling service says more people believe in prayer than believe in God. Certainly many more people pray than study the Bible, go to church, or practice any religious activity. Avowed atheists admit that they pray when they get in trouble. Very few of these people can articulate confidently whom they are praying to. The majority approach God when and if they need Him as if He is a benevolent grandfather or a genie in a bottle. One guy told me that God is his good buddy who always has his back. All this reminds me of that story of the little boy who was saying his prayers as his Dad put him to bed. He spoke softly until he got to the part about giving him a new bicycle, and then he spoke loudly. His Dad said, "God can hear you", and the boy said "I know but mom is in the next room". Then there was the young unmarried lady who had just heard a sermon on unselfish prayer, so she prayed, "Please give my mother a handsome son-in-law!" My point is that typically the point of view of the human race about prayer is far different than the Bible's. In my view there are several model prayers for us to study in the Bible, and one of the best is Daniel 9:3-19. Daniel has faith in the promise of God to restore the Jews and rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. His prayer here in Daniel 9 is the sound that faith makes. His prayer is made up of three parts: 1. v.4-11 is confession of sin, 2. v.11-14 is acknowledgment of the just judgments of God, 3. v.15-19 is a plea for God's mercy.

Prayer of Confession

Daniel begins in v.4 by contrasting the faithfulness of God who keeps His promises and always loves us, to the unfaithfulness and disobedience of mankind. Then Daniel gives a very comprehensive description of Israel's sin using four different words for sin in verse 5. Notice also that even though Daniel is the only major character in the Bible with no known sins, he identifies

himself as a sinner. J. Vernon McGee was preaching a sermon on universal depravity when a student corrected him that Daniel was without sin. McGee showed him Romans 3:23 and Daniel's confession here and said, "Either Daniel was a sinner or he lied here, which made him a sinner."

In verse 5 we have the four fold extent of Israel's sin using different Hebrew words for each. It is as if Daniel is making sure he doesn't miss any part of the general nature of being a sinner, or the external acts of sinning. In English we translate that we have sinned in general, we have committed serious crimes, conducted ourselves wickedly, and been rebellious against God's authority and God's Word. To make matters worse in v.6, they were warned many times and had every opportunity to repent, but would not listen.

In verses 7-8 he gave a valuable contrast between the righteousness of God compared to the shame and guilt of Judah, Jerusalem, and all Israel. Clearly God was justified in driving them into the far away countries because of their unfaithful deeds. He repeats again a comprehensive guilt of all the people including kings, princes, and our fathers. He is saying that for centuries their leaders and their ancestors were rebellious and guilty. Again in v.9 he gives the contrast of God's attributes of compassion and forgiveness versus the people's rebellion and disobedience. Every step of the way for over 400 years God was willing to forgive and bless, but finally He had no choice but to act in severely disciplining His people. How bad did it get? In v.10-11, they have not obeyed, have not lived by His teaching, and have ignored the prophets. Who is guilty? All of Israel had transgressed and turned aside in disobedience. This corporate national guilt is a very interesting concept for us to contemplate. It seems that if we as believers turn a blind eye to the gross depravity, perversions, violence, corruption, and wickedness in our country we may be held responsible for the moral state of the nation. It is interesting to see how America continues to turn a blind eye to pornography, blasphemy, depravity, and my personal favorite, corruption on Wall Street. I constantly ask businessmen what they think about corporate executives making huge salaries and bonuses while the company's stock value goes down. Everyone knows that most politicians are depraved and corrupt. People acknowledge it's true but don't seem to care. We operate in a culture of thieves, but we just continue everyday to go about our business as usual.

God Did the Right Thing

Daniel begins v.12 with "Thus" or "Therefore", meaning because we are guilty God has spoken against us and brought calamity upon us. The severity of the calamity is brought out by saying that it was unique in history. Nevertheless, God is righteous and justified in bringing the calamity because He was being faithful in keeping His Word. This "Word" was first given by Moses before they ever came into the land. Moses gathered them on the eastern bank of the Jordan River before they ever came in to possess the land. The Book of Deuteronomy is our record of what Moses told the people as his farewell address. Moses gave a great warning and promise from God in Deuteronomy 28, "It shall come about if you will not obey the Lord your God...the Lord will bring you to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known...and you shall become a horror...your sons and daughters will go into captivity...Because you did not serve the Lord your God...therefore you shall serve your enemies..."

Plea for God's Mercy

Now in Dan.9:15-19, he turns in his prayer to his great burden and supplication. Notice that Daniel always appeals only to God's attributes of love, compassion, grace, and mercy. I have heard every manner of prayer, and have noticed a tendency in myself, and others to insert a certain sense of entitlement. Why should God help us-because we are good people. Why should God get me out of this trap-because I need Him to. Why do I deserve deliverance-because God shouldn't have made me if He wasn't going to take care of me. I could go on and on with this sense of entitlement I think we all share in different degrees, but you get the point. Daniel's prayer stands out because there is absolutely no sense of entitlement at all. Daniel appeals to God based solely on God's attributes. We deserve nothing but a good whipping, but you God are loving and merciful so please turn your righteous wrath away and reconcile your people.

In the Old Testament, the standard illustration of God's power to deliver is the deliverance from Egypt in Exodus. Therefore Daniel appeals to the Lord, "O Lord who has brought Thy people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and has made a great name for Thyself", in other words, Lord just as you delivered Israel out of Egypt, please now deliver us out of Babylon. God has righteously disciplined Israel so Daniel approached God on the basis of His precedent of delivering Israel before, His attributes of compassion and mercy, and because Jerusalem is His city therefore it will bring honor to God and be a testimony to the nations. In v.18 he repeats again that "we are not presenting our supplications before Thee on account of any merits of

our own, but on account of Thy great compassion.” In verse 19 Daniel emphasizes the urgency of the situation. About eighteen months later, King Cyrus of Persia issued a proclamation that the Jews could go back to their homeland and rebuild. You can see this in Ezra 1:1-4. Why did the powerful King do this? The text says “in order to fulfill the word of the Lord by the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia”.

Let me comment on some observations about prayer based on Daniel’s prayer. First, he prayed according to God’s word. He earnestly desired God’s will to be done, and was seeking it unselfishly. Secondly, Daniel believed in his heart God’s promises would be brought about by prayer. He believed that he had a part to play in God’s will. Thirdly, Daniel was persistent. We can derive from ch.6 that he prayed this way everyday. Fourth, Daniel was concerned with God’s honor and glory, and he had a concern for knowing God and developing the relationship as his priority.

CHARLIE TAYLOR

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