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Truths for Bitter Providences, Part 11

Apple launched an advertising campaign featuring the expression, "Two is better than one!" At the time the iPhone was available only on the AT&T network and with the introduction of the iPhone 4 the iPhone would be available on the Verizon network too. (Apple Computer, 2011)

So, in the spirit of this advertising, I am going to preach two sermons in the time it normally would take me to preach one.

The book of Daniel was the first book written in exile by an exile for an exiled people and it

contains a series of messages given to encourage the genuine child of God suffering under the judgment of God on account of the apostasy of their nation. The first message — chapter 1 — answers the question, “What ought we to do now that we are in exile?” What was the answer given? Purpose within yourself to seek... honor... worship... trust the Lord! As we have seen, this has been the exhortation given throughout this book!

The second message — chapters 2-12 — answers the question, “What is there to encourage the child of God to seek the Lord in the valley of the shadow of death?” Thus far we’ve seen seven answers: *“Be Encouraged...”*

- *Your God is Great and so Rules Kings and Nations, Daniel 2.”*
- *Your God is Holy and therefore has a Plan that is Beyond your Ability to Understand, Daniel 3.”*
- *Your God Reigns and so Holds the Heart of the King in His Hands, Daniel 4.”*
- *Your God is Jealous and so will not allow Himself- and so the Believer- to be Mocked, Daniel 5.”*
- *Your God’s Way is Infallible and so makes no Mistakes when it comes to the Child of God, Daniel 6.”*
- *In the end, God’s People Win, Daniel 7.”*
- *Be Sobered! Until the End, God’s Kingdom will Suffer Violence!, Daniel 8.”*

Daniel 9 continues with the theme of “encouragement” by which Daniel deigned to instruct the nation through a prayer that he offered to God around the same time that he was thrown into the Lion’s Den!

Now, in the previous sermons, I neglected the overarching theme of this book to examine how we ought to pray in the crucible. Now, we are going to finish our examination of Daniel’s prayer and address the main consideration of this passage as it relates to the overall theme.

Daniel’s Prayer

We have seen that the entire prayer of Daniel was based NOT on the need of Daniel or the corporate people of God, BUT on God’s Character! What an important principle for us. We tend to base our prayer on what we want or perceive that we need. The prayer of faith springs forth from who God is!

We easily could summarize this section with the words of Jeremiah, “Why should *any* living mortal, or *any* man, offer complaint in view of his sins?” (Lamentations 3:39) When the national covenant that God made with Israel is taken into consideration; a covenant which was conditioned upon the obedience of the nation, the exile is well understood. God said that if Israel rejected Him, He would allow foreign nations once and for all to rule over His people (Leviticus 26:14ff) which is exactly what happened in 586 BC and so the confession of Daniel.

Daniel 9:11-12a, "Indeed all Israel has transgressed Thy law and turned aside, not obeying Thy voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God [cf. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28], for we have sinned against Him. Thus He has confirmed His words which He had spoken against us and against our rulers who ruled us, to bring on us great calamity..."

With this in mind, notice Daniel's supplication. The first thing Daniel prayer for was reconciliation. God truly had done nothing to offend His people! In fact, He loved them so much He was willing to allow His name to be profaned for a bit in order to discipline them (cf. Hebrews 12:6)! Accordingly, Daniel's first concern was NOT the restoration of God's people to the land, BUT the restoration of the health of their relationship with God! And this led to his second petition for covenant blessing.

Daniel 9:17-18a, "So now, our God, listen to the prayer of Thy servant and to his supplications, and for Thy sake, O Lord, let Thy face shine on Thy desolate sanctuary..."

When we sin against God we do NOT forfeit His love or commitment to us. BUT we can forfeit His covenant presence which can turn "the valley of weeping into a spring" (Psalm 84:6)! This was Moses' concern when he prayed in the desert after God told him to lead the nation to the Promised Land.

Exodus 33:15, "Then he said to Him, 'If Thy presence does not go *with us*, do not lead us up from here.'"

Truly, the restoration of God's covenant presence was of the greatest concern to Daniel. And so way before we ask God to change our physical circumstances, our longing must be a healthy and ever deepening walk with God! We want to thrive in the desert; that must be our first passion! With that, notice the third thing for which Daniel prayed was restoration.

Daniel 9:17b, 18-19a, "...let Thy face shine on Thy desolate sanctuary. O my God, incline Thine ear and hear! Open Thine eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Thy name; for we are not presenting our supplications before Thee on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Thy great compassion. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action!"

Much like the pattern found in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13), Daniel doesn't get to specific temporal requests until he is well into his prayer. Notice, his prayer spanned 19 verses of which 17 do NOT relate to the physical circumstances of God's people. It is only after he (1) adored God, (2) confessed his and the nation's sin, (3) attended to the restoration of the people's relationship with God THAT Daniel turned his focus and that rather briefly (two verses) to the physical difficulties of God's people. For a man of God, physical suffering and difficulty isn't that big of a deal. Of course, no one wants to live in difficult days. But in comparison to eternity, what is 70 years of suffering? Paul answered that question.

2 Corinthians 4:16-17, “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.”

What was 70 years of suffering to Paul? Nothing when compared to the “eternal weight of glory” that is ours in Christ today! Now you might be tempted to say that Paul was an idealist; he didn’t deal with the realities of life. But if you said that you’d be wrong. Paul — and for that matter the prophets, the apostles, and Christ Himself — were driven by something far more important than the temporal comforts of this passing age. This was Paul’s focus when he made this remark:

2 Corinthians 4:18, “momentary, light afflictions” of this life, “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

And so it was with Daniel! Gazing upon eternity and God’s redemptive plan, the exile truly was a “momentary, light affliction.” What served to be a profound impact upon the people of God was NOT their physical circumstances, BUT the health of their walk with God! Accordingly, the clear emphasis and focus of this prayer is on the quality and depth of the relationship God’s people had with God. With that addressed, he then turned to supplications of a temporal nature.

Daniel 9:17b, 18b, 19a, “...let Thy face shine on Thy desolate sanctuary... Open Thine eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Thy name... O Lord, listen and take action!”

What specifically is Daniel praying for here? Obviously the restoration NOT of the nation (according to Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, that was forever lost), BUT of the city of Jerusalem and its temple! Way before the people of God were a nation, they were a worshipping people delivered from slavery to worship God in the wilderness (Exodus 7:16)! And so it was this calling that concerned Daniel here, and that for good cause, the same as the call of God to Pharaoh:

Exodus 7:16b, “...Let My people go, that they may serve [worship] Me in the wilderness...”

Isaiah 43:6b-7, “Bring My sons from afar, and My daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone who is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory, whom I have formed, even whom I have made.”

Recall Paul’s definition of the Christian:

Philippians 3:3, “...the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God...”

Christianity in its most basic form can be summarized as true worship! We are worshippers;

that is what we are all about as people! Christ summarized it with these words:

John 4:23, "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers."

Christian, why do you long for the restoration of your health? Why do you want a better marriage? Why do you want the storm to end? Why do you pray for the things you pray for? If it isn't because of the negative impact these have on your ability to serve/worship the Lord, you are missing the boat. When Daniel finally got around to praying for the physical needs of the people of God, notice that a large part of it revolved around their ability to worship the Lord. "God, look at Your city... look at Your people... look at the desolation of Your sanctuary... and so take action to restore Your worship and service!" In the words of Paul,

1 Corinthians 7:35, "And this I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is seemly, and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord."

That in essence was Daniel's third petition in the face of the devastation of God's people: God Restore Your city... restore Your temple... restore Your worship! This brings us to Daniel's fourth and final petition, the vindication of God's name.

Daniel 9:16b, 17b, "...Jerusalem and Thy people *have become* a reproach to all those around us. So now, our God, listen to the prayer of Thy servant and to his supplications, and for Thy sake, O Lord, let Thy face shine on Thy desolate sanctuary."

Daniel 9:19b, "O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For Thine own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy name."

Recall, when Adam and Eve rebelled against God that which drove them was a passion to be autonomous from the Lord. In fact, that remains the root of all sin and rebellion against God. How is "sin" spelled?

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Daniel's passion can be hard to wrap our heads around. Daniel wanted good things for the people of God, but primarily because he knew that God's name was attached to God's people. Whatever happened to them, whatever they did, ultimately reflected upon God! This was a major theme when God established His people.

Ezekiel 20:9, "But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they *lived*, in whose sight I made Myself known to them by bringing them out of the land of Egypt."

Listen to that which drove the commands that God gave to His people when they were organized into a Nation:¹

Leviticus 19:12, “And you shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the Lord.”

Leviticus 21:6, “They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God...”

Leviticus 22:2, “Tell Aaron and his sons to be careful with the holy *gifts* of the sons of Israel, which they dedicate to Me, so as not to profane My holy name; I am the Lord.”

When Achan stole from God, what was the overriding theme behind his confession?

Joshua 7:19, “Then Joshua said to Achan, ‘My son, I implore you, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and give praise to Him; and tell me now what you have done...’” - this is one of the major concerns behind church discipline. Lest the world say, “Evidently salvation brings with it a license to sin!”

And thus when Israel was taken into exile, a major concern was the honor of God as His name was associated with His people.

Ezekiel 12:14-16, “And I shall scatter to every wind all who are around him, his helpers and all his troops; and I shall draw out a sword after them. So they will know that I am the Lord when I scatter them among the nations, and spread them among the countries. But I shall spare a few of them from the sword, the famine, and the pestilence that they may tell all their abominations among the nations where they go, and may know that I am the Lord.”

Accordingly and not surprisingly, what would be that which drove God in restoring His people to the land? The glory of His name!

Ezekiel 36:22-23a, “Therefore, say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord,” declares the Lord God...”

And lest you think this was an Old Testament theme, one of the main reasons you were saved was so that God’s name might be honored!

Ephesians 1:5-6a, “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace...” - you thought you were saved because God couldn’t stand to live in a world where you weren’t happy; yet that is wrong! You were saved to be a trophy of Grace! And thus we read of the promise of salvation in...

Ezekiel 36:25-32a, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart

and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. And you will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers [ultimately speaking of the New Heavens and Earth]; so you will be My people, and I will be your God. Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, that you may not receive again the disgrace of famine among the nations. Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations. [Yet] I am not doing *this* for your sake,' declares the Lord God, 'let it be known to you...'"

This truly is a major theme of salvation. Again, in our autonomy we tend to think that life is about us and that God must exist for our pleasure! Oh how the love of God has grown cold today! Inspired by Daniel's petition here, I would recommend a simple prayer for each and every one of us:

Psalm 115:1, "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy name give glory because of Thy lovingkindness, because of Thy truth."

In the words of John, may our passion and prayer in life be this:

John 3:30, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

That was the final and ultimate concern of Daniel as he suffered in the crucible along with the people of God- the honor and glory of the Lord! That which drove him in his prayer life was that in and through all things, God might be glorified!

That was Daniel's prayer! May God give us the grace both to learn it and pray it as we pass through the Valley of the Shadow of Death!

And yet, the purpose of this section was NOT ultimately to instruct us on how to pray in the valley. It was to encourage a people of God living as aliens and strangers in a hostile land, this is my second sermon! We want to serve the Lord as aliens and strangers, but what is there to encourage us? The truth contained in Daniel 9:12-13 play a seminal role in Daniel's prayer:

Daniel 9:12-13a, "Thus He has confirmed His words which He had spoken against us and against our rulers who ruled us, to bring on us great calamity; for under the whole heaven there has not been done *anything* like what was done to Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come on us..."

God's people couldn't complain to God on account of the rough treatment that they were receiving in exile since what they were receiving was on account of their own rebellion (cf. again Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). That essentially is what Daniel says here. And yet, that

isn't all that Daniel says here. Notice, Daniel could have just said, "God, we are getting what we deserve based on Your covenant warnings..." but that is NOT what he says. In fact, had he said that the focus here would have been on the people's failure- which it clearly is not!

Look at the passage again: what is the focus? What receives the emphasis? "Thus He has confirmed His words which He had spoken..." The focus in this passage is on God and His faithfulness to the promise He made concerning the nation! Do you see it? That's the emphasis: *"Ultimately we are where we are today because God has fulfilled His promise!"*

Why is this so important to Daniel? Why is he stressing this? Because God made other promises that God's people needed to know about:

Daniel 9:2, "In the first year of his reign I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was *revealed* as the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, *namely*, seventy years."

Oh how God's people knew that God always keeps covenant! They were living proof! The destruction of their nation, the devastation of their lives, attested to that fact! With this well-established principle in their minds (God is Always Faithful to His Promises) Daniel referenced another promise of the Lord which God's people needed to hear! In Jeremiah 29:10, God promised to restore His people in 70 years following their exile. And guess what? It had been about 70 years! Do you understand what that means? Something big was about to happen and God's people were going to be the beneficiaries!

From this we derive an incredible principle by which to live as aliens and strangers in this land: God is always faithful both to His promises and His people! This has been and continues to be a major source of encouragement for the people of God. While suffering in the crucible, the Psalmist wrote:

Psalm 94:19, "When my anxious thoughts multiply within me, Thy consolations delight my soul."

Did you know there are 660 prophecies (which are nothing less than promises) in the Bible relating to the coming of the Messiah? Of the 660 prophecies/promises, 224 relate to the second coming- leaving 436 relating to Christ's first advent (300 alone in the Old Testament)- all of which were fulfilled in Christ's first advent! You have to see how amazing this is! Mathematically speaking the chance that any man might have lived down to the present time and fulfilled just 8 of the 436 prophecies concerning Christ is 1 in 10^{17} . That is 1 in 100 Quadrillion.

Let me illustrate what 1 in 100 Quadrillion looks like: "If one took 100 quadrillion silver dollars and laid them on the face of Texas, they would cover the entire state two feet deep. Now imagine marking one of these silver dollars and then placing it somewhere in the state. If we then blindfolded a man and told him that he could travel as far as he wished, but he could only

pick up one silver dollar, the chance that he would choose the marked coin is the same as one man fulfilling eight” of the 436 prophecies in Scripture relating to Christ’s first advent. And yet Christ fulfilled all 436! (Stoner, 1958, p. 50)

If Christ fulfilled all 436 prophecies concerning His first advent, what do you suppose He will do when it comes to the remaining 224? That essentially is the point that Daniel is making here! The nation was in exile because God proved faithful to the promise He gave in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28- and how well they knew this! Yet God made another promise concerning the future (Jeremiah 29:10)... *Sons of Israel, will you trust God to confirm this promise? Will you lift your eyes and behold the salvation of God?*

This brings us to the *Question de Jour*: Christian, what has God promised you as you work out your salvation in this land of sin and misery? Be encouraged this day; He will by all means fulfill it!

Bibliography

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End Note

¹ See also Leviticus 20:3; 22:32.