

Crying Out to God in Chaotic Times

Daniel 9:1-10

A Theology of Daniel's Prayer

In a commentary on the news this week, one observer noted, "We're living right now in a time of rapid and revolutionary cultural change in the United States, and that means not only cultural change but moral change, political change, economic change, demographic change and of course, theological change as well. As Christians, we actually understand that the theological questions are primary in the sense that those theological axioms or principles that guide our lives eventually determine the rest."ⁱ As we meet here today, we are all pondering why a small group of people broke into the U.S. House and Senate chambers during the Electoral College vote this week. Most of us – like the peaceful protesters who gathered for a rally in Washington – were shocked by the events of the day.

As we think through these events, we are reminded of Jeremiah's message from God to His people (Israel) in Jeremiah 4:22-23, "**For my people are foolish, they have not known me; they are soddish [silly] children, and they have no understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge. I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light.**" According to God's Word in this passage, these evils spring from a failure to know the one true Godⁱⁱ. Because the people did not know God, they were silly; they acted foolishly in devising evil. But because they did not really know God, they had no idea how to do that which is good in God's sight. And the results were heartbreaking: it was as if their society was being "de-created" or "unmade," returning to a confused chaotic state not unlike that described in Genesis 1:2. If you agree with these observations about the serious moral decline, then take heart and find hope in the last phrase of Genesis 1:2. Any Jewish person who heard the words of Jeremiah would have remembered what was missing:

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. ² And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

Dear friends, there has never been a more important time for us to pray for a genuine work of the Holy Spirit. He is our great hope in these days. As the Apostle Paul expressed it in 2 Corinthians 4:6, "**For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**" *As we have sung, "All who are lost have been blinded by Satan, the god of this age, the dark ruler of night; God who commanded the light out of darkness has shined in our hearts by His great gospel light!"ⁱⁱⁱ*

When we sense that our society is confused and chaotic, surely this is the right time to pray for a moving of God's Spirit: that God's great gospel light would shine in this darkness. No amount of political pressure from the right, left or center can accomplish what we really need in this nation. We need a genuine work of God's Holy Spirit that will convince saints and convict sinners of the great need for repentance. We are facing a problem of national proportions. What should we do? The Scripture offers us guidance: we can follow Daniel as he followed the Lord in prayer. We can cry out to God in these chaotic times.

Searching the Scriptures to Pray

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; 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. (Daniel 9:1-2)

How does Daniel's example guide us to pray? As we noted in the last message, Daniel searched the Scriptures. And to his great joy, he discovered the prophecies concerning his nation, Israel. Though we may not find specific prophecies about the formation or destiny of our nation, we can still use Scriptural principles to pray. We can use the positive example of pagan Nineveh's repentance (in the book of Jonah). Or the negative example of Nineveh's failure to repent (in the book of Nahum). Or the warning of Psalm 9:17, **"The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God."** Or the warning and welcome promise that God gave to each and every nation in Jeremiah 18:1-10. We could be like Daniel; we could search the Scriptures to find powerful fuel to help us pray faithfully. And then we could cry out to God in these chaotic times.

Setting Your Focus to Pray

³ And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: (Daniel 9:3)

When you look at the state of our nation right now, here is a question that you must answer: Are you desperate yet? We are not talking about violent acts like those that fueled recent rioting in Portland, Seattle and the U.S. capitol. Mob rule only seems to win until a bigger mob comes along. The question each of us is faced with is this: Are you desperate for God-honoring change in this country? If so, then Daniel 9:3 guides you to focus your efforts.

Daniel made direct appeals to the Lord God by prayer and supplication. The word "prayer" refers to Daniel's direction communication or conversation with God. The reason it's appropriate to say "communication or conversation" is that Daniel used the Scriptures to pray. That's a great way to think about your Bible: a conversation starter. God had communicated clearly through His prophets; Daniel wanted to communicate to God with equal clarity in prayer.

The word "supplication" refers to an appeal for favor. Surely, this is the great need of the hour for us – to appeal for the favor of God on our nation. Daniel approached prayer and supplication "with fasting, sackcloth and ashes." We could all rightly apply this approach in various ways – being mindful of what would be medically appropriate for each of us (in fasting). But at the very least, it is obvious that Daniel set aside some or all of his creature comforts. Rather than focus on his appetites, he wanted to seek the Almighty. Daniel wasn't content to try to find some morsel of happiness in the moment. Daniel longed for the everlasting joy of knowing that God's face shown upon Him and His people.

So are you desperate for God-honoring change? Would you be willing to devote at least 1/32 of your waking hours to prayer? (That's 30 minutes each day).^{iv} Especially after the events of this week, are you desperate enough to spend 1/32 of your day appealing for God's favor? You could do this by following practical steps.^v If you would like to learn more about how to pray like Daniel, see the booklet we have prepared for you entitled "Seasons of Prevailing Prayer." If you believe that these are chaotic times, would you cry out to God?

Daniel not only searched the Scriptures, he also put them into practice. (The way he obeyed the specific guidance in Jeremiah 29:10-14 guides us to pray as he did.) Putting the Scriptures into practice (being a “doer of the Word,” James 1:22) is just as important in our day.

This week, a skeptical news commentator insulted a sitting U.S. Senator calling him “Mr. Bible boy.”^{vi} The CNN reporter (who would probably reject any moral absolutes) criticized the Roman Catholic senator by saying the senator has, “a Bible quote for every moment, he just never speaks truth to power ... or acts on any of it in the interests of his own state or of this country.” Anyone who has heard the senator debate knows that he “speaks truth to power.” His strong pro-life stance is evidence that he acts in “the interests of his state and country” – especially of those human beings still in the womb. But the reporter’s unjust criticism is an important reminder for all of us to remember. In these days, we must be an example of what we believe. We must be what we want others to become. We must put into practice what we say we believe. The Apostle Paul explained that the Law of God (including the 10 commandments) puts a stop to the claims of self-righteous people. But Paul also explained to Timothy that his faithfulness (in Scriptural teaching and obedience) would stop the mouths of the false teachers.

Setting Your Heart to Know God

Beginning in verse 4, Daniel testified, “**And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession ...**”

Now if someone were going to make a confession, how would you expect them to go about it? Wouldn’t it be something like, “I sinned when I ...,” or “We were wrong when we ...” etc.? But here is where we need the guidance that Daniel gives us in chapter 9. He did not begin by confessing sin, but by confessing the glory of the sovereign God. The word “confession” translates the Hebrew [yadah] meaning “to know.” (You will often hear people say, “Yadah, yadah, yadah” “I know, I know, I know.”) But what was it that Daniel carefully prepared “to know?” From the context, it’s clear that Daniel was determined to know His glorious God. And in the light of the glory of God, he was determined to admit the depravity of his nation’s sins. As an illustration, Daniel glorified God in verses 4-5 before he mentioned “sin.” The Hebrew word “sin” [chatah] means “to miss a goal, way, or mark.” This is the word that Paul had in mind when he wrote Romans 3:23 that “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” In the next message, we will study the ways that Daniel described Israel’s sin. But in this message, we want to first concentrate on the glory of God.

Throughout the Scriptures, we can see consistent themes that we can summarize with the acronym “G.R.A.C.E.” This stands for G – the Glory of God, R – the Rebellion of Mankind, A – the Awful Penalty for man’s rebellion, C – the Christ who paid the penalty for mankind’s rebellion, and E – Embrace Christ by faith today. As you can easily see, this is a description of the Gospel.^{vii} As we have often noted, the religions of the world are about trying to do things to get close to God; the Gospel is about trusting the things that God has done to get close to you. The most important Biblical prophecies were fulfilled in the passion of Jesus Christ. He showed us God’s faithfulness when He died for our sins and rose again after three days in a borrowed tomb.

Searching the Scriptures, Daniel was determined to know His God. As one of the wise men in Babylon, Jeremiah 9:23-24 undoubtedly caught his attention, “**Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty *man* glory in his might, let not the rich *man* glory in his riches: ²⁴ But let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I *am* the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these *things* I delight, says the LORD.**”

In a series of messages during 2019^{viii}, we studied the Glory of God. We discussed how to magnify the unique excellence of God. For the remainder of this message, let's dwell on the way Daniel focused on the glory of God in Daniel 9:1-10. This was no mere listing of God's characteristics from a doctrinal study. Here is the beating heart of prayer and the marrow which provides the lifeblood for all praying that pleases God. In these verses, we learn a great deal about God by the names with which He is addressed.

The Lord God (v.3)

These words combined translate the Hebrew words [Adonai] (meaning "master" or "lord") and [Elohim] meaning "God." This is the "Lord God" to whom blinded Samson prayed from his captivity (Judges 16:28). David exalted the "Lord God" who had made a covenant with him (2 Samuel 7:19-20). He is the One who imparts strength (Psalm 71:16) and He alone is worthy of our trust (Psalm 73:28). The "Lord God" gathers the outcasts of Israel (Isaiah 56:8) and He anointed Christ to preach (Isaiah 61:1, Luke 4:16-21). This combined name for God occurs only once in the book of Daniel, here in chapter 9, verse 3. After the momentous introduction of verses 1 and 2, we see Daniel's reverent approach to God. Daniel did not breeze into God's presence lightly. No, he guided his heart and set his face to address [Adonai Elohim], the Lord God.

The LORD my God (v. 4)

Here the title "the LORD my God" translates [Yahweh] (or [Jehovah] with God [Elohim]). To those in bondage in Egypt, the LORD sent a message by Moses:

"And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. ¹⁵ And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this *is* my name forever, and this *is* my memorial unto all generations" (Exodus 3:14-15).

It is not surprising then to see that Daniel uses this name of God to make his appeal for the captives in Babylon. This is the personal name of God, and has been described as His essence. He is eternal and unchanging. This name of the LORD [Yahweh] occurs only seven times in the book of Daniel – and every time, it is here in Daniel chapter 9.

The Great and Awesome God (v.4)

Daniel made his direct appeal with the words, **"O Lord, the great and dreadful God . . ."** Our great God inspired awe in the heart of humbled Daniel. If we are to pray in a passionate and effective manner, this attitude should be true of us as well. Praise our great God until your heart is filled with awe. Then you will find the zeal to cry out to God in these chaotic times.

The Covenant Keeping God of Mercy (v.4)

This is the great LORD who made a covenant with Abraham (Genesis 22:16-18). This covenant resulted in the coming of Christ: **"And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed . . ."** This is the God who keeps His covenants and maintains His steadfast love. Those who love Him and keep His commandments revel in His immeasurable mercies. His greatest mercy is this: **"Unto you first God,**

having raised up his Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:26).

The Lord to Whom Righteousness Belongs (v.7)

"O Lord, righteousness belongs unto Thee" – The right ways, the straight ways, belong to the Lord. But as we have learned, the ways of man miss the mark of God's righteousness. Our ways are perverse, twisted and deliberately evil. When we comprehend God's righteousness, we can rightly confess our rebellion. In verse 18, Daniel made it clear that no one can appeal to God on the basis of human righteousness.

The Lord our God: The God of Mercy and Forgiveness (v.9)

Was there any hope? Yes, for one reason: "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses"

"Though we rebelled against Him," Daniel confessed, **"to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses."** As the psalmist wrote, **"If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But *there is* forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope"** (Psalm 130:3-5).

If it were not for the Lord's forgiveness and His tender mercies, there would be no hope. This is why the psalmist continued in 130:7, **"Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD *there is* mercy, and with Him *is* plenteous redemption."** Only the Lord Himself could redeem His people. And the Lord did pay the price for redemption by giving His life on the cross of Calvary. This is why we have hope. It is in the Lord alone and no other. **"Christ in you, the hope of glory"** (Colossians 1:27). Let us make our appeals through Him in these chaotic days.

The God Who Communicates with Us (v.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."

In the next message, we will study the rebellion of Israel (and all mankind). But here stop for a moment to consider how God has spoken to us. This verse makes reference to "the voice of the Lord our God." This is not some ambiguous whisper. No indeed, this is the clear communication of God whereby He has given us His laws. He has sent His servants the prophets to speak plainly to men. And the Book we hold in our hands is the very Voice of God, showing us His ways.

Daniel was moved to pray as he studied God's precepts. But to him the Scripture became powerful fuel for faithful prayer. Would you seek the Lord's face to truly know your God? Would you study His Word, His works and His ways to be able to appeal to Him as Daniel did? In these desperate times, would you be willing to devote yourself to pray? When our society is in chaos, it's the right time to cry out to God!

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ⁱ Albert Mohler, The Briefing, Friday, January 8, 2021, accessed on 01/08/21 at <https://albertmohler.com/2021/01/08/briefing-1-8-21>

ⁱⁱ See “Seeking the Lord in Troubled Times” accessed at <https://www.cbfindlay.org/seeking-the-lord-in-troubled-times/>

ⁱⁱⁱ “Glory to Glory” a hymn of salvation and sanctification, available at <https://www.cbfindlay.org/from-glory-to-glory/>

^{iv} See “Seeking the Lord in Troubled Times” for a discussion of Matthew 6:6, accessed at <https://www.cbfindlay.org/seeking-the-lord-in-troubled-times/>

^v How to Spend an Hour in Prayer, accessed at <https://www.cbfindlay.org/how-to-spend-an-hour-in-prayer/>

^{vi} Ryan Foley, “Marco Rubio responds to CNN’s Chris Cuomo for mocking him as ‘Bible boy’” The Christian Post, accessed at <https://www.christianpost.com/news/marco-rubio-responds-to-cnn-chris-cuomo-for-mocking-him-as-bible-boy.html> 010821

^{vii} For a fuller explanation of this acronym, see G.R.A.C.E. on our website at <https://www.cbfindlay.org/im-new/#about-calvary>

^{viii} Calvary Baptist Church, Sermon Audio series, accessed at

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?sourceonly=true&currSection=sermonsource&keyword=calvaryfindlay&subsetat=series&subsetitem=The+Glory+of+God>