



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 13 Issue 36

September 14, 2014

Truths for Bitter Providences, Part 9

Toward the end of Christ's life shortly before His crucifixion, one of the disciples approached the Lord and said, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1). With this, Christ repeated a lesson He gave the disciples almost two years previously in the Sermon on the Mount; He gave them what we call "The Lord's Prayer"- a marvelous pattern for prayer. Yet this wasn't the first time God taught us with regard to prayer. Six hundred years earlier, the Lord raised up the prophet Daniel whose life was intended to be an example for a wounded and struggling nation.

God is Faithful to His Promises and His People

In the first year of Cyrus' regency (539 BC- around the same time Daniel was thrown into the Lion's Den) Daniel sat down to read the word of God. On that particular day he was in the book of Jeremiah in which he undoubtedly read this:

Jeremiah 29:10, "For thus says the Lord, 'When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place.'"

By this time, Daniel had been in captivity almost seventy years and so he knew he was on the cusp of a very big event, redemptively! Accordingly, Daniel "set his face toward prayer." This wasn't something he did in the moment because he was moved; rather it was something he purposed in his heart to do! Prayer-warriors are not born, they are made! They are the result of intentionality, discipline, and hard work.

The irony here is that Daniel is praying about something that God already has said is going to take place. Prayer is NOT primarily the means of getting something or changing the future. RATHER, it is a vehicle of communion whereby the child of God participates in the outworking of God's Kingdom! That is why Daniel prayed. This is why we ought to pray!

Now how is it that Daniel prayed as he did here? What led him to this noble discipline? The ground of Daniel's prayer revolved around a series of assumptions that Daniel held regarding God; much of which he already presented to us in Dan. 1-8! Daniel prayed as he did here because of God's:

- Greatness, v. 4a.
- Faithfulness, v. 4b.
- Condescending grace in His seeking after His people though they strayed, vv. 6, 10.
- Righteousness, vv. 7, 11-12, 14.

Yet it was because of these truths that Daniel prayed as he did here. There are two more assumptions that drove Daniel as he approached God the fifth being God's graciousness.

God's Graciousness

Daniel 9:9, "To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him."

The fact that Daniel was still around to pray this prayer is testimony of God's "compassion and forgiveness." The phrase "to our Lord belong compassion (רַחֲמִים [rahāmîm])" refers to deep love. In fact, the term is related to the Hebrew word for "womb." Of all places where a child enjoys the tender care of its mother, it is there. It is a place that is secure, safe, warm, constant, and well supplied. Such is what the Lord is to His people ever and at all times!

The second phrase is this: “to our Lord belong compassion and forgiveness (רַחֲמֵי־יְיָ [səḥîhâ]).” The word used here is only used of God in the Bible. Nowhere in the rest of Scripture is this word used of a man forgiving a man. Accordingly, we are dealing with an exclusively divine action by which the cosmic rebellion of a sinner is pardoned! The apostle Paul uses it this way:

Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death...”

That means, if God were to act justly toward a sinner, death would be the result. Accordingly, if the Lord had acted only in justice when Adam sinned, God would have destroyed the entire world!

Genesis 2:17, “...from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.”

Did Adam eat from this tree? He did! So what should have happened? On the spot, God should have wiped man off the face of the earth! *That God didn't is the grace of forgiveness!*

This is a fifth reason Daniel approached the Lord in prayer. He knew that God was compassionate (which means He genuinely cared about Daniel) and forgiving (which means Daniel stood before God pardoned of all his sin). So though Israel stood condemned before God; though Daniel stood condemned before God on account of his sin, nevertheless God would and indeed had forgiven him! The knowledge of this drastically affected Daniel's prayer.

Daniel 9:18b, “O my God, incline Thine ear and hear! Open Thine eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Thy name [N.B., there is no fear of condemnation; Daniel knew God had forgiven him and so he prayed...]; for we are not presenting our supplications before Thee on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Thy great compassion.”

Do you see it? Daniel prayed because he understood *a priori* that God in His grace had pardoned him and so he was totally acceptable to God! This leads us to the sixth basis upon which Daniel approached the Lord, God's omnipotence.

God's Omnipotence

Daniel 9:15a, “And now, O Lord our God, who hast brought Thy people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and hast made a name for Thyself, as it is this day- we have sinned...”

There are a couple of words that are frequently associated with the Exodus, one of which is “mighty hand” (used ten times in association with the Exodus)! God didn't just sneak His people out of the land of Egypt under the cover of darkness or with trickery or deceit. God took

on Pharaoh; and more significantly the Egyptian gods (Exodus 12:12) head on! He vanquished them with might and power, through it all demonstrating that He alone is God, He alone is great, He alone is all-powerful *and as such He alone has the ability to respond!*

Notice that in Daniel's life this glorious demonstration of God's power remained relevant "to this day." The story of the Exodus wasn't as the stories told of past victories by aged and dying men who used to be warriors. God's redeeming power ever and always remained current to the Old Testament people of God! Recall the Passover. What did the host of the meal say when he took the bread? It wasn't "My great, great, great grandfather was a slave in Egypt..." but, "I was a slave in Egypt!" Truly, God's omnipotence and power were to remain a major part of an Israelite's worldview!

And by way of footnote, by the inclusion of the Passover words, "do this in remembrance of Me" Christ taught us as well to ever and always live in light of the Glorious Omnipotence of God by which He redeemed us out of the grip of Satan with a "might hand!" From this we conclude that anything God wants to do, He can and will do!

Now, what is it that God wanted to do at the time of the writing of this book? Daniel knew from Jeremiah that the Lord deigned to restore His people to the Promised Land! So Christian, as you face the valleys before you, what is it that God wants to do? You know the answer (Revelation 21-22)! Allow this to bring you to your knees in gratitude and supplication!

So that is why Daniel prayed while in the fire! He knew *a priori* that God was

- Great, v. 4a.
- Faithful, v. 4b.
- Ever and always seeking after us, His children, vv. 6, 10.
- Righteousness- and so makes no mistakes, vv. 7, 11-12, 14.
- Graciousness- and so ever and always forgiving, vv. 9, 18b.
- Omnipotent- and so always doing what is in both His and our best interest, v. 15.

I love the words of Dr. John MacArthur in this context as he reflected upon the character of God as manifested in this passage and its impact on our prayer life:

All that God is to Daniel, God is to us. And Daniel knows it from his dealings with his people, and we know it from the cross. We see His power, His majesty, His faithfulness, His love, His holiness, His grace. And that's the basis of our prayers. (MacArthur, 1980)

Again, prayer is not a vehicle to change things, but to enter into a deep and abiding fellowship with the Lord!

Now with these Presuppositions, what is it that Daniel prayed when he knew that God was about to do a marvelous thing? What ought we to pray knowing that God likewise is about to a

glorious thing in Christ (Revelation 21-22)? That brings us to the confession.

The Confession

Daniel 9:4, “And I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed and said...”

The word “confess” is a very important word in this chapter as Daniel makes reference to it often. The word in the Hebrew is יָדָא (yādâ) primarily means “to acknowledge or confess (1) sin, (2) God’s character and works, or (3) man’s character.” The focus obviously is on man’s sin. The basic difference between this verb and its synonym, הָלַל (hālāl), is that the latter term emphasizes the idea of “glorying in” an object, while yādâ emphasizes the “recognition” and “declaration” of a fact, whether good or bad. The New Testament equivalent is ὁμολογέω (homologeō) which means “to speak the same (as with God).” This is a key to Biblical confession: it is speaking about our sin as God does. That is the idea behind יָדָא (yādâ).

So what does God say about our sin? At least three things

1. What we’ve done is wrong (v. 5).
2. It is heinous in His sight/it offends Him (v. 8).
3. It is our fault (vv. 11ff)! Most Christians will admit the first two. It is the last one where we get hung up. We tend to blame others for our sin. We say *I’d be more godly if it wasn’t for my spouse!* Or perhaps *I wouldn’t have done that had they not done this!*

All of this falls short of Biblical confession which no doubt is why so many in conflict flounder in their walks. Remember the words of John:

1 John 1:8, “If we say that we have no sin [if we don’t confess our sin and so take responsibility for it], we are deceiving ourselves...”

Daniel was NOT self-deceived. He knew that the trial and difficulty that God’s people currently were in was on account of their national rebellion. And so he confessed this and much more! Notice the five things he confessed and what amounts here to the content of biblical confession.

The Content of Biblical Confession

1. He and God’s People were Guilty of Active Rebellion against the Lord

Daniel 9:4-5, “And I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed and said, ‘Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, we have sinned...’”

Daniel identified himself with the people of God. This is significant. While Daniel was a sinner and therefore no doubt guilty of fowl revolt against God, nevertheless the confession that he prays involved active rebellion which he never committed! But that is the thing about salvation: while there is an individual element to it (obviously, think of justification), nevertheless there is a “corporateness” to it as well!

So it is not enough that you are doing fine in your walk; how about the rest of the body? If you are part of the body of Christ than if a weaker brother or sister falters, you too have faltered (this was Paul’s point in 1 Corinthians 12:26)! Daniel understood this. While he may NOT have committed the sins which plunged the nation into exile, nevertheless because he was part of the nation he was guilty along with it and so suffered along with it on account of “their sin.” This is counter to our American culture, but it is so true; when trial comes to your door, you must see that more often than not, it is NOT about you!

In this regard, notice secondly that v. 5_serves as the summary and overview of Daniel’s prayer. In this verse Daniel confesses five different sins which he then spent the rest of the chapter expounding upon and so explaining.

Notice his first words of confession, “We have sinned...” The word used here is חָטָא (*hātā*) which speaks of active rebellion. It is the most generic of words for “sin” and as such could refer to everything else written in this chapter. However as it is general, it speaks generically of a rebellious heart/inclination against God. See, it is one thing to violate God’s commands; but it is quite another to be in open, active rebellion. That is what Daniel recognized about himself and his nation here! The national sin of God’s people wasn’t something done accidentally or in ignorance. The nation had first given themselves to a rebellious heart such that they actively and purposely lived in rebellion against God and His authority. Not only did Israel stiffen their necks in rebellion, they showed a grave indifference to the Lord when He disciplined them,

Daniel 9:13, “As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come on us; yet we have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from our iniquity and giving attention to Thy truth.”

That was the chief and foremost sin God’s people were guilty of prior to and into the exile. It could be traced all the way back to the selection of Saul as king. Do you remember what God told Samuel?

1 Samuel 8:7, “And the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.’”

At this point, Israel wasn’t necessarily guilty of any act of sin; rather, they were guilty of a disposition of sin and rebellion against the majesty and glory of God. That is where Daniel began in his confession. And this is where we too must begin!

The fall was first and foremost a declaration of independence from God's authority or claim over man's life, so this sin remains at the heart and soul of all rebellion! In other words, you too must see that this is the essence of your struggle today. In your flesh, you still are in rebellion against God! So when you bow before God in prayer, begin by confessing/admitting that there still is an element to you that seeks escape from God's authority. That is why we sin! W. S. Plumer put it this way:

We never see sin aright until we see it as against God... All sin is against God in this sense: that it is His law that is broken, His authority that is despised, His government that is set at naught... Pharaoh and Balaam, Saul and Judas each said, 'I have sinned'; but the returning prodigal said, 'I have sinned *against heaven* and before thee'; and David said, 'Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned.' (Bridges, 2003, p. 20)

Notice Daniel's second point of confession, that he and God's people were guilty of violating the natural order of things.

2. Guilty of Violating the Natural Order of Things

Daniel 9:5, "We have sinned, committed iniquity..."

The word for "committed iniquity," אָוֶן (*āwâ*), speaks of a perversion or a violation of the natural order of things. It literally means "to bend, twist, or distort." For example, it is used in Job speaking of the forgiven sinner when Elihu put these words in Job's mouth:

Job 33:27, "...I have sinned and perverted what is right..."

Daniel observed that this was true of the nation as well. In their rebellion, they had perverted the natural order of things! In fact, Daniel expounded upon this:

Daniel 9:7, "Righteousness belongs to Thee, O Lord, but to us open shame, as it is this day-to the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are nearby and those who are far away in all the countries to which Thou hast driven them, because of their unfaithful deeds which they have committed against Thee."

What were the "unfaithful deeds which they committed against [God]"? How did they violate the natural order of things?

- In His salvation, God created a family where grace, compassion, and love would flourish. The nation instead used their salvation to advance their own purpose on the backs of the poor- and so took advantage of the poor and the weak in the body.
- In redemption, God gathered a people to Himself to serve their chief and most glorious end: the worship of God. At this time they perverted this and so made worship about themselves and how they felt- the heart and soul of Baalism!

- In His providence, God made His people into a nation and so a foretaste of the time when the world once again would be possessed by God in the New Heavens and Earth. Yet at this time God's people used their national existence to declare their independence from God and so function and serve as any other secular nation!

This was Daniel's second confession: a perverting of the natural order of things. And herein is where we fall so often. Christian, why were you saved? Why did Christ die on the cross for you? Many today honestly believe that God saved them to make them happy or to fulfill them! But what a "twisting" of the natural order of things! God saved us because it pleased Him! That is all! Our happiness today factors in very little, if at all, in what God is doing in this world today!

But we pervert this. We assume that God's chief end is to glorify man and to enjoy him forever; *just look at how we react when God crosses our will! Look at how we respond to bitter providence!* We see this twisting of the natural order of things today also in

- Our marriages — believing our spouses exist for us and not we for them.
- Our churches — where most believe it exists somehow to satisfy a need in the attendee (Christian I remind you: we have been saved to give a blessing, not receive one)!
- Our relationships — where self-expression and so the appeasing of self is more important than edifying/encouraging an image bearer to serve the Lord!

Daniel saw this in the people of God in his day and so confessed it!

References

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