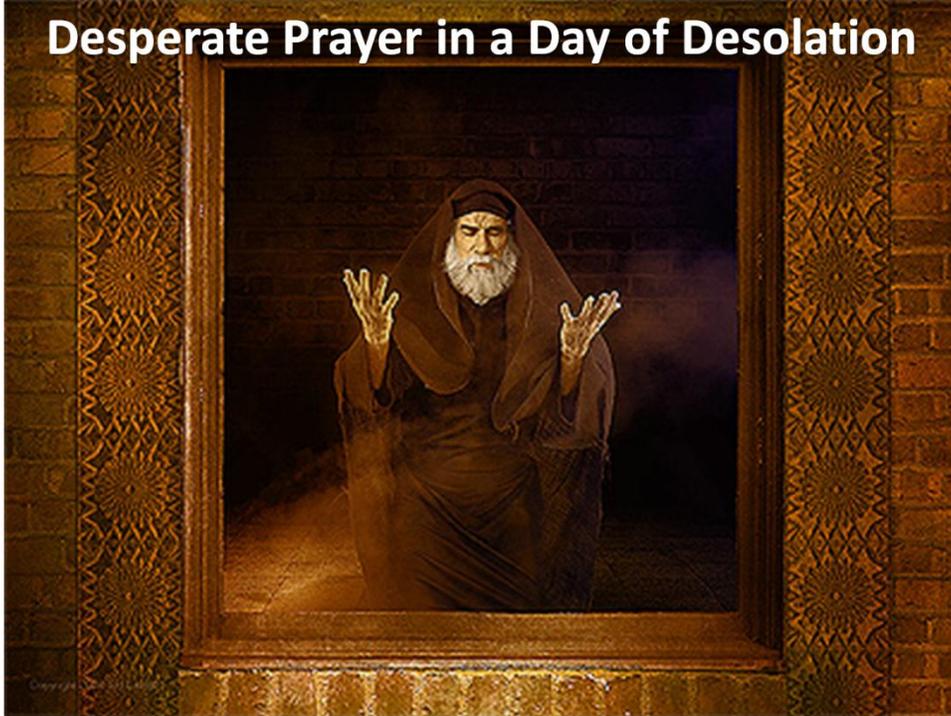


Desperate Prayer in a Day of Desolation



Daniel 9:1-19

We are going to be commissioning the Seeley family for cross cultural missions work after the message. As you know, we are the sending church for the Seeleys. The Seeleys have never had a sending church. They have never been commissioned for full time gospel work in a cross cultural setting. But neither has our church ever been a sending church for any missionary. We have sent plenty of short term mission teams. We send ten percent of our budget to missions every year outside of our church body through the nation and the world, but we have never been a sending church in the way that we are beginning this morning. It is a turning point and momentous occasion in the life of the Seeley family and in the life of our entire church body. As part of this commissioning, we will be praying for them and asking the Lord to provide for them, bless them and help them to build a fruitful ministry.

Since prayer is the most important thing we could do for the Seeleys this morning and at any time in the future, I wanted us to see how Daniel approached the Lord in prayer when he had something very important to ask of the Lord.

1 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans— 2 in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.

3 Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. 4 I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, “O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, 5 we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. 6 We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to

all the people of the land. 7 To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, as at this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. 8 To us, O LORD, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. 9 To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him 10 and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God by walking in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

11 All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. And the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him. 12 He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers who ruled us, by bringing upon us a great calamity. For under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what has been done against Jerusalem. 13 As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us; yet we have not entreated the favor of the LORD our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth. 14 Therefore the LORD has kept ready the calamity and has brought it upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in all the works that he has done, and we have not obeyed his voice.

15 And now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and have made a name for yourself, as at this day, we have sinned, we have done wickedly. 16 “O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy hill, because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people have become a byword among all who are around us. 17 Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate. 18 O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. 19 O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name.”

At this point, Daniel was in his early 80's. He had watched his beloved Judah fall to the mighty Nebuchadnezzar and was dragged from his own country as a teenager. He witnessed the rise and complete domination of the Babylonian Empire and then their slow weakening of power and eventual fall to the Medo-Persian Empire. He had been threatened with execution, thrown into the lion's den and now chapter nine finds Daniel serving under his third empire after nearly seventy years of faithfully serving his God in a foreign land.

For most of his life, Daniel had lived in the court of the richest kings in the world. He probably did not suffer want in most of his years but in chapter nine he possessed something infinitely more valuable than gold, jewels or the finest wine—Daniel had hope. Daniel had hope that the years of captivity and years of desolation of his beloved city, Jerusalem, would be coming to an end. And the reason that Daniel had hope was because he also had possession of something else—a copy of the book of Jeremiah.

Verse two gives the background. *I, Daniel, perceived in the books¹ the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.*

God had severely disciplined his people through their years in Babylon but God had also promised an end to these years of desolation. The passage that Daniel was reading from was Jeremiah 25:11-12 *This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. 12 Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste.*²

Jeremiah wrote these words in the year 605 BC. Does that date sound familiar to you? This was the very year that Nebuchadnezzar rose to power, conquered Jerusalem and carried off Daniel and others to Babylon. This means that God would have given this promise to Jeremiah mere weeks or months before Nebuchadnezzar invaded.

It is important to note that Daniel considered the words of Jeremiah to be the inspired word of God. He read them and believed them as if they were the very words of God. This is important evidence for the reliability and inspiration of Scripture. The Bible is filled with these kinds of examples, where one part refers to the other as inspired and reliable. Moreover, by believing this prediction of Jeremiah, Daniel was not just validating this section of Jeremiah 25 but by extension, the entire book of Jeremiah.

Even though the actual time was more like 68 years, Daniel took the number literally, not symbolically. This once again emphasizes our third principle of interpretation of apocalyptic literature.

1. Scripture ALWAYS has a single meaning (UNLESS there is a double fulfillment.)
2. Symbols do represent actual entities, they are not random or meaningless.
3. Assume the plain meaning of the text, including numbers.
4. Look for the interpretation within the text.

And the events played out exactly as Jeremiah predicted them and as Daniel believed them. The opening words of Ezra give us the details.

In the first year of Cyrus³ king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing:

2 "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

We can only imagine the level of excitement that Daniel must have felt after reading the words of Jeremiah. Daniel had seen the former glory of Jerusalem and now he knew that he was standing on the historical precipice of the fulfillment of this prophecy. If I were in Daniel's shoes at this moment, I imagine that I would have run through the land announcing the good news that was coming. I may have offered some instructions about what to pack for the journey. I might have spoken words of condemnation against the Babylonian kingdom and how they had finally

gotten what they deserved. But Daniel's reaction to this impending promise was to offer a prayer of repentance. The next seventeen verses is nothing but details of this prayer.

Many of you are familiar with the model for prayer that has the acronym ACTS: Adoration—Confession—Thanksgiving—Supplication. Supplication simply means what we ask for in prayer. Daniel closely followed this model of prayer and I estimate the percentages like this.

Adoration—15%

Confession—75%

Supplication—10%

By contrast, most of our prayers probably look like this.

Supplication—100%

Or to be generous, we may have 1-2% of thanksgiving and confession thrown in, but we predominantly think of prayer as asking for something. And in part, that is a good thing. On our way to my sister's house for Thanksgiving, we stopped off at Trinity College in Deerfield, IL for a campus tour. Karen and I are working our way through memorizing Matthew 5-7 and Matthew 6:8 hit me. Your heavenly Father knows what you need before you ask him. In that moment it occurred to me that we had not prayed about this visit yet and that our father wants us to ask him for good things. But still, most of us spend far too much time asking and far too little time in other kinds of prayer.

Adoration

Daniel opened his prayer with adoration of his God. "*O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments...* In this short sentence, Daniel set forth a powerful description of the Lord. He called him "great and awesome," which can refer to all that he is and does but Daniel was also very specific in his prayer. He knew God to be one "who keeps covenant and steadfast love." A keeper of a covenant (berit) is one who keeps his promise.

There are two types of covenants in Scripture—conditional and unconditional. Conditional covenants are promises that are conditioned upon both parties fulfilling their respective responsibilities. These are by far the most common. If the Israelites obeyed the Lord, he would bless them and protect them from their enemies but if they did not obey, God would send enemies to punish them. The Jews were in captivity in Babylon precisely because they did not fulfill their end of the covenant. God never breaks a covenant because it is impossible for him to do so. The Israelites were the ones who broke every covenant and thereby experienced the consequences of their unfaithfulness.

But Daniel was probably referring to God's covenant with Abraham, which was an unconditional covenant. God promised Abraham descendants, land and blessings which were not conditioned upon his obedience but on God's faithfulness alone. So Daniel addressed the Lord by reminding himself that God is a covenant keeper kind of God.

The phrase steadfast love is also important because it is the word *hesed*, which is essentially the Old Testament word for *grace*. Daniel worshipped the Lord as a covenant keeping God who is

full of grace and lovingkindness. Right worship flows from right theology. Daniel had a proper understanding of God's attributes and this was reflected in his prayer. Some of us have poor prayer lives because our theology is poor, or we simply forget that God is a covenant keeper who is full of grace. If we do not begin with this understanding of God, our prayers will be weak.

Confession

As you can see, confession is by far the largest part of Daniel's prayer and can be divided into three parts: What—Who—Why.

What

Daniel models how we should be very specific in our confessions. He listed no less than six descriptions of sin.

sinned—This is the most common Old Testament word for sin and literally means, “to miss the mark.” We can see idea in Judges 20:16. “Among all these were 700 chosen men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.”

done wrong—This word means “twisted, perverted, off of the straight path”

acted wickedly—This phrase carries the guilt of a sin within it and means “to be condemned, convicted of a crime”

The final three descriptions all go together.

rebelled

turning aside from your commandments and rules.

not listened to your servants the prophets,

Turning aside and not listening qualify the type of rebellion. God was always faithful to warn, teach, admonish and woo Israel toward himself, but they were not teachable.

Who

Just as Daniel was specific in listing the types of sin, he was also very specific in listing exactly who was guilty of these sins.

- to the men of Judah
- to the inhabitants of Jerusalem
- to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them,
- to our kings
- to our princes
- to our fathers

Was anyone exempt from Daniel's list? No one was exempt from Daniel's list of those who have sinned because Daniel was practicing what has been called Representational Repentance.⁴ Daniel himself was never a king or prince. He probably was not a worshipper of idols in Judah, yet he identified with centuries and millennia of guilty men and women. In Daniel's mind, All of Israel had sinned and he was part of the problem.

This is drastically different than the way we normally think about repentance. We usually view repentance as completely personal. I have committed certain sins and I therefore must repent of the sins which I have committed. I did not commit your sins so why would I repent of a sin which you committed? God looks at us as individuals, right? After all, if repentance were this easy, couldn't I repent on behalf of everyone in Viroqua and thereby bring salvation to them? To some this might look like the Mormon practice of baptizing ourselves on behalf of dead people, but nothing could be further from the truth.

Representational repentance begins with representational guilt. For example, why was Israel in captivity in Babylon? Because their fathers rebelled against the Lord and that rebellion continued in every successive generation down through the centuries. Daniel identified himself not only with the nation of Israel but with the nation of Israel over 1500 years of history. There is a sense of corporate guilt and therefore, corporate repentance that we fail to understand, but it is a thoroughly Biblical concept. Let me give you a quick survey of verses throughout the Bible.

Exodus 34:8-9—And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. And he said, “If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.”

Ezra 9:6—“O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens.

Nehemiah 1:7—We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses.

Nehemiah 9:2—And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. (They spent **three hours** in corporate confession)

Psalms 106:6—Both we and our fathers have sinned; we have committed iniquity; we have done wickedness.

Ezekiel 22:29-30—The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery. They have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the sojourner without justice. And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and ***stand in the breach*** before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none.

Cf. to Psalm 106:23—Therefore he said he would destroy them— had not Moses, his chosen one, ***stood in the breach*** before him, to turn away his wrath from destroying them.

Jeremiah 14:20—We acknowledge our wickedness, O LORD, and the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against you.

Matthew 6:9-13—“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Matthew 23:31-32—Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.

Acts 3:13-15—The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead.

1 Timothy 5:22—Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.

But some might object to this idea of representational repentance because Moses and the other prophets were functioning as a type of priest before the Lord. Since Jesus is our priest, we no longer need someone to intercede on our behalf, like they did.

However, as we learned a few weeks ago, believers are a kingdom of priests. We are living stones being built into a living temple of the Lord. Much more than we realize, we are a corporate entity. We are the body of Christ and as his unified body, there is a very real sense in which we can “stand in the breach” and not only model our own repentance but also practice representational repentance.

Not only this, but since we are all sinners who sin every day, it is likely that we share in some way in the sins of others. There is nothing new under the sun and just because we have never committed an act of murder, all of us have murdered others in our hearts. We may have never shared a bed with someone other than our spouse, but we have committed adultery in the heart. Daniel did not take on the sins of his ancestors as a type of symbolic message. He knew that he himself was a sinner in need of a God who was a covenant keeper and one who was full of grace.

Why

The final part of confession is the “why” question. Why should we repent? Most of us think that we should repent because the Bible says that we should. Others will take it a step further and say we should repent because it restores us back into a right relationship with the Lord. Both of these are true but Daniel adds another reason.

O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name.”

Our sin is a poor reflection of the perfect holiness of God. When we sin we do not make God look beautiful, but rather just the opposite. God’s holiness is a marvelous and beautiful thing and we want others to see it that way. Our repentance is certainly for our good but it is predominantly for God’s glory, for his name and his fame.

Here is what I want us to do. Before we ask the Lord to bless the Seeley family in their mission's journey to the Bahamas, I want us to share in a time of corporate repentance. I want to take several minutes and confess sins, wrongdoing, rebellion and wickedness in our loves, in our church, in our town and in our nation.

Rich Maurer
December 9, 2014

¹ The NIV is alone in translating the Hebrew word as the "Scriptures." All other translations that I consulted translated the word as "books." The NIV is making an interpretive decision in by translating it is Scriptures, but I think it is an accurate decision. First, out of the 138 uses of the word in the Old Testament, the vast majority of the times it clearly refers to the Law or some other part of the Scriptures. Second, Jeremiah himself used the word to refer to his own prophetic words. "Jeremiah wrote in a book all the disaster that should come upon Babylon, all these words that are written concerning Babylon" (Jeremiah 51:60).

² Daniel no doubt also had in mind this section of Jeremiah.

"And when you tell this people all these words, and they say to you, 'Why has the LORD pronounced all this great evil against us? What is our iniquity? What is the sin that we have committed against the LORD our God?' then you shall say to them: 'Because your fathers have forsaken me, declares the LORD, and have gone after other gods and have served and worshiped them, and have forsaken me and have not kept my law, and because you have done worse than your fathers, for behold, every one of you follows his stubborn, evil will, refusing to listen to me. Therefore I will hurl you out of this land into a land that neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor.'

"Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when it shall no longer be said, 'As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,' but 'As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.' For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their fathers. (Jeremiah 16:10-15)

³ Ezra lists Cyrus as the first King of Medo-Persia and Daniel 9 records the name of Darius. Either Darius is an alternate name for Cyrus or else Darius was ruling locally under the overall leadership of Cyrus. We can't be sure which option is correct.

⁴ In October of 2012, Ugandan president, Museveni, offered a corporate confession to God on behalf of his nation. I cannot attest to the genuineness of Museveni's faith or of his confession, but it certainly fits within the spirit of Daniel's confession.

"I stand here today to close the evil past and especially in the last 50 years of our national leadership history and at the threshold of a new dispensation in the life of this nation. I stand here on my own behalf and on behalf of my predecessors to repent," Museveni prayed. "We confess sins of idolatry and witchcraft which are rampant in our land. We confess sins of shedding innocent blood, sins of political hypocrisy, dishonesty, intrigue and betrayal."

"Forgive us of sins of pride, tribalism and sectarianism; sins of laziness, indifference and irresponsibility; sins of corruption and bribery that have eroded our national resources; sins of sexual immorality, drunkenness and debauchery," he continued. "These sins and many others have characterized our past leadership, especially the last 50 years of our history. Lord, forgive us and give us a new beginning. Give us a heart to love You, to fear You and to seek You. Take away from us all the above sins."⁴

"We want Uganda to be known as a nation that fears God, and as a nation whose foundations are firmly rooted in righteousness and justice to fulfill what the Bible says in Psalm 33:12: Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord. A people you have chosen as your own," he said. "I renounce all the evil foundations and covenants that were laid in idolatry and witchcraft. I renounce all the satanic influence on this nation. And I hereby covenant Uganda to You, to walk in Your ways and experience all Your blessings forever."