

Armagh Baptist Church: Sunday 27th January 2019 – 11am

Daniel 9:1-19

“If God’s got it all sorted out, why pray?”

Introduction

As we have made our way through the Book of Daniel, one theme that keeps repeating itself is that **‘God is in control’** – God is in control of all things.

We’ve seen that **God was in control** in ch.1 when he allowed Nebuchadnezzar to come to Jerusalem and carry off, not just the items out of the Temple, but also many of the young men (like Daniel) into exile in Babylon.

God was in control when Daniel refused to eat the king’s meat, and survived on water and vegetables instead.

God was in control when Daniel and his 3 friends did better than all the others, at their studies in the University of Babylon.

God was in control when he rescued Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego from the Fiery Furnace, when they refused to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar’s image.

God was in control when he rescued Daniel from the Lion’s Den, when he refused to break his pattern of praying 3 times a day, even when the Laws of the Medes & Persians were changed to say that he should only pray to the king.

God was in control when he gave Daniel insight into dreams and visions, when none of the wise men of Babylon were able to interpret them.

We have even seen that God is in control of world history!

In ch.7 we saw that God knew what was going to happen in terms of the rise of world empires long before it happened.

He knew that the Medo-Persians would overthrow the Babylonians;
He knew that the Greek Goat would overcome the Persian Ram in ch.8; and
He knew that the Roman Beast – the worst of them all – would be able to bring down the mighty Greek Empire – long before it ever happened!

He even knew that 10 kings would arise out of the Roman Empire, bringing us down to the present day, as those empires spread out across the world in ch.7.

So, if God already knows all that, if God already has it all worked out, why then, should we as Christians pray? Can we change God’s mind? What is prayer for, if it’s not to change God’s mind? Why does God want his people to pray?

That’s the question I want us to look at this morning:

If God has it all sorted out, why pray?

In Daniel ch.9 we see Daniel in prayer. We have his prayer recorded for us from v.4 right down to v.19. So Daniel’s prayer lasts for sixteen verses.

We’ve always known (from our childhood) that Daniel was a man of prayer:

***Daniel was a man of prayer - daily he prayed 3 times,
Even when they had him cast in the Den of lions.
In the Den, In the Den, fears could not alarm him,
God just shut the lions’ mouths, so they could not harm him.***

But apart from a brief prayer of thanks to God in **Daniel 2:20-23**, we’ve never known what exactly Daniel prayed about, or what he prayed for.

*‘Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
to whom belong wisdom and might.
He changes times and seasons;
He removes kings and sets up kings;
He gives wisdom to the wise
And knowledge to those who have understanding;
He reveals deep and hidden things;
He knows what is in the darkness,
And the light dwells in Him.
To you, O God of my fathers,
I give thanks and praise,
For you have given me wisdom and might,
And have now made known to me what we asked of you,
For you have made known to us the king’s matter.’*

So that was simply a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for revealing the mystery of the king’s dream to him and his 3 friends when they met together to pray for help, otherwise, next day they would all have lost their lives.

Daniel was a man of Prayer, but I also want you to see that **Daniel was a man of the Word** – God’s Word. We’re going to see him reading the Bible at the start of ch.9. - And it’s what he read, that prompted him to pray.

I hope that all of us make some time each day to get alone with God to read the Bible and pray. We will see here that the two things go hand in hand. - Some people call it their **Quiet Time** with God. It’s a good habit to develop and get into. If you need some resources to help you get into a regular time alone with God, just talk to any of the elders, and we’ll be glad to point you in the right direction. Maybe a set of Bible Study notes, or a daily reading plan, **The Word for Today** from UCB, or **Explore** Bible Reading notes from the *Good Book Company*. Whatever works for you, take it, get into it, and use it, to spend time with God.

1. Why did Daniel pray? (vs.1-3)

Well, first of all, we need to notice when this was. What's the date at the beginning of this chapter? There's been one at the start of each of these chapters (7,8,9,10).

The dates at the beginning of chs.7 & 8 were still in the times of the Babylonians. The First year of Belshazzar, and Third year of Belshazzar – the last of their kings.

But for the first time, ch.9 begins with the **'First year of Darius, the Mede'** who has just been made king over the realm of the Chaldeans – he's just taken over from the Babylonians. So the Babylonian Empire has just gone. Now the Medo-Persian Empire has just appeared on the stage of World History.

Remember we saw, back in ch.6:28, there were actually two kings at this time.

*'So this Daniel prospered during the reign of **Darius** (the Mede) and the reign of **Cyrus** the Persian.'*

Remember the two horns on the Ram's head, we looked at last time in ch.8?

One represented Darius the Mede, the other was Cyrus the Persian.

Very soon, it would just be Cyrus the Persian, also known as Cyrus the Great.

So the year is 539 BC. Cyrus was in charge from 538 BC - the next year.

But why did Daniel pray at this particular time? - Well, what's he doing in v.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.'

He's reading a book of the Bible. He tells us which one - It's Jeremiah!

Daniel was doing his Bible reading. He's having his Quiet Time with God.

And suddenly something just jumps out of the page at him. - It applies to him!

What was it? Well, he could have been reading Jeremiah ch.25 or ch.29.

Because both of them tell us that the exile in Babylon would last 70 years.

Read Jeremiah 25:11-14. God's people would serve the king of Babylon 70 yrs. At the end of 70 years God would punish the Babylonians and set his people free.

Read Jeremiah 29:10-14. When the 70 years are up, God would fulfil his promise and bring his people back to Jerusalem. - Jer.29:11 is a favourite verse of many:

'For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord...

...Plans to prosper you and not to harm you.

Plans to give you hope and a future.' (NIV)

But sometimes we rip it out of its context and make it mean whatever we want it to

mean for us today, and we miss what it would have meant for its original readers!

Well, Daniel was its original reader! It was a letter sent from Jeremiah who stayed behind in Jerusalem, to Daniel and the exiles who were carried off into Babylon. It was probably written as soon as the exile started. Because in the chapters around it there were some false-prophets trying to tell the people that they'd be home inside 2 years! Well, Daniel knew that wasn't true. He's been there at least 68 years by this stage! He's been faithful to God through the reigns of all the Babylonian kings from Nebuchadnezzar to Belshazzar, and now a new king Darius, and a new empire, the Medes & Persians, has come to power. How much longer can it be before Daniel and his people are allowed to go home!?

So he realises from his Bible reading that the exile is going to last 70 years.

So he realises that time is nearly up. It'll soon be time to go home! That's great!

Now, Daniel could have just sat back and waited for it all to happen...

He'd learned over all these years that **God was in control**; God knew all that was going to happen, before it ever did. God raises up kings, and brings them down. Sure, if God's in control, I'll just sit back here, and wait for it all to happen! And you could forgive Daniel for thinking like that, and yet he didn't. - Why didn't he?

Because he read on in Jeremiah 29; He didn't stop at our favourite verse in v.11; He read on...

'Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you.

You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.

***I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.'* (vs.12-14)**

That's why Daniel prayed. Because he read those instructions in God's Word, in the Book of Jeremiah. They were written nearly 70 years ago by old Jeremiah, but now Daniel was an old man, and he knew what he had to do. He had to pray.

Now there's nothing to tell us in Daniel ch.9 that anybody else had realised this. It was only Daniel as far as we can tell. So, on behalf of his nation, on behalf of all of God's people, Daniel gets down to prayer. And he doesn't just pray for himself. He puts himself in their shoes and he prays for them all – on their behalf.

Now, to finish Daniel ch.9, I would need to make two more points.

2. What did Daniel pray for? (vs.4-19) and

3. Was Daniel's prayer answered? (vs.20-27).

This morning, I'm going to concentrate on just one of those points (vs.4-19)...

2. What did Daniel pray for? (vs.4-19)

In v.3 we read: *'Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.'*

So straightaway we know that Daniel is serious, he is in earnest as far as praying to God is concerned. He has turned his face to the Lord God – probably looking westward from his window towards Jerusalem as before. He's seeking God by prayer, but he's also pleading for mercy. He's fasting from food and he's dressed in sackcloth and ashes. Daniel is deadly serious. Prayer is a very serious matter.

*(v.4) 'I prayed to the LORD my God and made **confession**.'*

This isn't a prayer of praise and *celebration*. This is a prayer of serious *confession*.

So what did Daniel pray?

A. The first part of the prayer is Confession: (vs.4-15)

Notice how Daniel addresses God at the beginning of his prayer in v.4.

*'O Lord, the great and awesome God, **who keeps covenant** and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments.'*

I want you to notice that everything that Daniel is about to say, he says in light of the fact that God had made a covenant with his people many years ago.

It's not that long ago that we looked at the Book of Deuteronomy here in Armagh. Do you remember how that book ends? It ended with 3 sermons from Moses to all the people of Israel gathered on the Plains of Moab. Moses was about to die, but he warned the people, if they kept the terms of God's covenant when they went into the Promised Land of Canaan and settled down, then God would be with them, and bless them, and be their God.

But if on the other hand they went into the Promised Land and settled down, and began to forget about God, and worship other gods and idols and images of the Canaanites all around them, then he would have to punish them. In fact, instead of being blessed, they would be cursed. And if they continued in that way, and didn't listen to God calling them to come back to him, then things would eventually get so bad that he would have to put them out of their Land.

Just as they had spent 400 years in slavery in Egypt, so they would be sent away once again into Exile, as punishment for their sins. He specifically said because they hadn't kept God's Laws, including the Law of the Sabbath, he would send

them away from their Land, so that their Land could have its Sabbaths. You see, every seven years they were supposed to leave the land fallow, to allow it to rest. But if they didn't do that, God would put them out of their land so that it could have all its Sabbath years of rest, while they were away.

(More of that when we come to **'The 70 weeks'** at the end of Daniel 9.)

So God had remembered to keep the terms of His Covenant with His People all these years. If they followed him, he blessed them. When they forsook him, he had to carry out the curses, that they had all agreed to. He had to punish them.

So I want you to notice a pattern in how Daniel prays. He prays **two things against himself** and his people. Then he prays **one thing in God's favour**. Let me show you what I mean...

In v.5 he prays one thing against himself and his people:

(i) 'We have sinned' (v.5)

In v.6 he prays one thing against himself and his people:

(ii) 'We have not listened' (v.6)

Then in v.7 he says one thing in God's favour:

(iii) 'You are righteous' (v.7)

So let's review that triplet for a minute. Daniel says that he and his fellow countrymen had **sinned** and **done wrong** and **acted wickedly** and **rebelled**. They had **turned aside** from God's commandments and rules.

All of those things are involved in what the Bible calls **'sin'** – doing wrong, acting wickedly, rebelling against God, turning aside from His commands and rules.

But then, if that wasn't bad enough, whenever God did try to warn them and call them back to himself, **they didn't listen**. They refused to listen. They turned a deaf ear, and continued to go their own way and do their own thing.

***'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.'* (v.6)

Jeremiah was one of the prophets who had tried to bring God's Word and God's warning to these people, but they just wouldn't listen to him: *The weeping prophet!*

So having admitted their sins, and having admitted that they just hadn't listened, Daniel has to confess on behalf of his nation, that God was **righteous** in all that he had done against them as far as the Exile was concerned (v.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.' (v.7)

So Daniel here is agreeing with God's verdict on his people – they had sinned, they had not listened, so God had been absolutely within his rights to send them into Exile, far away from the Land he had once given them.

That's at the heart of confession – it's agreeing with God about our sin.

It's agreeing with God that our sin is serious; it's agreeing with God that we have no excuse. We haven't listened to his warnings, to him pricking our consciences, we have just continued to go our own way. Therefore God's judgement is right.

Let's move on then to the next triplet. Two things against themselves, one for God:

(iv) 'To us belongs open shame' (v.8)

To our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers – we're all filled with shame. 'Shame' is a very strong word. Nobody likes to use it today. But when it comes to sinning against God, that's exactly what it is - 'shame' – we should be 'ashamed'. Why?

(v) 'Because we have sinned against you' (v.8)

If we only see our sins as minor misdemeanours against one another, we will never be filled with shame. But if we see our sins as something major – flying in the face of a holy God, despite all the good things He has done for us, then we will be filled with shame. That's the point we have to come to, like David in Ps.51:4...

'Against You, You only have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight.'

Only then will we see that our God is merciful and forgiving, like Daniel says in v.9:

(v) 'You are merciful and forgiving' (v.9)

Because of all the Israelites had done, God would have had every right to cast them off, and throw them to one side, but God is a faithful God, a merciful God, one who would rather extend forgiveness, than banish us away in his wrath.

So He's righteous and just, but He's also merciful, and ready & willing to forgive! So Daniel moves onto his final triplet:

(vi) 'We have rebelled and are disobedient' (v.10)

'We have rebelled against Him 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.'

(vii) 'We've transgressed your law, turned aside, refused to obey you' (v.11)

'All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice'

(viii) So you have judged us – You are right in what you have done (vs.11-14)

'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.'

'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.'

'As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us, yet we have not entreated the favour (or the grace) of the LORD our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth. 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.'

Again and again in this prayer of confession, Daniel doesn't stand piously by wringing his hands, as if he was holier than the rest of the people of his nation. No, he gets down into the dust and ashes on their behalf and tells it as it is! They had all sinned. And God had no alternative but to punish them for their sin.

And so he comes to the conclusion of his prayer of confession, and he says it one more time...

(ix) 'We have sinned, we have done wickedly!' (v.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.'

There was nothing else Daniel could say. He and his nation had been caught out. They had sinned against God. They had gone their own way. They had broken the covenant He had graciously made with them. They'd brought it all on themselves.

They had sinned. God was right and just in all He had done to them.

N.B. When did any of us ever pray a prayer confessing our sins like that?

B. The second part of the prayer is Petition: (vs.16-19)

Now in this section I want you to notice the things that Daniel specifically asks for. That's what petition means. It's asking God for certain things...

(i) '***Let your anger & your wrath turn away*** from **Your City Jerusalem**, your holy hill.' (v.16)

(ii) '***Jerusalem*** and **Your people** have become a byword to those around us!' (v.16)

(iii) 'Listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy' (v.17)

(iv) 'For your own sake make your face shine upon **Your sanctuary**, which is desolate' (v.17)

(v) 'Incline your ear and hear!' (v.18)

(vi) 'Open your eyes and see our desolations!' (v.18)
See what? – **The City** called by **Your name**.

(vii) 'We don't present our pleas because of our righteousness...

...but because of **Your great mercy**. (v.18)

(viii) 'O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act.' (v.19)

(ix) 'Delay not, for **Your own sake**, O my God...

...because **Your City** and **Your people** are called by **Your name**.' (v.19)

What is Daniel really concerned about here in this prayer?

He's concerned about 3 or 4 things:

Your City - Your People - Your Sanctuary - Your Name

The City of Jerusalem was lying in ruins.

God's People, Israel, were scattered over many countries in exile.

The Sanctuary, the Temple in Jerusalem, was lying desecrated and in ruins.

And God's Name was being dragged through the mud!

Daniel wanted God to act, to sort all of these things out.

3. Was Daniel's Prayer Answered? (vs.20-27)

It certainly was. But that's for next week. It was answered in every last detail!

The Temple, The City, The People and **The Name of God** were all restored.

But don't miss what Daniel asked for in v.16.

'Let your anger and your wrath turn away from your City Jerusalem, your holy hill.'

There's a very important word that wraps up the idea of turning aside wrath from something. It's the word **Atonement**. God turns aside his wrath against sin by the sacrifice of a substitute. That's what we really want to see answered in Jerusalem.

And it will be. We'll see that next Sunday morning in v.24 in particular.

Conclusion

At the beginning this morning I asked the question:

'If God's got it all under control, why pray?'

Maybe that's why you find it hard to pray. You ask, *'What's the point?'*

Here's the answer.

God isn't just concerned about where his people are at **geographically**,
He's more concerned about where we're at **spiritually**.
That's why we need to pray.

Prayer is not a matter of us changing God's mind, it's a matter of bringing our hearts and minds into agreement with God and His will for us, and our world.

The only way that can happen is to spend time in prayer with God.

Didn't Jesus teach us to pray in the Lord's prayer:

'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.'

**Prayer is not a matter of us trying to twist God's arm, or change God's mind,
so that we get our will done in heaven.**

**Prayer is a matter of conforming our wills to God's will, so that His Will gets
done on earth, just as it always gets done in heaven.**