

Daniel Series Part 14

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[0 : 00] We all know that Daniel was a man of prayer. We all know that Daniel serves as a paragon of prayerfulness.

When it comes to prayer, Daniel's your man. Pray like Daniel, and you will have this business of prayer well and truly cracked.

Would it be a good thing if you prayed like Daniel prayed? Would it transform your life and the life and ministry of our congregation if we all stood up to the mark and prayed like Daniel?

If all the Christians in Scotland across the different denominations prayed like Daniel, what impact would that have on our nation?

So, what we have to do, I guess, is copy Daniel. We take this chapter we've read, chapter 6, supplemented by other relevant material in the book that tells us of Daniel's life of prayer, and we establish how Daniel prayed.

[1 : 20] We can pull together a concise description of how the man prayed. We're talking frequency, manner, perseverance, location, posture, content, and then we make a big effort to emulate the man.

I wonder, would that work? Would that convert us all in mighty men and women of prayer? If we could just establish this picture of Daniel and say, well, I'm going to be like him.

I'm going to pray like he prayed. Well, I fear not. In simply trying to copy Daniel, we would be in danger of ignoring the bigger question.

Perhaps in exhausting the questions what and how, we would be leaving untouched the bigger question of why. Why did Daniel pray?

Why did Daniel pray so much, three times a day, regular as clockwork? This is the question that I want us to think about and seek to respond to this evening.

[2 : 38] Why did Daniel pray? I want to suggest four reasons that we can find in this chapter and limiting ourselves really to verse 10, though we will supplement that a little.

Really, really verses 10 and 11, but supplement that when we look at the fourth reason with one or two other references, and we'll come to that when we get there.

But four reasons that we can suggest, give an answer, or at least in a measure, give an answer to the question, which I think is the bigger question. Why?

Why did Daniel pray? And why did Daniel pray so much? The first reason that I want to suggest is that he loved God. Now, his love for God is revealed to us in an unexpected way, at least for us it's unexpected.

As we focus in on what we're told there in verse 10, where we have described Daniel responding to the decree and turning to prayer, we're told there in verse 10 that on hearing of the decree, he went home and headed to his upstairs room where the windows opened towards Jerusalem.

[3 : 53] That seems a quirky detail for us, that the windows of this room opened towards Jerusalem. What possible importance can that have? We might even wonder if we were uncharitable, if this was a quirky superstition, or maybe some evidence of sugar-coated nostalgia, as he remembered Jerusalem, where he had been born and brought up, and the place he loved, and now he was far from Jerusalem, and so in a bout of nostalgia, well, he would look towards and pray towards Jerusalem.

Well, that would be not only uncharitable, but inaccurate. This is not the reason why Daniel has these windows open towards Jerusalem, as he prayed three times a day.

The practice of praying towards Jerusalem can be traced to Solomon's prayer of dedication of the temple, some 400 years before the events that we have described for us here, of Daniel in exile in Babylon.

And we'll read in 1 Kings chapter 8 from verse 33. 1 Kings chapter 8, we'll read from verse 33 through to verse 36.

And again, just to remind you of the context, Solomon has built the temple. The temple is about to be dedicated or is being dedicated, and as part of that dedication, Solomon prays.

[5 : 27] And what we read is part of Solomon's prayer. Verse 33, When your people Israel have been defeated by an enemy because they have sinned against you, and when they turn back to you and confess your name, praying and making supplication to you in this temple, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel and bring them back to the land you gave to their fathers.

When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray towards this place and confess your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live and send rain in the land you gave your people for an inheritance. Solomon is imagining different scenarios, different crises that the people might be overtaken by, and he's imagining what they would do.

And his prayer is that when those things happen, God's people, if they're not in Jerusalem, that as they pray they would turn and face towards Jerusalem and pray to God.

You see, Jerusalem was much more than just a city. Jerusalem represented the God who directed that the temple, his special dwelling place, be in Jerusalem.

[7 : 02] And so for the people of God, one's loyalty to God could be measured by one's loyalty to Jerusalem. Listen to the words that we've already sung in Psalm 137.

The exile song, God's people in Babylon, a song that is of the same period as Daniel and his challenge here as he is about to face the lion's den.

Listen how the exiles express themselves in this psalm. By the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs.

Our tormentors demanded songs of joy. They said, sing us one of the songs of Zion. How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill.

May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.

[8 : 14] Very particularly that last expression, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy. It's a very revealing expression in terms of revealing in the mind of the exiles how they viewed Jerusalem.

When we see the way in which they express themselves, we're maybe tempted to retort, well, is this right that they should speak of Jerusalem as their highest joy?

Surely the highest joy of the believer is to be found in God himself. Indeed so. But for the exiles in Babylon to speak of Jerusalem as their highest joy was to speak of God as their highest joy.

God was represented by Jerusalem. And so to speak of Jerusalem as their highest joy was not to displace God. It was rather an expression of their love for and loyalty to God.

So Daniel prayed towards Jerusalem in accordance with the instructions, if you wish, given by Solomon, if indeed we can consider them as instructions. But more importantly, he prayed towards Jerusalem as an expression of his love and thirst for the God of Jerusalem.

[9 : 33] Daniel loved God. And because he loved God, he prayed to God. His thrice daily routine was no tedious chore or religious ritual.

It was a time of cherished fellowship with the God he loved. His highest joy, his supreme delight. If we do not pray as Daniel prayed, perhaps we can find here a hint as to why that is so.

How great is our love for God. And so we pray, Lord, you know I love you. Deepen my love. Why did Daniel pray?

He prayed because he loved God. But he prayed also because he was grateful to God. We're told explicitly that when Daniel got down on his knees on that fateful day, he gave thanks to God.

There in verse 10 of chapter 6 in Daniel, giving thanks to God just as he had done before. Now this reference to him giving thanks to God just as he had done before.

[10 : 47] It's not altogether clear if the reference to his previous custom or habit just as he had done before is a reference specifically to the giving thanks or simply a reference to his custom of

praying thrice daily just as he had done before.

But we don't need to quibble or take too much time to try and resolve that difficulty if indeed it is a difficulty. What we can be sure of is that thanksgiving was at the heart of Daniel's daily prayers. As he prayed, on each occasion that he prayed, we can be sure that thanksgiving was a central element in Daniel's prayers.

Here we have Daniel, far from home, an exile in a foreign land, and yet profoundly grateful to God for all that he received from God's gracious hand.

He had known and continued to know the good favor of emperors, protection from his enemies decade after decade, the granting of wisdom and prosperity and so much more.

[12:00] And Daniel wanted to say thank you. He was grateful to God. And so he prays as he prays because he has so much reason to give thanks to God.

Indeed, on this very day, this very day described for us in Daniel chapter 6, he also has reason to give thanks. I wonder what he gave thanks to God for on this occasion.

Was he giving thanks in expectation of deliverance? Well, we don't know if he had that expectation. Was he giving thanks for the opportunity to declare his loyalty to the God of Jerusalem in the face of his enemies?

Did he give thanks for the peace that came from knowing that even his most ferocious enemies could go no further than his God would allow them to? Well, perhaps for all of these things and many more.

Why did Daniel pray so much? Well, he had so much to be thankful for. And he wants to express that and give thanks to God.

[13:09] Once a day just wouldn't allow him to cover all the ground. If we do not pray as Daniel prayed, might it be that we are less aware of the many reasons we have to be grateful to God.

It's not that there are less reasons, but that we're not aware of them. We're not so conscious of them. Well, if that is so, then we pray, Lord, I am grateful. Deepen my gratitude.

Why did Daniel pray? He prayed because he loved God. He prayed because he was grateful to God. And he prayed also because he needed God's help. Notice what we read in verse 11, when his enemies have set the trap, as it were, and they're coming to discover if Daniel is indeed continuing to pray.

And in verse 11, we read, then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. Asking God for help.

So, very specifically, they catch him, red-handed as it were, praying, but they're also able to establish what it is that he was doing or what was the content of his prayer at this point.

[14:23] Well, he was asking God for help. Daniel knew his limitations. He was highly regarded by the king. He was wise and gifted and experienced in court affairs.

And yet he could not, in his own strength and wisdom, sort out this particular crisis that has emerged. He needed God's help.

And importantly, he knew that he needed God's help. And so what does he do? When he discovers about the decree, he returns to his home and he prays, and he prays, asking for God's help.

Was it only at a time such as this that Daniel would have asked God for help? Well, we can be sure that not only for such a time as this, we can be sure that Daniel was ever conscious of his need of help and so sought such help thrice daily in the face of the many and varied challenges and difficulties that each day would bring, as is true for us, though in different circumstances, as he needed God's help and was conscious of his need for God's help.

So the same is true for us. And so again, we ask the question, if we do not pray as Daniel prayed, might it be because we imagine that we can handle the challenges of life in our own strength and wisdom.

[15:55] Perhaps we need God for the big problems, but we are pretty capable of handling most stuff that life can throw at us. If that is our conception, then it's not surprising that we won't often seek God's help.

And so again, we pray, Lord, I do recognize my need of you. Help me to see just how much I stand in need of your help in everything I do.

So Daniel prayed out of love for God. He prayed as an expression of thanksgiving to God, an opportunity to give thanks to God. He prayed conscious of his permanent need of God's help.

There's a fourth reason that I want to suggest, and for this we will bring to bear other references in addition to what we have here in chapter 6.

Finally, we say that he prayed, and he prayed so much because he was expecting great things of God. He was expecting great things of God.

[17:04] Now, this isn't so immediately apparent, what we're getting at here. For this particular motivation that drives Daniel to prayer, we need to go beyond chapter 6 and explore a little further.

So if you would turn with me to chapter 9, Daniel chapter 9 and verse 2. Well, we'll read from verse 1, verses 1 and 2 of Daniel chapter 9.

Now, notice in the reading it will become apparent, but just in case it passes you by, notice that the reference that is given, the time reference that is given, identifies what has been described here as something that was happening at the very same time as Daniel was facing these troubles with his colleagues who were trying to get him thrown into the lion's den, indeed were successful in getting him thrown into the lion's den.

It's in the very same year, the first year of the reign of King Darius. So that's just to be aware of.

What do we read? In the first year of Darius, son of Xerxes, a Mede by descent, who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom, in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last 70 years.

So what is Daniel doing? He's saying that in this very year, the same year in which he has this difficulty, to put it mildly, in terms of the lion's den, in this very same year, he had set to studying the prophecies that had been delivered by the prophet Jeremiah.

[18:41] And having done so, he had come to the conclusion that this desolation of Jerusalem, the exile that the people of God had been enduring, was coming to an end.

You see, we mentioned this morning that Daniel, at this point, had been in Babylon some 70 years. It's difficult to work it out with complete precision, but roughly 70 years.

Well, that very year, in God's providence, he's considering what Jeremiah has written concerning the exile, concerning the desolation of Jerusalem, and to his great excitement, he discovers that it's 70 years.

Perhaps he's reminded that it's 70 years. We don't know. And so, there is, you can imagine, in Daniel, in this very year, in which he has this trouble with the administrators who want to destroy him, there is this expectation that the exile is coming to an end, that soon there will be the longed-for return to Jerusalem, this Jerusalem to which he faced every day as he prayed to his God.

Now, Daniel himself tells us that he had come to that conclusion on the basis of what was written by Jeremiah. Now, it would be helpful for us just to notice what it is that Jeremiah said, and we're not going to read everything that Jeremiah says on this matter, but we will selectively notice one or two things that Jeremiah says.

[20:14] First of all, in Jeremiah chapter 25, we'll read verse 1, and then we'll jump through to verse 12. So, Jeremiah chapter 25 and verse 1.

We'll notice there in the church Bible that the chapter is entitled, the 70 years of captivity. Well, this, of course, was precisely what Daniel had discovered or rediscovered and was enthused by.

Well, notice what it says there in verse 1 of Jeremiah. These are the words that Daniel would have been reading in that first year of the reign of King Darius. The word came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, king of Judah, which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

So, that's the time reference of when this prophecy, it comes to Jeremiah. And then we jump to verse 12. And there we read, but when the 70 years are fulfilled, that is 70 years after that year, first year of Nebuchadnezzar, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians for their guilt, declares the Lord, and will make it desolate forever.

Well, here it speaks of a punishment of Babylon, a destruction of Babylon, but we need to turn to chapter 29 to see more fully what it is that God was declaring through Jeremiah.

[21:42] So, in chapter 29, a letter to the exiles from the prophet Jeremiah, and we read from verse 10. This is what the Lord says. When 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.

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. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to 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 will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you, declares the Lord, and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.

So, here's Daniel. He's been in Babylon about 70 years, and he discovers in the prophetic writings of Jeremiah that the exile will last 70 years. Can you imagine his excitement?

And what does he do in the light of this discovery? What does he do? Well, he does exactly what the Lord, through Jeremiah, says that his people will do as a precursor to the longed-for return to Jerusalem.

[23 : 04] He prays, when my people pray, I will hear, and I will deliver them and return them to the land from whence I sent them.

And Daniel prays. He prays with passion and excitement and urgency and expectation to get a flavor of the manner in which he prays in the light of this truth.

Notice in chapter 9, we will in due course, of course, come to chapter 9 and consider it in more detail, but notice just in the passing the manner in which he prays there from verse 17 of chapter 9 of Daniel.

Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, O Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. Give ear, O God, and hear, open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your name.

Notice the connection, the close connection between Jerusalem and God himself, the city that bears your name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy.

[24 : 13] O Lord, listen. O Lord, forgive. O Lord, hear and act. For your sake, O my God, do not delay because your city and your people bear your name.

O Lord, listen. Daniel prayed because he was expecting great things of God. And he understood that these great things that God had declared would become effective and a reality in the measure that he and God's people prayed.

And so he prayed. He prayed thrice daily as a man expecting great things of God. And as we think of this final reason that we identify for why Daniel prayed, and as we think of ourselves, if we do not pray as Daniel prayed, might it be because we are missing that sense of eager expectation concerning what God is planning for our lives, the life and ministry of our congregation, for our city, for our nation.

Lord, help us to see the great things you have in store for us and help us to pray that we might see your mighty hand in an ever more powerful and marvelous way.

And your people will ever pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray.

[26 : 07] Let us pray.