

Daniel Series Part 21

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[0 : 0 0] to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us. To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Immeasurably more than you ask or imagine.

Does that ring true for you as you have prayed to God? Has He responded in the way described here by Paul in the letter to the Ephesians? Immeasurably more than all that you could have asked or even imagined. Are you able to say, yes, that happened to me? I can tell you about a time when that was my experience. I remember speaking with friends in Peru who told me their experience with regard to their three adult daughters. Now, all three of their daughters were single, and the parents were just a little concerned as to the absence of any prospect of wedding bells. Now, it's a moot point whether they should have been concerned, but the point is they were concerned. And they decided, Mom and Dad decided to make this a matter of urgent and determined prayer. Well, within a year, all three of their daughters were married, and the parents were on the brink of bankruptcy, having had to fund these weddings. Well, I guess the pace of the response that they received to their prayer qualifies, perhaps, maybe in a not particularly a profound way, but nonetheless qualifies as immeasurably more than they asked or certainly imagined. And today I want to consider this truth concerning God with the help of one example of God acting in this way, doing immeasurably more than is asked for or imagined.

And for this, we return to Daniel and the chapter that we've read, chapter 9 of Daniel. On the last occasion that we considered Daniel, we were thinking about the introduction to Daniel's prayer, the first four verses of the chapter. And today what we want to do is move on to the prayer itself, and indeed God's response to it. Now, as you will have noticed in the reading, there is much here before us, so the way in which we're going to do it, and even doing it this way, we will have to leave much unsaid. But the way we're going to do it is we're going to think about the prayer this morning, and then the response, God's response this evening. I'd like to think that both sermons are stand-alone and would be a prophet on a stand-alone basis, but clearly they do tie together as we think about Daniel's prayer, and then move on to think about God's response. Now, the prayer is so rich in content that it can be approached and considered from a variety of angles, and all of which will involve a focus on one or other aspect of the prayer to the exclusion, or in any case to the partial exclusion, of others. Now, my point of departure for considering Daniel's prayer, and the truth around which I will say all that I have to say this morning, is found in words of Daniel in verse 7. Notice with me there, if you have your Bibles open there in Daniel chapter 9, and in verse 7 at the heart of the prayer,

Daniel makes this statement or affirmation in addressing God, Lord, you are righteous. And this will be the truth around which everything we say will, in one way or another, revolve.

Lord, Lord, you are righteous. Or as it is also translated, to you, O Lord, belongs righteousness. What is literally said is, to you, O Lord, righteousness. And so, some think it right, and it seems reasonable to introduce the word belongs. To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness. Or, very simply, Lord, you are righteous. And the intent of this affirmation is to declare that righteousness is of the very essence of God. Daniel is not simply declaring that God acts in a righteous manner, which evidently He does. But what Daniel is recognizing is that God is, in His very essence, righteous. To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness. Lord, you are righteous. But what does it mean to say that God is righteous? In the Bible, the word righteous has the sense or the meaning of integrity or conformity to a norm. Now, in the case of God, the norm to which He conforms is His own being and character. To put it another way, God is always true to Himself. He always acts in character.

[5 : 46] He does not. He cannot act out of character. And the contrast with ourselves is so dramatic that we don't really need to dwell on it. But this is important for us to have very clear in our minds as we proceed.

The Lord, Daniel recognizes, is righteous. He is characterized by that integrity. He is always true to Himself. He always acts in character. And with this in mind, let's consider Daniel's prayer under the following headings. First of all, confession before a righteous God. Then we'll notice, as the prayer develops, punishment accepted at the hands of a righteous God. And then finally, as the prayer itself comes to its climax, forgiveness sought from a righteous God. So, these are the headings, and they really equate to the three parts of the prayer before us. Confession before a righteous God, punishment accepted at the hands of a righteous God. And forgiveness sought from a righteous God. Well, let's begin with Daniel's confession before God, before the righteous God. And notice who Daniel confesses to and what Daniel confesses. The content of his confession is in some ways of particular interest. But very briefly, note who it is that he approaches in confession. There in verse 4, O Lord, the great and awesome God.

This is the God that he is dealing with. This is the God that he approaches to confess his sins and the sins of his people. The great and awesome God. God is great. God is awesome. Now, the word awesome, as I think we just commented very recently, has been largely diluted of its meaning in popular parlance or usage. If we think of the Olympics that have just passed, how often did we hear the word awesome? It was an awesome performance. It was an awesome run. The crowds were awesome. The success of Team GB, it was awesome. BBC coverage was awesome. And time and time again, this word was often on the lips of those who were speaking about the Olympics. And as a result of this dilution of the word, it no longer has the gravitas that it is intended to have. Daniel is not just saying that God is pretty amazing, though it's reasonable to describe God as pretty amazing. But what Daniel is saying is that he recognizes that God is awe-inspiring, even terrifying. God is so great and majestic and holy, so utterly other, that we can but fall down before him in awestruck wonder. O Lord, the great and awesome God!

And yet this God is Daniel's God. Notice there in verse 4, I pray to the Lord my God. Yes, he is awesome, but Daniel can approach him as a God to whom he belongs. He is also, Daniel assures us, the God who keeps his covenant of love. O Lord, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of love.

Now, that expression, covenant of love, is a beautiful one, and we will return to its significance. But for the moment, my concern is simply to note that the God Daniel confesses to is a God who keeps his promises. He keeps his covenant. He is true to his word. And this, of course, ties in with what Daniel goes on to say in verse 7, and the truth around which we are considering the prayer, you are righteous. It is because God is righteous that he keeps his covenant. A righteous God could do no other.

[10 : 14] You and me, we break our promises. And the reason we break our promises is because we are not righteous. But God keeps his covenant. God keeps his promises because of who he is, because he is righteous.

And as a righteous God, he always acts in character. So, this is the God that Daniel approaches to confess his sins. But let's think also what it is that Daniel confesses. And just remember the occasion. God's people, of whom Daniel is a part, have been in Babylon for nearly seventy long years as exiles, enduring God's punishment upon them for their rebellion.

This is the circumstance in which Daniel finds himself. And as he approaches God to confess his sin and the sin of the people, let's just notice four elements of Daniel's confession. And we can think of these elements by expressing them in words that Daniel uses or certainly reflect what Daniel is saying. The first thing that I think we can say concerning the content of this confession is that Daniel comes before God and declares, we have sinned grievously. Notice in verse 5 the manner in which Daniel expresses himself, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled.

We have turned away from your commands and laws. Daniel might be accused of being unduly morbid, as he seems to wallow in a manifold description of the sin of the people. Would a simple, we have sinned, we have sinned, not been sufficient. But no, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled. We have turned away from your commands and laws. And he goes on.

Now, we're not going to examine each word that Daniel uses and identify what each one could add to our understanding of Daniel's conception of the people's sinfulness. We could profitably do that. And the words that Daniel uses, though clearly related, are not synonyms. But we're not going to do that.

[12 : 47] Rather, I simply want to emphasize that the language Daniel uses here has and is intended to have a cumulative effect in emphasizing the gravity or the seriousness of the people's sin. This is why he describes it in such a vivid way. We have sinned grievously. This really is what Daniel is recognizing as he comes in confession before God. And this is where true and heartfelt confession begins.

In an appreciation of the gravity of sin committed against a righteous God. If perhaps even in where we have reached this morning, your response, your own internal mental response is, oh, all this talk about sin and the gravity of sin and the seriousness of sin. What a miserable message. If that's what you're thinking. And what that reveals is that you just don't get it.

You don't get it like Daniel got it. Daniel was conscious and aware that sin was a serious matter. And so, he comes before God and he begins with this declaration, we have sinned grievously. But we can go further.

Daniel also, in confession before God, declares, we have sinned knowingly. See, what does he go on to say in verse 6? We have not listened to your servants, the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers. Then in verse 11, all Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you. Now, this truth that Daniel expresses, we have sinned knowingly, is not a distinct category from recognizing that they had sinned grievously. Rather, the gravity of the people's sin is accentuated by this reality. We have not listened to your servants. Daniel acknowledges that God had graciously spoken to the people through his prophets. God had told them clearly and repeatedly what were his commands, what were his laws. The people were not ignorant of God's law. Rather, they were guilty of knowingly and deliberately sinning against knowledge. They turned away, refusing to acknowledge

God. It is said that ignorance of the law does not excuse. But I suppose it is a mitigating factor.

[15 : 44] But in the case of Israel, there were no mitigating circumstances. They sinned knowingly. We can't consider Israel without bringing this to ourselves. What about you? Do you sin knowingly?

Do you realize that by being here this morning, today, and having the opportunity to hear God's Word, you place yourself under a far greater degree of responsibility, humility, and indeed guilt in the event that you choose to refuse to obey? Daniel recognized that the gravity of the people's sin was accentuated by this reality. We have sinned knowingly.

But what else does Daniel say as he approaches God in confession? Well, he also says this, we have sinned shamefully. Verse 7, Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame.

This statement of Daniel, it brings to the fore the appropriate response to disobedience, a sense of shame. To be unfaithful, as the people of Israel were unfaithful to the Lord, was a shameful thing. Our generation is one that appears in significant measure to have lost a sense of shame. Let me just illustrate that in one very fleeting way. I caught a snippet of a discussion on Daybreak. That's the breakfast TV on ITV. Very sad, I know, that I was watching. But anyway, I caught a snippet of a discussion this past week. And the topic of the discussion was along the lines of, infidelity can be good for your marriage. I don't know if you've come across this theory that is being put forth. The thesis was being seriously argued that a little bit of adultery is no bad thing. And it's certainly not healthy to be ashamed of it. We should celebrate our little peccadillos. A marriage holiday, I think, is one of the expressions that is also used in this connection. Now, I don't want to dwell on this or develop that, but I think it just illustrates the point that we have in great measure as a society lost this sense of shame. Infidelity, unfaithfulness, is a shameful thing. Well, Daniel was not afflicted with such folly. He recognized that unfaithfulness to the Lord is a shameful thing. And he describes it and recognizes it in this vivid language, we are covered with shame. But there's a final thing I want us to just notice of Daniel's confession before a righteous God and the content of it. Not only does he recognize that the people had sinned grievously and knowingly and shamefully, but also he recognizes that all had sinned.

Daniel is in no doubt that there is none righteous, no, not one. There in verse 7, the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you. Whenever the people were to be found, guilt also accompanied them. But also note this, and crucially, Daniel recognizes that he too must confess his own sin. Or is it the case, I suggest or propose, is it the case that Daniel very nobly and commendably simply identifies with and stands in the breach for a rebellious people, though he himself is guiltless? Daniel was a pretty good guy after all.

[19 : 51] Listen just very quickly to God's own opinion of Daniel in the previous book in Ezekiel and in chapter 14. Just very quickly we'll notice what God says concerning Daniel. The context isn't, of great interest for us, for our purposes this morning. Then in Ezekiel 14 and verse 12, we read, the word of the Lord came to me, son of man, if a country sins against me by being unfaithful and I stretch out my hand against it to cut off its food supply and send famine upon it and it kills its men and their animals, even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, they could only save themselves by their righteousness, declares the sovereign Lord. Now, it's an intriguing passage that we're not going to think about, but what is evident is God's opinion of these men. He said, Daniel, Daniel is a righteous man. So, is it the case that Daniel here is acting in representation of others who have sinned, though he himself is faultless? Well, Daniel is careful not to allow us to come to that conclusion. Notice the language that he uses in verse 20. While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people. Then it's as explicit as it possibly could be.

My sin and the sin of my people. Now, was Daniel as guilty as others? Well, by no means. But he was, as we all are, guilty before a righteous God. So, we have this part of the prayer, confession before a righteous God, but we move on to the second part of the prayer, punishment accepted from a righteous God, which really takes us from verse 11 through to verse 14.

In his prayer, Daniel reflects on the punishment the people are enduring as a consequence of their sin. And what can we say of this punishment? There's a couple of things we can say. One thing that we can say about it is that the punishment followed due warning. Notice there in verse 11, All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you. Therefore, the curses and sworn judgments written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us.

Daniel is very clear. We were warned. We were warned. Daniel, no doubt, is aware that among the people there were those who were grumbling under the burden of this exile and punishment. No doubt there were those who were asking the question, why is God so severe? Why is God treating us so badly? It's not fair.

But Daniel knows that there is no just cause for complaint, among other reasons, because God had given due and gracious warning. And as we fast forward to the present day, it is no different. God has given us lovingly provided to all of us a means that we might be reconciled to God. God has given His own Son, Jesus, who has died in the place of sinners. And we are invited to put our trust in Jesus and to be saved.

[23 : 17] But we are also warned that if we choose to reject the offer of salvation, then we will stand condemned at the final judgment and spend eternity in hell. Fair warning. The punishment followed due warning, but we can also notice, and it's very clear from what we said thus far, that the punishment was severe.

In verse 12 we read, you have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing upon us great disaster. Under the whole heaven, nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem. Maybe this was one of the complaints also. Okay, we have to be punished, but why such a great disaster? What does Daniel do? Does Daniel try to defend God and argue that the punishment wasn't really that bad? Not at all. Daniel recognizes that the punishment was severe.

It was of an unmatched and incompatible severity. Does this reflect badly on God? Not according to Daniel. It simply reflects the stubbornness and obstinacy of the people who continue to disobey even as they are being punished, which is what Daniel recognizes in verses 13 and 14.

But there's another thing we can say about this punishment. Not only that it followed due warning, not only that it was indeed severe, but perhaps most importantly of all, and tying in with what we introduced our sermon in terms of the central theme, the punishment is grounded in the righteousness of God. Notice in verse 14, the Lord did not hesitate to bring the disaster upon us, for the Lord our God is righteous in everything He does. Why such severe punishment? Well, Daniel is in no doubt, and his answer brings us to this big truth of the passage, the righteousness of God. Why the disaster? For the Lord our God is righteous in everything He does. We might stand back and just speculate for a moment and say, well, how does Daniel know that? How can Daniel know that? Is Daniel privy to everything that God has ever done that would allow him to state with such confidence that God is righteous in everything He does?

Is Daniel not getting a little carried away with himself? Now, the reason Daniel can state this with such confidence is because he knows God's character. He knows that to God belongs righteousness.

[26 : 08] He doesn't need to be privy to everything that God has done to know that everything that God has done is righteous. Because God is righteous, and He will always act in accord with His character.

God doesn't do unrighteousness. We're told of a certain segment of the population in Scotland that doesn't do walking away. Well, good luck to them. But I'll tell you this, God doesn't do unrighteousness.

And so, Daniel recognizes that the punishment inflicted on Israel was righteous. It was in accord with God's character. It was reflective of His justice and consistent with His revealed Word.

There could be no grounds for complaint. Punishment accepted from the hands of a righteous God. But we close with the final part of the prayer, and that is forgiveness sought from a righteous God, from verse 15 through to verse 19. Daniel's prayer reaches a climax and crescendo in his cry to God for forgiveness.

Oh, Lord, listen. Oh, Lord, listen. Oh, Lord, forgive. Oh, Lord, hear and act. Does Daniel cry out in blind hope, or does Daniel make a case to God? Are there any grounds upon which his request for forgiveness is made, and which would allow Daniel to harbor a legitimate expectation that his forgiveness will be granted? Well, yes, we can identify grounds or arguments that Daniel makes to God in his request for forgiveness. Daniel begins by reminding God of his track record, we could call it. Then in verse 15, now, O Lord, our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

[28 : 06] He reminds God of all that He has done in the past for His people, and He says, you've done it in the past, we'll do it today. He reminds God of the promises. The very prayer is prayed in the context of Daniel identifying promises that were delivered through the prophet Jeremiah. Then at the very beginning of the chapter, we're told that, that he had been reading in the prophet Jeremiah, and there he read the prophecies, he read the promises, and so grounded on God's track record of His past actions, of the promises given. He comes and asks that God would forgive, and that's no different today. The words that we read in 2 Chronicles are entirely appropriate for us today. If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Daniel's cry for mercy, for forgiveness, grounded in God's track record, grounded also in God's reputation. Notice there in verse 15, having recognized that the people had been delivered out of Egypt by a mighty hand, he recognizes also that in so delivering the people God had made a name for himself that endures to this day. In verse 17, he also appeals to God's reputation. 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. Daniel appeals to the fact that God deserves to be recognized by all. He is worthy to be admired and praised by the nations, and this was not happening.

And so he appeals to God's reputation. Now here we do have to be careful. Though this was and remains a legitimate argument that God's people can make to God as we cry for forgiveness, we must never imagine that God is in any way diminished by a bad reputation. God may well have a very bad reputation today in our land. God isn't diminished by that. The fact that others think ill of Him, well, that doesn't lessen Him in any way. Nonetheless, Daniel here, in crying out for mercy, grounds his cry also in this manner.

But he goes on. He grounds his cry for mercy also on God's mercy. There in verse 18, Give ear, O God, and hear, open your eyes, and see the desolation of the city that bears your name.

We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. Daniel here eloquently expresses his own conviction that restoration, redemption, salvation is all of grace, all of God. There is nothing that he can bring to the table. We stand naked before God, wholly dependent on His mercy. If Daniel and the people are to be forgiven, then it will be thanks to the mercy of God. And that is true for me, and that is true for you. But is mercy the ultimate ground on which Daniel cries out for forgiveness? Well, I'd like to suggest that there is another ground, and it comes back to where we began. Daniel cries out to God for forgiveness on the grounds of God's righteousness. Notice there in verse 16, O Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. Now, this is, if we've been following what we've been looking at, this is at face value a little in Congress. Daniel has, in the very prayer, just recognized that the punishment being endured is to be explained in reference to God's righteousness. That's what he said in verse 14. We've already commented on it.

[32 : 26] The Lord did not hesitate to bring the disaster upon us, for the Lord our God is righteous in everything He does. So, he's just recognized that punishment is to be explained on the grounds of God's righteousness, and yet here he is crying for forgiveness. And what does he ground his request on in keeping with all your righteous acts? How are we to understand this? Well, remember what we said at the beginning concerning the Bible's conception of righteousness, integrity, or acting in character.

For God to punish a rebellious people is to act in character as a God who is just. It is the righteous thing to do. But equally, for God to forgive a repentant people is to act in character as a God of mercy. It is the righteous thing to do. It takes us back to the beautiful expression we just fleetingly noted in verse 4 concerning God's covenant of love. God's covenant with His people reflects God's character. And the covenant does include curses and judgments. But the covenant is at heart a covenant of love, reflecting a God who is love. So, God displays His anger because He is righteous, and He displays His mercy in forgiving because He is righteous. And where does this wonderfully and necessarily point us to? Well, this all points us to the cross. It points us to the death of Jesus

Christ, the eternal Son of God. At Calvary, we are witnesses to the single and most powerful demonstration of the multifaceted righteousness of God. At Calvary, God's righteous anger was poured out on sin. As His own Son was made sin for us, sin was rightly and justly and effectively punished and dealt with in the death of Jesus, who bore the sin of the world. But at Calvary, also God's righteous love was demonstrated in the giving of His own Son to such a death. In the giving of His own Son that He would die in the place of sinners, that we might be delivered from the punishment we deserve. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and gave His one and only Son. Daniel confesses his sin. Will you? Will you do likewise?

Will you? Really? Will you return home to Sunday lunch, till he rests, and to whatever the day may hold, leave behind all this talk of sin and guilt? Or will you confess your sin before God?

Daniel recognizes that God is right in everything He does, right in everything He does. Do you? Daniel cries out to God for forgiveness. Will you do likewise? He will forgive you if you ask Him to do so.

[36 : 12] Listen to John as he writes in his first letter. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, faithful and righteous, and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. As a righteous act. Yes, as a merciful act, but as a righteous act. As the Father looks on what Jesus has done, so as a righteous act, He is able and willing to forgive the sins of those who confess their sins.

So Daniel prays. Does God answer in a manner that is immeasurably more than Daniel asks or imagines? Well, that we will have to leave for this evening. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we come before you, and we recognize that as we read the manner in which Daniel approaches you, it is so, so different to the manner in which we approach you. Certainly, in the privacy of our own homes, when nobody is watching and nobody else is hearing, we recognize that we fall very far short. We don't have that same conception, that same realistic appreciation of our condition and of the condition of the people that we form a part of. And so we pray that by your Spirit you would work in us, that we too would know what it is, to appreciate the gravity of sin, the seriousness of it, and that as we do, so we would with Daniel come to you, confessing our sins, that we might do so, yes, even today, and that we might do so in the confidence that you are a God who has promised to forgive all those who come to you, repentant, confessing their sins. Help us then, we pray by your Spirit. And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, we will close our service this morning singing in Psalm 119, singing from verse 137.

Hear the psalmist with Daniel. Recognizes, O Lord, You are the righteous one. Psalm 119, from verse 137 to verse 144. It's on page 165 in our psalm books. We'll sing to the tune, Hereford, and we'll stand to sing.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[38 : 52] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. He consumes and wears me out, Because my foes forget your word.

Your promises are tried and proved, And I, your servant, love them all.

O I am lowly and despised, Your precepts I do not forget.

Eternal is your righteousness, True is the law that you have said.

[41 : 00] The peace and trouble, Rest me down, That your commands are mighty thine, And wisdom so that I may live, Your statutes are forever right.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God the Father, And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, Be with us all now and always. Amen.