

Confession

Daniel: When Kingdoms Collide

Daniel 9:1-19

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Good morning, First Free. My name's Dirk Jasperse, I serve as a Pastoral Resident here. I just want to say at the outset what a joy it's been to be a part of this church family. During our first few months here, Katie and I have felt so welcomed and well-cared-for. It's been a testimony of your love, not only for us, but for Christ. So, thank you. It's a privilege to open God's Word with you today from Daniel 9:1-19.

I don't know about you, but when I look at the world, there's no shortage of sin and evil to be criticized. Injustice is obvious, corruption is widespread, immorality is blatant, sin and death run rampant through our world. Kings and kingdoms threaten and oppress God's people. Yet while the sins of the world around us seem obvious, we often find it difficult to admit or confess our own sin.

Daniel 9:1-19 interrupts the stories and visions of proud kings and blasphemous beasts with a lengthy prayer of confession. While most of the book has exposed the evil "out there" among the kingdoms of the world. Daniel 9:1-19 turns the tables on God's people, pushing us to take a hard, sober look in the mirror, and examine and confess our own sins.

As we walk through Daniel 9 together we will see that Daniel humbly confesses the sins of God's people, looking to God for mercy and restoration. And therefore, as we consider Daniel's example, our main takeaway, our sermon in a sentence, is this: We must confess our sins to God, looking to him for mercy and restoration.

As we walk through the passage, we'll begin by looking at the reason for Daniel's prayer in verses 1-3, then we'll see in Daniel's prayer two ways we must respond, as God's people, when confronted with our sin. So that's where we're going as we walk through Daniel's prayer today.

REASON FOR DANIEL'S PRAYER (1-3)

Our passage begins with the reason for Daniel's prayer: He understood a particular promise, at a particular time, which underscored a particular problem. This context is vital if we are to understand what's going on in this prayer. Let's look starting in verse 1.

Daniel 9:1-3¹

¹In the first year of Darius the son of Abasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—²in 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. ³Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

In verse 1, we're told the particular time of Daniel's discovery: In the first year of Darius, ca. 538 BC.² Daniel's discovery took place one year after the fall of the Babylonian Empire under Belshazzar

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

² Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, The New American Commentary

to the Medo-Persians, which we saw in the story of the writing on the wall in Daniel 5. It's also sixty-eight to sixty-nine years after Babylon gained control of Judah, looted God's temple, and deported Daniel and his friends to Babylon.

Now this particular date is important because of the details of the particular promise Daniel understood. We're told in verse 2 that Daniel perceived in the prophecies of Jeremiah that seventy years must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem.

Daniel had evidently been reading the prophecies of Jeremiah 25 and 29, and read God's promise in Jeremiah 25 that seventy years would pass before Jerusalem's desolation would end. That promise had been given in 605 BC, so at the time Daniel discovers Jeremiah's prophecy, it's been around sixty-nine years. And so ... the clock was ticking.

Daniel also would have read in Jeremiah 25 that this seventy-year promise was tied to the defeat of Babylon, which occurred the year prior to Daniel's discovery. So not only was the seventy-year period almost over, the promised defeat of the Babylonians had also occurred. Now so far, so good. Based on the connections so far, we might expect Daniel's prayer to be one of jubilant expectation and thanksgiving at the prospect of Israel's return.

Yet what we see in verse 3 is something different. We're told that Daniel turned to the Lord "by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes."

Daniel's prayer here is a humble plea for mercy. He fasted, a common practice of self-denial before praying to God. He put on sackcloth, a rough, simple garment associated with grief and mourning. And he covered himself with ashes, a mark of humility.

Why, in light of this particular promise, at this particular time, does Daniel respond with humble, mournful confession? Because this particular promise underscored a particular problem: There was one condition of restoration still unfinished. You see, in Jeremiah 29, God tied the restoration of Israel's fortunes to their calling on him, their seeking him. We're told in Jeremiah 29: "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."

Israel's restoration was connected with her repentance and turning with all her heart to the LORD. Daniel, a student of the Scriptures, knew that Israel's restoration was directly tied to her repentance while in exile. In his prayer, he directly alludes to two passages, 1 Kings 8:47 and Leviticus 26:40-41, which explicitly conditioned Israel's restoration on her confession of sin and turning from iniquity.³

Daniel knew his people's restoration could only come when they confessed their sin to God and turned with their whole heart to him. And so, Daniel does what we must do when confronted with the ruin of our own sin, he humbly confesses the sins of his people to God in the hope of mercy and restoration.

That's the reason for Daniel's prayer. Now let's look at the content.

³ John J. Collins, *Daniel*, Hermeneia; Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament Prophets*

RESPONSE 1: WE MUST CONFESS OUR SINS TO GOD. (4-14)

We'll see in the next few verses what we must first do when confronted with our own sin. When confronted with our sin, we must confess our sins to God.

Let's read again starting in verse 4. As we do, listen for the contrast Daniel draws between the faithful covenant-keeper and the faithless covenant-breakers:

Daniel 9:4-5

⁴I 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, ⁵we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules."

Daniel begins his prayer with a humble address to God, focusing on his character and actions: "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments."

Daniel begins his prayer with a clear affirmation that God is great. God is awesome. He is faithful to his covenant. The problem, though, is that while God has been faithful in keeping his covenant, his people have been unfaithful. They have not kept their end of the bargain. Listen again to Daniel's confession of his own people's sin in verse 5. The words used are striking. He says, "We have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules."

Daniel here confesses, clearly and without evasion, that God's people have broken their covenant with God. Daniel uses a number of different words—sinned, done wrong, acted wickedly, and rebelled—which each have different connotations, and which emphasize the comprehensive nature of Israel's sin. They've sinned in every way possible. No sin was left uncommitted, no commandment left unbroken.

Daniel also confesses that this sin was defiantly pursued by the whole people of God as a community. Listen to his words.

Daniel 9:6-8

⁶We 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. ⁷To 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. ⁸To us, O LORD, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you.

Israel's sin was communal. Note the repeated use of "we" language: "we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled," (v. 5), "we have not listened" (v. 6). The sin was a sin of the community as a community. And just as Israel's sin was communal, so was her judgment and her shame. By Daniel's time, Israel lay defeated, torn from her home, under the yoke of the foreign powers around her. The holy city, Jerusalem, lay desolate, the temple looted and destroyed. God's judgment came on God's people as a community because they sinned as a community.

This sin was also pervasive throughout all of the community. Daniel is clear that all of God's people, no matter their status or location, participated in this treachery against God. Note the emphasis on

the comprehensiveness of Israel's sin and her shame. Kings, princes, fathers, all Israel, whether in Jerusalem, or near or far, all committed treachery against God.

Communal holiness is incredibly important, and communal sin is incredibly serious. Israel's communal sin led to guilt, judgment, shame, and ruin. Our holiness as a community, as First Free, is incredibly important. We are called to reflect God not just as individuals, but as a community. And if we ignore sin as a community, we will bring on ourselves communal guilt, judgment, and shame. We will dishonor the God whose name we bear. It should be a priority for us, as First Free, to take sin seriously, to confess it wherever we find it, and to seek communal holiness.

I think it's worth taking a moment together as First Free, as a community of God's people, to consider the sins of Israel which led them to ruin and shame in exile, and to ask if we as First Free, are pursuing the same or similar sins today.

I'm fairly new here, I don't profess to know First Free's history well, my earnest hope and prayer is that First Free is innocent of many of the sins Israel pursued. If so, this exercise might help us know what sins to guard against lest we fall into them, but I think it's healthy to consider whether we are guilty of these same or similar sins before God. If so, we must confess those sins to God.

Israel committed many sins. Perhaps the most fundamental sin was idolatry. Rather than worshiping and obeying the LORD alone, Israel either replaced, or, more frequently, supplemented their worship of the LORD with worship of other false gods. This was often driven by desire for material prosperity, family fertility, and good health. (All good desires to a point, but easily transformed into idolatry.) While we may not be tempted to bow down to a statue of Baal to increase our crop yields, do we as a church pursue material wealth, comfort, and healthy family lives as supplementary idols, or even rival gods? If so, we must confess these sins to God.

Israel also sinned out of desire for political power, prestige, and protection. God's people were meant to worship and serve the LORD alone as their king, relying on him for their protection. Yet God's people routinely pursued sinful alliances with the kings and nations around them. Are we as a church compromising ourselves by trusting in or aligning ourselves with unholy political leaders or nations or powers, rather than relying on God alone? If so, we must confess these sins to God.

Israel also pursued sexual immorality, frequently in connection with temple prostitution, defiling themselves as a people and becoming like the nations around them. Can we here at First Free say, as Paul says in Ephesians 5, that at First Free sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness is not even named among us? Or are we allowing sexual immorality to pollute and defile us as a community? If so, we must confess these sins to God.

God's people also sinned by failing to live justly as a covenant community, abusing and disenfranchising the poor and vulnerable in their midst. Do we as a gathering of God's people fail to obey that which God has called us to do? Are there acts of justice within our church family that we neglect? Do we show partiality toward some within our church family on economic or other grounds? If so, we must confess these sins to God.

Yet Daniel confesses something beyond just comprehensive sin, committed by the whole community in the past.

He also confesses that Israel continued sinning persistently, even in the face of God's correction, refusing to obey the voice of the Lord.

We already saw this refusal to listen to the prophets in verse 6, but as we read Daniel's words, starting at verse 9, notice the repeated emphasis on the continuing nature of Israel's sin, and their refusal to obey God's voice.

Daniel 9:9-14

⁹To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him ¹⁰and 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. ¹¹All 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. ¹²He 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. ¹³As 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. ¹⁴Therefore 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.

Notice the way Daniel defends God's character. He says God brought this punishment upon Israel "because we have sinned against him" (v. 11). God has upheld his end of the bargain. Not only that, he spoke to the people by the prophets to correct them. And yet, despite his correction, despite sending his prophets, despite even his just punishment of exile, "yet we have not entreated the favor of the LORD our God" (v. 13). He says we haven't turned to the LORD, we haven't confessed, we haven't, as verse 13 says, "turned from our iniquities or gained insight by your truth. We have not obeyed his voice."

Israel's pride is ironically similar to Belshazzar. Remember, he refused to learn from Nebuchadnezzar. He didn't humble himself before God. He lifted himself up against God. He didn't learn from the past. And neither did Israel. This is the reason Daniel is praying in the first place. God's people had not turned to God, even after being sent into exile.

When God speaks to us through his Word, when God convicts us of sin, when God disciplines us, we must listen and respond with repentance and obedience. To ignore his voice will result in shame, to ignore his discipline and correction is dangerous.

We here at First Free pride ourselves on our knowledge of God's Word, of the Scriptures. We seek to study God's Word diligently, and to understand it, and to teach it to others. But when we hear God's Word, do we listen to his voice, confess our sin, and then work to put that sin to death? Or do we hear God's voice through his Word, and then proceed to ignore it?

Today, if we hear his voice, we must not harden our hearts, as Israel did, and so brought shame and ruin on themselves, instead we must listen to God's voice and turn from sin and pursue righteousness. It is not enough to merely admit our sin. We must turn from sin and put it to death. We must humbly confess our sin to God, and we must turn to him for mercy and restoration, the very thing Daniel has been doing throughout this prayer.

This leads us to our second response.

RESPONSE 2: WE MUST LOOK TO GOD FOR MERCY AND RESTORATION. (15-19)

Throughout this prayer, Daniel is pleading for the restoration of God's people to God's place to worship him in the temple. In his confession in verses 4-14, Daniel seeks to repent with all his heart

and with all his soul to God, drawing on communal confession language from elsewhere in the Old Testament, that they might be restored. This desire for restoration comes out most explicitly and most directly, however, in his closing plea, which says:

Daniel 9:15-19

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. ¹⁷Now 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. ¹⁸O 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. ¹⁹O 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.”*

Daniel’s plea for mercy and for restoration is a God-centered prayer. It is an appeal for restoration for the sake of God’s fame and his glory, not for the sake of the people in and of themselves. It is focused on the restoration of the place of God’s worship, where God’s people were intended to glorify God’s name. It is focused on the reconstruction of the city called by God’s name. It is a prayer on behalf of God’s people called by his name, for the fame of that name.

Ultimately, we exist as God’s people for God’s glory, and our primary concern as we live our life as a community should not be ourselves and our own reputation but the glory of God who has made us his own and whom we represent. When we take our eyes away from him, we are frequently tempted to pursue idols. We disobey him, heaping shame on ourselves and bringing dishonor to his name. Yet when we sin, we must cast ourselves on his mercy for his glory. And as we seek his glory, we must put sin to death by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Daniel’s plea for mercy and restoration is God-centered, not only because he focuses on God’s glory as the ultimate goal, but also because he rests his plea for mercy on God’s righteousness, rather than any righteousness or ability of the people. Note Daniel’s words in verse 18: “For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy.”

When we sin, we must humbly cast ourselves on the mercy of God. We do not plead for mercy on the grounds of our own righteousness, but because of his great mercy. He is the righteous one. He is the one who is faithful and loving and great and awesome. We must look to him.

We see this most clearly in our justification through Christ, something Daniel could not see clearly in his day. It is through Christ’s righteousness we find mercy, forgiveness for our many sins which we commit against God. We must look to Christ as we confess our sin to God, pleading for mercy.

We must look to Christ for our restoration. Daniel’s hoped-for restoration of Israel would not ultimately be accomplished in the seventy-year time frame he envisioned. While many would return to Israel one year after this prayer under Cyrus, and they would later rebuild much of Jerusalem and construct a new temple, it was a partial restoration. The problem of Israel’s uncircumcised, sinful hearts, from which their rebellion flowed, would not be directly addressed until a later date, and to some extent, the full and final restoration of God’s people, her worshiping God in his place under his rule as his pure people, still awaits final consummation.

Yet we, through Christ's work, have received new hearts through the new covenant in his blood. We have been united with him in resurrection to new life. Having ascended, Christ poured out his Holy Spirit on us, that we might put sin to death, having died to sin and been made alive to righteousness. This gives us hope in the fight against sin. We are not helplessly enslaved to sin. The omnipotent Holy Spirit dwells in us and is able to overcome sin. This gives us hope, even as it makes sin even more unfitting for us than it was in Daniel's day. We have no excuse for our sin. We must put it to death by the Holy Spirit.

And so, because of the work of Christ, we must humbly confess our sin to God, trusting that Christ took those sins on the cross that we might be shown mercy. We must listen to God's voice and turn from sin, knowing that by the power of his resurrection and the Holy Spirit he has poured out on us, persistent sustained progress in the fight against sin is possible, and we must look forward to the day of final restoration when our sins will be taken away, when we will be without any remaining stain of sin, worshiping God forever in the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, which will never be ruined. Worshiping God forever in his temple, the new heavens and the new earth, which will never be desolated, for the glory of his name.