

Daniel's prayer life

Part 1

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Place	Catford
Date	01.02.1978
Duration	00:45:53
Online version	https://www.audioteaching.org/en/sermons/fw002/daniel-s-prayer-life

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[00:00:00] This afternoon we had ministry that occupied us with the greatness of the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ and the blessings that have flowed towards us because of him and because of what he did. A very instructive and encouraging word it was. He referred to objective ministry and subjective ministry, our brother this afternoon, and this evening I want to engage you with something that is intensely subjective, the matter of prayer.

Perhaps it's one of the things in the Christian experience that we neglect most. Those who are prayers, of course, will not object to me saying that because generally speaking I believe it is a matter that is greatly neglected. Perhaps we feel that if we have [00:01:01] had our prayer in the morning and our giving of thanks for food and perhaps a prayer in the evening, thanking God for his kindness and good to us throughout the day, we have done all that is necessary. But I feel that as we consider this exercise of Daniel, his prayer life, we will see that much more is required in the Christian life. Prayer is the outcome of real concern. Whether it be for one's own spiritual progress or for the glory of Christ or for the prosperity of God's interests upon earth, it must always flow from one's personal concern. If we are not activated or motivated by these things, then our prayers will be of a very shallow nature indeed. But if these things are continually in our mind and cause us that concern that we see in the scriptures so often, then we will find that our prayers will take on a different character. There will be a fullness [00:02:03] to them. There will be an urgency about them. There will be a continuity of them. And those prayers are extremely appreciated in heaven. We saw that from the last word that I read, that Daniel was a man greatly beloved, not only for his personal behavior, but for the exercises he carried day by day in Babylon in captivity, and what results flowed from them for the glory of God. So this is what we want to consider this evening, not simply to impart knowledge to you, encouraging as that may be, but to stimulate in each of our hearts a desire to pray more for the prosperity of the interests of the Lord in our localities and indeed in this favored country. I think we would all admit that things could be much better than they are. Individually, in the homes of the saints, in the gatherings of [00:03:01] the saints, more substance, more life, more energy and exercise, more evidence of progress instead of declension, and the continual cry is, how can the situation be altered? How can we see more energy? How can we see more faithfulness? How can we see more glory for the Lord? And we inquire, we think, and we wonder, how can it be? And the more we plan and scheme, the more we see how fruitless it is. And I suggest to you, dear brethren, that if a company like this were stimulated into greater concern and prayer, then we might see things changing. And not only this company, but all Christians more and more concerned in deep prayer, crying to God that God would

come in in his power and in his wisdom and give us the necessary direction so that our lives might be more fruitful for the God who [00:04:03] has blessed us in such a wonderful way. I have chosen this passage in chapter six to show a little of the private prayer life of Daniel before we consider the two other portions. Here we find the real secret of this man's greatness. And he was a great man, captive in Babylon, and yet not subject to the laws of the king, not subject to the directions that were imposed upon him, really concerned about doing the will of God. He knew that will, and whatever the circumstance was, or whatever the occasion was, he was governed by that will. In spite of the danger, in spite of the opposition, he was a true and faithful man. And I believe in this chapter, God is revealing to us the secret of his power, the secret of his faithfulness, a private life in prayer that was never hindered. Let [00:05:03] us read the words again. And prayed and gave thanks before his God as he did aforetime.

It wasn't a sudden energy, a burst of energy in prayer because the circumstances were difficult and his life was in danger. Not at all. This was only another incident in the life of Daniel. He prayed three times a day. It was his continual life. It wasn't something that was forced upon him. It was his joy. My dear friends, what a wonderful way to view prayer life.

The settled disposition of a man praying three times a day. I'm perfectly sure knowing Daniel nothing was allowed to interfere with those moments when he bowed his knees in prayer before his God. He was a great man. He had great responsibilities in administration and yet he could find time three times a day in settled portions. We don't know how long, [00:06:05] but he did it. It was his settled life. Praying, praying, praying. And we'll see in a moment the substance of his prayers. It says also that he prayed to his God. I like that. It wasn't a God who was far off as far as Daniel was concerned. It was his God, his personal God. One whom he knew in personal communion. God was a reality to him. God wasn't an abstract conception of the mind. God was a living glorious God to whom he could turn at all times and in all situations and find an answer. And also I believe day by day in communion his joy and delight and life. Is this your experience in prayer? Is this my experience in prayer?

Is God near to us? Or is he a far off? Oh, what a challenge. I believe in these last [00:07:08] days of difficulty and weakness. We need brothers and sisters with a knowledge of God in this way. That God is a living God. That God does listen to the prayers of his people. That God delights to answer those prayers when they're in accord with the revealed will of God. And also the righteousness of the man that was a living witness to the reality of his connection with God. If you read in the book of Ezekiel, you'll find that Daniel is linked with two other men, Noah and Job. And God says, suppose those three men came with the righteousness, it wouldn't alter the situation here in Israel. It's so bad. But by the very mention of these things, God is drawing attention to the righteousness of Daniel and the other two. But for this reason, we are referring to Daniel. Daniel was a righteous man. That is, he lived his life recognizing the rights of God and obeyed [00:08:06] those rights, whatever the cost. And for this reason, his prayers had power. James tells us that the prayer of a righteous man availeth much. If you read in the book of Proverbs, you will find again and again that prayers of evil men are an abomination to God. We'll find in John's first epistle, the last chapter, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And there is the great secret of prayer that really works. That is prayers in accord with the will of God. Now it's evident here that Daniel was fully in the knowledge of God's will. This is indicated by him opening his window towards Jerusalem. And he's acting now in full accord with what already had been revealed that in the days of Solomon, when [00:09:01] the temple was dedicated and Solomon made that wonderful prayer to God, he said, if the time ever should come when the nation is so unfaithful that it is taken into captivity, if there are those who will pray towards this temple, then hear them, maintain their right, and grant them compassion on the part

of those who hold them captives. Here we find a man in the full possession of that knowledge. He hasn't forgotten God's word. He hasn't forgotten that prayer, for God ratified the prayer of Solomon. Yes, he says, my ear will be towards the temple. Not only my ear, but mine eye and my heart continually. God's interests were centered in that place. Unfaithfulness in the nation had taken them away from that center that never altered the fact that God was deeply concerned about his center and his name that was placed there. And so we find a man in captivity, remembering that and in the [00:10:09] full knowledge of it, praying accordingly, that God would listen to his prayer. Did he? We know how well he did. In the den of lions or in any other circumstance, God came to the help of his servant. His God was able to deliver him as he did to the three young men. Oh, what a wonderful God Daniel proved him to be. And while the king spent a sleepless night, there was Daniel, perfectly complacent in the midst of those wild animals. God had closed their mouths, creatorial power exerted on the behalf of his servant. And Daniel spent a restful night in the midst of those tremendous animals. What a God. But Daniel's concerned about the interests of God. Three times as he bowed his knees day by day, opening his window towards Jerusalem.

[00:11:04] He wasn't always praying, I'm sure, for personal help and encouragement. He's yearning, throwing out his heart's desire that the position might be reversed, that no longer the people of God would be bound in captivity, but be led out of captivity into God's center to enjoy God's thoughts as he had purposed for his people. I believe that would be the main burden of Daniel's prayers as he bowed his knees in the presence of God, for God to come in in this way. Did God maintain the right of his servant? He did. When other kings died, Daniel continued. Daniel prospered. The change of the ruling dynasty made no difference at all to Daniel's life.

He went on smoothly, continued to do the things that pleased God. What a man he was. Here again I say, my dear brethren, that this is the result of this prayer life, this righteousness [00:12:04] that was in his life, this desire for the interests of God. These are the things that sustained him, and they come to evidence in a remarkable way. One other thing. He kneeled when he prayed. Oh, if we have time, kneel. Bend our knees in the presence of the supreme majesty of God and indicate our reverence towards him. However great the blessings he has given to us, we are still creatures and failing ones at that. Oh, what a privilege to bow our knees in the physical posture that indicates we recognize the supremacy and the greatness and the glory of God. Recently, I had the privilege of being in Germany and Holland, and what a sight to see 900 brothers and sisters bowing their knees in prayer when it was time for prayer. What a sight. Touch my heart. Oh, that this reverence might mark us.

[00:13:08] Here it's individual. There is no reason why it shouldn't be collective when the situation is suitable. CHM in his articles on prayer reminds us of this, how he felt what an indication of irreverence it was when there was opportunity to bow the knee in prayer, this lounging about or showing a casual attitude in the presence of the great and glorious God who is infinitely beyond I believe this kneeling in prayer is a physical attitude that indicates our recognition of the supremacy and greatness of the eternal God. Not to be done just in a sentimental religious way, but the inward feelings guiding us to this. Have you ever felt compelled to bow the knee? I don't mean compelled by power, but compelled because you feel what a right thing it is to do [00:14:01] to bow the knee. Maybe a casual attitude to begin with and the Lord saying no, nothing casual in my presence, bow down, bow your knees in the acknowledgement of my supremacy. And we have good examples and supremely the Lord Jesus Christ himself as we see him kneeling in the garden of Gethsemane, bowed down with the weight of the approaching cross and all that meant to him. And he kneeled and he prayed and Paul and Solomon and Ezra and many others bowing the knees in the presence of God or in the presence of Christ. And then I've referred to this already, but I want to refer to it again.

He kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks. Three times a day he kneeled, he prayed and he gave thanks. That's the important thing. He gave thanks. A captive, no liberty, perhaps a good [00:15:06] position, yet not privileged to go back to his country and his people and share in all that that country stood for. No, yet he prayed and he gave thanks, acknowledging the situation that was upon him and upon his people as the just judgment of God in God's holy government. And yet thankful that he could still enjoy this happy communion with his God. Oh, my dear friends, this is a tremendous lesson, this attitude, this private attitude of prayer on the part of Daniel. And I ask myself, as I will ask you, do we spend sufficient time in prayer? Again, I say for those who do devote their lives in prayer, and I'm sure many elder ones do, it's great encouragement to hear of the prayers of elderly saints. But for those of us who perhaps have forgotten that [00:16:02] prayer is an essential in the Christian life. Oh, that Daniel's example may stimulate us privately and in our homes and certainly in the prayer meeting. Here is Daniel privately, but then by an extension of this attitude, our prayers in home. It's a joy this morning at the home of our brother Arthur and his wife, Joan, to bow our knees and pray and cover many interests. Thank God for homes where husband and wife and children too, if necessary, or if possible, to bow down together in this family attitude of prayer and a settled matter that nothing puts aside unless something extraordinary which the Lord would appreciate and would have sympathy with. But to have those settled times of prayer and so when the young are brought up in an atmosphere of prayer as they get older, it's a simple thing to continue. Wonderful opportunity. And then, of course, collectively, [00:17:02] here is the secret of power in our assemblies when prayer is offered, not generalities as so often happens, but specific prayers for specific need, not only in connection with the company, but in international matters too. Wonderful attitude of prayer. I want to go over very, very briefly the things that I think would mark Daniel in his prayer as he opened his window towards Jerusalem. First of all, the land. That land was depopulated because of the unfaithfulness of the nation. What kind of land was it? Good land, flowing with milk and honey, but there was something greater than that. It was God's land. The land is mine. And in his sovereign goodness, he gave it to the nation of Israel, not because they were greater and better than any other other nation. Indeed, they were smaller than the other nations, but he gave it to them as a gift. It was the inheritance [00:18:03] and all God's thoughts were centered in that land. And Daniel would pray for it. And then specifically for Jerusalem. Why? Because his name was placed there. God's interests were centered in the city of Jerusalem and specifically in the city, the house that was built where his name was, and then the name of Jehovah itself. Think of these things, the land, the city, the house, and the name. I believe these things would characterize the prayer of Daniel. But then you say that's all historical. What does it mean for us today? I believe it means a lot. We were singing together and we've been praying together about the salvation of precious souls. Never let us forget that in our prayers, how much we needed souls might be brought to God through Christ. But there's something that's greater than that. That is the rights of God. [00:19:06] According to his revealed will and his word, God has indicated how Christians should gather together to the name of the Lord Jesus without any human organization, without anything to direct them in the sense of authority as far as man is concerned. God has given precise instructions regarding these things. This is his land, his people. This is where his interests are centered. His own beloved people who have been brought to him through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. And there is an administration of love in the headship of Christ and in the power and service of the Holy Spirit. And there precisely is where Christ is to be found, where two or three gather together in his name. I believe this is what the land and the city and the house and the name represent [00:20:03] for us today. And these are the things that have been attacked and destroyed by the power of the enemy. In Christ, all these things are secure and can never be overthrown. What we want to see in these last days is an increase of interest in relation to gathering to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ without any human organization whatsoever, because it's not necessary where the headship of Christ is in operation, where every

member of the body is subject to the direction of the head, where the Holy Spirit has free direction to move amongst his people and to guide them and to direct them and to inspire them without any human organization whatsoever. And all governed not by the simple fact that we are Christians, praise God for that, but something greater, all governed by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Everything done, everything said in consistency [00:21:06] with that great and glorious name. Is that too much to hope for in these last days? Not if we're obedient, not if we accept the word of God as our guide, not if we are prepared to subject our own wills to the will of God as revealed in his precious word. It's not only an ideal, it's a glorious possibility. And what a wonder it would be if it were possible. If it did come to pass, I ought to say that in the last days before the church period closes, there might be a revival of interest and enthusiasm in these wonderful truths so that when the Lord does come, he finds those who are faithful to his word. Well, they came to Daniel and they found him praying. I think it's wonderful to think that those wicked men, they didn't interrupt Daniel in his prayers, he kept on praying. Time would come, of course, when they arrested him and he was put into the [00:22:05] den of lions and we know the rest of the story, how God looked after his servant and was a great blessing to him. Now for a few moments, we'll turn to chapter 2 because I want to speak about chapter 9. You know the story how the king had a remarkable dream and he wanted the dream made known and he also wanted an interpretation of the dream. And he refused to give the astrologers and the soothsayers and the wise men any encouragement to give him their idea after he told them the dream. No, he says, you tell me the dream and tell me the interpretation too. Well, that was a very hard thing to do. And when there was no interpretation forthcoming or no telling forth of the dream, the king orders the execution of all the wise men and that involved [00:23:06] Daniel and his three companions. So they came together in fellowship, in prayer. It's not now a private matter, this is a matter of fellowship. Daniel, he made the thing known to the three young men and you'll notice that they have their Jewish names, a recognition of their connection with God. Their names had been changed, they were given Babylonish names that connected them with the heathen gods, but the spirit of God records for us their Jewish names, their Israelitish names that indicated their connection with the living God. Well, they got together, we have the record of it, it's perfectly obvious, that they prayed about the matter, fellowship and prayer. And then the dream was made known to Daniel. And it's a wonderful note of praise and worship that Daniel gives to this great God, because he is the God who can do things. Oh, that we might get this into our [00:24:04] souls. God can change things. God can bring about a better condition. God can give wisdom, understanding, power, provided we acknowledge him, provided we are ready to say, yes, our lives are thine.

We are ready to do what we are told, ready to obey, ready to bring God in, whether individually or collectively, not to leave him standing out. I remember passing by a church and they had one of these posters up, what they call a wayside pulpit, and it struck me very much. It says, don't let God be the spare wheel. Well, you know what that means. Spare wheel is only used in an emergency. That's not the kind of God we want. We want a God who's at the driving wheel, the one who takes control, the one who directs, the one to whom we are subject, [00:25:04] the one who delights to answer, humiliation and obedience and faithfulness. And so Daniel and his three companions, they prayed together. God gave the answer, revealed to Daniel the dream that the king had, and not only the dream, but the interpretation of it. I want you to notice just for a few moments, the kind of answer that Daniel gave in prayer to God for this revelation. Blessed be the name of God forever and ever for wisdom and might are his. That's virtually God saying to Daniel, saying to God, this is a simple matter to the simple matter. Indeed, the dream revealed the interpretation given what an instant answer this is to the prayer. Then he goes on to say, he changes the times and the seasons. He removed kings and set up kings, kings, powerful, mighty, strong, boasting in their armies, boasting in their strength, [00:26:03] boasting in their wealth. God can change it overnight as he did in the book of Daniel. Oh,

how small man is in the presence of God. What power he has. We know this in the Bible. We know it in history. How boastful man is setting, setting himself up in all his arrogance and pride. He'll do this. He'll do the next thing. And God changes it overnight. This is the kind of God that we believe in. And this is Daniel's answer to this wonderful God. He revealed the deep and secret things. Now, if we just use this in connection with our own lives and in our companies, are we resigned to the fact that there can be no betterness? Are we resigned to the fact that in our individual lives, there's no possibility of getting more power or more spiritual progress? Do we resign ourselves to it? Do we acquiesce in the weakness and failure that is there? Or do we trust in the living God? He can change things, change things for us individually. Praise [00:27:07] God he does it day by day. And he can change situations. And he can change the conditions and localities. He can. We know he can. Are we prepared to pay the price in prayer, giving up more time to pray? And when God reveals his will to us, are we ready to obey? This is the kind of God that Daniel had. I want to turn you to chapter nine. Very often, when we are praying, we are quite unaware of what is going on. When Daniel was praying, at the same time, God was working on the spirit of Cyrus. And Cyrus was giving instructions to Daniel. And Daniel was praying to the spirit of Cyrus. At the same time, God was working on the spirit of Cyrus. And Cyrus was giving instructions [00:28:06] as to return from Babylon of a section of the people who were held in bondage there. The king was giving a decree that the people could move out from captivity and go back. Daniel didn't know this. But one thing he did know was that God had said precisely that after 70 years of captivity, there would be a remnant returning. Daniel knew this from the book of Jeremiah. It indicates to us that that book was in circulation then. Daniel read it, and he knew God's mind. Well, there's a principle for us right away. Do we know God's mind? How are we going to get it? From the philosophers of this world, it isn't there. There is one source where we can find it. That's in God's word. Not the law, as it pertains to Israel, not even the history of Israel and the lessons that we learn there, [00:29:06] but the New Testament, where it specifically pertains to the Christian's position in this world, his privileges and his responsibilities. We learn God's mind there. And as we learn it and seek grace to obey it, then the blessing of God comes. So immediately Daniel knew that the time had arrived. He had always been in accord with the mind of God. But now he knew that a specific moment had arrived. And so he set his face with earnest diligence to pray to God about this specific matter. And I think it's beautiful. It appeals to me tremendously that what he did was confession, wholehearted confession, not excluding himself, not specifically blaming this one or the next one, but taking an overall view of the picture. Absolute failure and weakness is the result of our [00:30:02] position today and a free acknowledgement to God that this was the case. But along with that, the knowledge that God was a merciful God, a forgiving God, a God who had not deviated from his covenant with Israel, a God who was ready to bless, ready to forgive, ready to hear. We haven't time to enter into the specific details of the prayer. I commend it to you. But here is the thread that is running through. We have sinned, we have done wickedly, we have failed, we've been unfaithful. Now I want to ask this company individually, would any of us dare to stand up and say that we have not failed? I don't think so. And I can assure you, I would take my first place along with you if you stand up and say that you have failed. So have I. And I regret it. Every failure of ours, [00:31:06] morally, ecclesiastically, or any way that you can think of, every failure of ours adversely affects the Christian testimony. Don't let us think that we can sin or fail in any way whatsoever with impunity. It's a definite truth that our failure affects the Christian witness in this world. That's a very solemn thing. We might think, well, I don't do this, and I don't do that, I don't do the next thing. And we might pat ourselves on the back and say, well, I haven't failed. I'm talking individually. To all my dear friends, if we examine ourselves in the light of God's presence, that's the measuring stick, that's the yardstick, just to be in God's presence and tell him that we haven't failed and see what he says to us. Oh, what a solemn thing it is to be [00:32:01] in the presence of God. And so when we consider the weakness of the Christian position, don't let us blame others. Daniel says, I confess my sin. And having confessed

it, look for understanding to follow the right way and to follow the word of God that there might be better conditions. Oh, what a prayer it was. God answered it. Man greatly beloved, man whose heart was yearning for the prosperity of God's interest first, yearning for the prosperity of the people of God, crying aloud. Notice what he says. Our kings have failed. Who are the kings? I'm now referring to the Christian company, the persons who are leaders, the persons who should tell forth the mind of God without any partiality, without any bias, the kings who are to enforce the word of God. [00:33:04] I don't use the word enforcing in the sense that there are leaders who say you must do this or must do that. I mean enforcing by presenting the word of God to the people of God and what it means to do the will of God in our day. Daniel says our kings have failed. Have they? Is this true of the Christian profession as we know it? I think it's true. And then the princes, the influential men amongst the people of God, the men who occupy places given to them by God, as we read in the book of Numbers. So very often we find princes brought forward there as persons who are given direction by God to accomplish things for him. The princes have failed. Well, let us take that to heart. And not only that, but the people have failed. The individuals, every one of us, we're all in it. [00:34:01] Peter failed. He was certainly a king. He led the saints astray. Even Barnabas was carried away by his dissimulation. We view the history of the revival from over 150 years ago and we see the breakup by continual divisions and sorrows amongst them. We bow our heads in shame and we say how well it could have been if the truth had been preserved. And all must bear their part in it. You see, this didn't happen just at the time when Daniel was in Babylon. And the declension that we are facing today just didn't happen overnight. And the reason, very simple, the word of God neglected. We haven't listened to the prophets, says Daniel. When the word of God was proclaimed in clearness and in power, nobody paid any attention. They were so occupied with their own affairs instead of listening to the word of God. Covetousness seen in Achan as [00:35:01] they entered into the land. Desire for materialism. And also at the beginning of the church period in Ananias and Sapphira. And then a complete ignoring of the word of God as to gathering together and following the principles connected with it. We cannot wonder that God's chastising hand is upon us. And so, let us confess. Let us take this attitude of humiliation upon us. If we can, then this meeting won't be in vain. Not a case of looking over our shoulders at someone else, but taking it home to our own consciences, our own hearts, and working it out in humility before God. I just want to say this in the way of encouragement to show how we can make things better. When I was in Germany, I was introduced to a young man and he was described to me as a brilliant student. I was told the different things that he was interested in and he had [00:36:02] been breaking bread for about a year amongst the brethren. His parents are practicing agnostics. I asked how it was that he found his way amongst the brethren. I was told a story and it touched my heart and that's why I'm passing it on to you. When he was at college, he noticed a young woman who was different. He watched her carefully and he had to acknowledge she was different. Different in appearance and different in her habits. So at last, his curiosity got the better of him and he asked her, why is it that you're different? She says, I notice that your hair is different from the others. I notice too that your clothes are different from the others. You never wear trousers, jeans. Well, she says, I'm a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, he says, are you compelled then to do this? Oh no, she says, I do it because I love the Lord [00:37:03] Jesus and that was the means of his conversion. You see, conversion can come about by faithfulness.

Not only by campaigns, thank God for them, but salvation can come about in a person's life by faithfulness to the Lord. That young lad is going on, he's making advances in the spiritual life. He's seen faithfulness. It's the result of his conversion. It was the result of his conversion. It's governing him in his life and he's going on well. Dear brethren, young and old, young and old, oh, that the Lord may help us to be faithful. We'll influence those who are beside us. We'll influence them in the right direction. May the Lord help us then to be more and more exercised in this tremendous matter of

prayer, the right attitude, the right desire, and the kind of life that gives power to our prayers as we wait for the Lord to see him face [00:38:06] to face.