

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

Pastor Adam Parker

February 16th, 2025

Sermon Title: The Anointed and Atoning One

Sermon Text: Daniel 9:1-27

Dan. 9:1 ¶ In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—

Dan. 9:2 in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.

Dan. 9:3 ¶ Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

Dan. 9:4 I 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,

Dan. 9:5 we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules.

Dan. 9:6 We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

Dan. 9:7 To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, as at this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you.

Dan. 9:8 To us, O LORD, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you.

Dan. 9:9 To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him

Dan. 9:10 and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God by walking in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

Dan. 9:11 All 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.

Dan. 9:12 He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers who ruled us, by bringing upon us a great calamity. For under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what has been done against Jerusalem.

Dan. 9:13 As 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.

Dan. 9:14 Therefore the LORD has kept ready the calamity and has brought it upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in all the works that he has done, and we have not obeyed his voice.

Dan. 9:15 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.

Dan. 9:16 ¶ “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.

Dan. 9:17 Now 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.

Dan. 9:18 O 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.

Dan. 9:19 O 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.”

Dan. 9:20 ¶ While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the LORD my God for the holy hill of my God,

Dan. 9:21 while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice.

Dan. 9:22 He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, “O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding.

Dan. 9:23 At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved. Therefore consider the word and understand the vision.

Dan. 9:24 ¶ “Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.

Dan. 9:25 Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time.

Dan. 9:26 And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed.

Dan. 9:27 And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of

abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”

Main Point: Daniel’s vision anticipated the Lord Jesus who would be anointed to make atonement for sin, bringing an end to the need for continued sacrifices.

Outline:

1. Upheld by the Word of God (9:1-2)
2. Crying from the Darkness (9:3-19)
3. Anticipating Something Better (9:20-27)

Introduction

If you’re like me, by this point in Daniel you might have gotten used to a little bit of a pattern. For example, I would expect another vision from Daniel at this point in the book. But instead, we are treated to what has to be one of the most heartfelt, humble, repentant prayers that we find in all of the Scriptures.

And what I’d like us each to do today as we look at this passage is to be open and willing to learn some things that might help and motivate us to draw near to the Lord in prayer, not as a formality, or as a box that we’re supposed to check off so that we can say that we are good Christians... but that we might draw near to him in prayer for some of the same reasons that Daniel is driven to pray here. I think there are tremendous helps for us here in Daniel 9.

What Daniel shares with us in this chapter is a portrait of a brokenhearted saint who cries out to God from the darkness. There are three things I want us to dwell on this morning that help us to understand how God uses his word and prayer to sustain weary saints.

Here are the three points: first, Upheld by the word of God. Second, crying from the darkness. And third, anticipating something better.

If you are a weary saint here today... God has something for you.

1. Upheld by the Word of God (9:1-2)

First, we find that Daniel is upheld by the word of God.

Let's talk about the date for a moment. According to verse 1, today's passage takes place during the first year of Darius, which makes the date 539 BC. I don't want to get distracted by the identity of Darius the Mede here, but many biblical scholars say this is another name for Cyrus the Great, who reigned in 539. Another possibility is that Darius the Mede is a regional ruler who served as sort of an executive of Cyrus. But whatever the case, we do know that in 538 the decree of Cyrus did in fact happen, which sent the Hebrews back to their land after 70 years of exile.

And so I think it's only right that we begin by reading the relevant part of that prophesy Daniel is reading when this passage opens. In other words, let's read what he's been reading.

The prophecy he's reading is from Jeremiah, and it's talking about the return from exile so we can see just what it is about the word of God here that breaks this man's heart and drives him to his knees.

“For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. 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.”

(Jeremiah 29:10-14 ESV)

Now, there is debate over when the 70 years Jeremiah refers to here actually began. Did it begin in 605 when Daniel was initially dragged away? If so, then 70 years from 605 would be 67 years, not 70 years from when he was taken into exile until the decree of Cyrus. But if this is correct then the 70 years that Jeremiah prophecies is a rounded number instead of a mathematically precise number.

Others have said that the 70 years is measured between the destruction of the temple in 586 until its reconstruction in 516 BC – and that would come out to exactly 70 years. I think both interpretations are very reasonable. In either case Daniel is reading this passage in Jeremiah and seems to believe that the exile is nearly complete.

But today's passage takes place in 539 BC, which means that if Daniel was dragged into exile in 605 BC, then he has been in exile for 66 years when this passage happens. So he is an older man by this point, almost certainly in his 80s.

Nearly the entirety of his life has been spent, not in Judea, but in this strange court with these strange people and their strange language, and their strange prayers and their strange gods. Most of Daniel's life has been spent as an exile, a stranger, and a sojourner. For 66 years Daniel has been pressed and pressured and plotted against so that he would conform and comply and compromise. For 66 years he has been tossed around between these different regimes and warring kings. For 66 years he has served faithfully and sought the good of the city of Babylon. All indications are, he has been a model exile. And you can imagine how the weight of the years must have pressed upon him.

It is with that context in mind that he turns to the Lord in prayer.

And I want you to notice what Daniel is doing here when we first see him in chapter 9. He does pray, but not at first. What we first see is that Daniel is meditating on the prophecy from Jeremiah. He's meditating upon the word of God. If you'll remember from the sermon on exile a few weeks ago, God sent this specific prophecy to these specific exiles with instructions about how they ought to live and seek the good of Babylon while they are there.

And this prophesy that he's reading becomes the catalyst that moves Daniel to pray.

Think about the role here that the Scriptures play in breaking the heart of Daniel and driving him to his knees. In verse 20 he says that in this prayer he was "confessing *his sin and the sin of his people Israel.*"

There is something about the prophesy here that *moves* him to confess. You see, it's the word of God – not in isolation, but in combination with his circumstances that has this powerful effect upon Daniel's heart. The situation itself means that when he reads the promise, it seems to land differently than before.

And if you're already a Christian, then surely you've seen this before in your own life from time to time. How many times have you heard that promise from Revelation that "he will wipe every tear from their eyes?" It can sound like just another Bible verse if you're not careful. But after you've had a long season of suffering, or perhaps lost a loved one, or you've just been wrestling with sorrow, when you hear the same verse, it suddenly breaks your heart.

God often uses circumstances to break through the hardness of our own hearts and to show us new vistas in his word. Here Daniel is reading this 60 year old prophecy – who knows how many countless times he must have poured over this thing – this scroll just has to be the most precious thing he possesses. And this time he's driven to pray.

God's word really is that precious, but it is easy for us to take it for granted. We forget or become careless at times. We treat it like it's just some other book or just some other document, or (heaven forbid) like reading it is a chore we're supposed to just get through.

But imagine how Daniel must have felt having received this message from the hand of Jeremiah... how he must have clung to it. How it must have been like a lifeline for him, and a reminder of his true home. They changed his name, they changed his language, they tried to change his allegiance to God even, but the word of God never changed from the day he received it until this moment.

Please, Christian, do not treat the Bible like just any other book. It is not in competition with television or the internet or your phone or anything else in this life. It is in a class all its own. This is God's precious lifeline to you. Will you treat it like Daniel treats it?

So Daniel has this precious scroll in hand, and he has surely read it a lot, but this time he reads it and he's broken right open by it. This familiar passage is transformed by the circumstances in which he reads it.

At the time he is reading this there is still a short period of time before the decree of Cyrus sends the exiles back to the land – that hasn't happened yet by this point. And as Daniel does the math and sees that time approaching, he doesn't become complacent or matter-of-fact about it, and he doesn't take the return for granted as if it was owed to them. If we had a prophecy like this in hand, I think we would be tempted by such a prophesy to slack off or become lazy or even to have a sense of presumption – to sort of see the end coming, and to think that of course it will happen and we're entitled to it; God said so. But for Daniel the approaching time pushes him to be *more* repentant, *more* reflective, *more* prayerful.

We should remember that the promises of God aren't there to make us lazy and complacent. They exist to encourage us and spur us along. The things God promises shouldn't lead to lethargy and laziness. They're supposed to spur us on to greater devotion and eagerness, not less!

One other thing I want us to see about the word of God and its role in our prayers: we need to realize that nearly everything in the Bible can be an opportunity for prayer.

When we read the law and see what God expects of us, we can pray prayers of confession. Not only that, but we can ask him to make us more like what we see in his law. We can ask God to give us a love of His law and to change us.

If we read a passage about Christ and his love, we can ask God to change us to be more like Jesus, or we can ask him to develop the same virtues in others.

There are endless opportunities in which the word of God can feed our prayers as seems to happen here in Daniel.

The word of God presses him toward prayer, and not toward laziness. Might it also be so for each of us.

2. Crying from the Darkness (9:3-19)

Second, Daniel reminds us that faithful prayer is often crying from the darkness.

In our own pragmatic age, you and I might read this prophecy and say, “Only a year until we return. I guess we’d better get busy preparing ourselves,” or we might start scheming how can we get the new king to send us back – sort of how we might manipulate the situation to make God’s own prophecy come true. But Daniel’s instinctive response to the word of God is to fall to his knees in prayer first.

Do you ever read Scripture and then walk away and feel like maybe it didn’t quite have the impact on you that it should have?

I have noticed that this usually happens when I read Scripture prayerlessly, and in a rush. Do you ever do this? You think, “Well I made a chore for myself, and now I have to do it.” You may have done this at the beginning of the year. Maybe you decided to start a Bible reading plan (how is that going? Let me encourage you to keep it up!) or maybe you decided you would start using a devotional of some sort back when January 1 rolled around. But do you go through the motion and prayerlessly try to still gain some benefit from God’s word anyway?

Do you ever do this, where you sort of treat scripture reading like something that you have to do rather than something that is an incredible privilege to do? And when we do that, we can often just think, “Well I just need to get through this.” This is a great opportunity to yell, “STOP!” and just remember, “wait, why did I decide that I should be doing this in the first place?” “Why am I reading the word of God at all?”

And the answer, ideally is, “I made these plans to read God’s word, not because I need more chores and more work and more tasks in my already busy day, but because I value being in the presence of God.”

And so if the purpose of our time reading the Scripture is being in God’s presence, then we do owe it to ourselves to slow down and say, “I’m here because this matters. I’m reading this because my soul is hungry for the living God. This isn’t busy work, this is my father’s business that I’m meant to be about.”

And when we slow down and remember why we're here, we will find it much easier to say, "Father, help me as I read this. Reveal yourself through this word. Lord Jesus, increase my dependence on you as I read this. Break my heart for sin and remake me. Spirit, don't leave me alone. Open up this very same word that you inspired the Apostles and prophets to write. Help me, make me confess, make me worship. Give me some glimpse of what you know that I need."

When Calvin talks about this passage he says that prayer in a circumstance like this is "proof of repentance and faith." In other words, not only does prayer express our faith, it *grows* our faith. When we think and read but we don't pray, it's like our own heart doesn't have a chance to speak to the God of these Scriptures. It's like muzzling our soul.

And so let me encourage you that as you read Scripture, do so in a prayerful manner, so that God speaks to you from the word. Are you reading this because you thirst for the living God? Or because you are somehow thirsty for a chore? I think you know that in your heart of hearts, you thirst for the living God. So take the time to speak and to hear.

In this case, God said in the Jeremiah prophecy that before they would return to the land, the exiles would do something. He said they would

"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...and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you" (Jer. 29:11-13).

But I want you to also see what Prayer is here. Prayer functions as the voice of Daniel's heart, responding to what he knows, and his being crushed by what God's word says. But I want you to think of prayer as the place where the ministry of God's word really touches the soul. If you are reading without praying, you may continue to wonder why things are so dry, why they seem to not penetrate the armor of your heart.

I want you to see that Daniel's prayer is motivated by a need for God. Daniel's life has been marbled throughout with a desperate need for the presence of God. And this is keenly felt by him because he is a stranger in a strange land. The Lord is his

only true home, and prayer is the way that he returns to his true home. And in the same way, each of us should be motivated in our prayers from a desire for God himself – not his gifts, not his blessings, but simply by Him.

Daniel's prayer is also driven by a need for confession.

God's law actually contains many promises and encouragements toward confession. For example, Leviticus 26:40, where God says this:

“But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me, so that *I* walked contrary to *them* and brought them into the land of their enemies—if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity, then I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. But the land shall be abandoned by them and enjoy its Sabbaths while it lies desolate without them, and they shall make amends for their iniquity, because they spurned my rules and their soul abhorred my statutes. Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not spurn them, neither will I abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them, for I am the LORD their God. But I will for their sake remember the covenant with their forefathers, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 26:40-45 ESV)

So you see a promise like this in Leviticus, and then I want you to think of what Daniel is doing here. Daniel is attempting to lay hold of the promises that God already gave to his people. Yes, this exile is punishment. But God's word has promises for someone who is suffering under the weight of sin.

Is that you? Are you like Daniel? Is your sin burdensome? The Bible tells us what to do. Confess your sins. 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Faithful? Faithful to what? To his promise. He said it. He doesn't lie. He'd never lie to anyone ever. He tells us, “you confess, I cleanse completely.” Daniel sees his sin and confesses

it. Take your cues from Daniel here. Lay hold of this promise. Confess your sins. Psalm 32:3: “When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.” Confess your sins. Daniel prays from a need to confess.

I want you to also notice that Daniel prays from a need for grace.

Daniel here is throwing himself entirely upon God’s grace and he is owning his own role and his own peoples’ role in bringing this exile upon themselves. He doesn’t pass blame; he includes himself in the confession. He isn’t just saying, “My forefathers were bad, but mine is the generation that’s going to turn it around!”

No! A person who comes to God in prayer but with his head held up and his chest out, and his finger pointing at everyone else is not actually casting himself on God’s grace, he’s charging in and trying to grab hold of God’s power or favor to take for himself.

Daniel’s not doing that. He’s come for grace.

What makes it grace is precisely that we aren’t in the position with leverage. Daniel has no leverage. His own confession here isn’t leverage, it’s an admission of guilt. Nothing he does here obligates God to be merciful. We are in God’s world, on our own we are deserving of God’s judgment, and we simply have no position to argue from. That’s what it means to have a need for grace. Daniel casts himself upon God’s grace and mercy and kindness. When you pray, do you pray like an equal, making demands from God? Or do you come with a broken heart and an empty hand?

3. Anticipating Something Better (9:20-27)

Third, this passage takes Daniel beyond himself, anticipating something better.

Gabriel comes in response to Daniel’s prayer, and he says in verse 23 that he brings it to him because “you are greatly loved.” What an incredible thing to hear while in exile, and you’re down and out, and you’re broken hearted. What a word: “You are greatly loved.”

Christian, please take to heart this truth: “You are greatly loved.” How do you *know* you are greatly loved?

God’s word says so. In your baptism, God has placed his name and his promise upon you. In Christ you see that ultimate guarantee of the love of God for you. You are loved because God has chosen to set his love upon you, not because it is something you are worthy of. In other words, there is not a time when he will cease to love you because there was never a time when he began to love you.

Daniel hears this precious word: “You are greatly loved.” What will God tell Daniel because he is greatly loved? Well here it is, and it begins in verse 24.

Although there are diverse views of this final prophecy, I’m not going to run you through the many options. I am going to tell you what I believe is the most faithful interpretation here in terms of the text and what we know of the history. Here is what Gabriel tells Daniel, word for word.

“Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.” (Daniel 9:24-27 ESV)

Obviously on some level this is a challenging prophecy to try to understand. But I’m going to summarize what I think this prophecy is saying. God has already told

Daniel that his people will have to endure seventy years. Now he is telling them that his people will then face seventy *sevens*.

Or put it another way, the end of the exile doesn't mean that there is a full or final restoration yet. There is a longer wait ahead before what verse 24 describes as "an end to transgression, an end to sin, atonement for iniquity, and everlasting righteousness." That won't happen right away when they get back to the land.

Instead, Gabriel tells Daniel that the kingdom of God is a longer term project. The seventy year that verse 2 spoke of are *here* called seventy weeks. So God speaks of the years as weeks. But in the Hebrew, the word "week" just means "seven." So the literal rendering of this in verse 24 would be, "Seventy sevens are decreed about your people and your holy city." Putting these things together, Daniel is saying that there are seventy years times seven that stand between the return of Israel and the ending of sin and atonement for iniquity and all of this that God says is coming. Seventy times 7 is 490 years.

I believe that this prophecy of the 70 weeks here is a prediction of a series of events beginning with the death of Jesus, the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, and the spread of Jesus' eternal kingdom throughout the world. How does that work out?

Mathematically here it is: in 458 BC, Artaxerxes issues a command to rebuild Jerusalem's walls and streets. This is recorded in Ezra 7:11-26. This decree, in a sense, starts the 490 year timer that Gabriel tells Daniel about. 490 years after the decree is AD 33, which is the approximate date of the crucifixion of Jesus.

I do believe this timing works out. But let me say that there have been a number of different approaches toward this prophesy, and I'm often impressed by them. Ralph Davis, for example, differs from me on this.

If this subject of Daniel's weeks has spurred your curiosity, I hope you'll spend time on it. I think this is a worthy subject to spend mental energy and time studying, and so I hope you won't take my shortness on this subject as a sign that it's not important.

Even more important, perhaps, even if there are diverse opinions on the specifics of this prophecy, I want you to see that in this prediction God is lifting the eyes of Daniel beyond his own present circumstances, and even beyond the hope of a return to the land.

Because God loves Daniel, he is giving him Jesus here. God hears the cry of this broken heart, and in response, he gives him Jesus. Because the most important source of hope, and something that comes about here in the midst of Daniel's prayers, and it's this: the messenger of God fixates Daniel's gaze on the one he calls (in v. 25) "the anointed one, a prince."

Jesus Christ, who was the son of David, indeed, came and entered the holy city, and was put to death. When he did this, he not only put death itself to death...for all of his people... but he put an end for the need for more sacrifices and offerings. In Jesus Christ, sin has been terminated, atonement has been made, and peace with God has been achieved for God's people.

I love this passage, because here Daniel is, he pours his heart out at this moment he seems to think there is going to be an end and a resolution. And at once God tells him, "No, the wait is longer than you thought," and in the very same moment God is preaching the gospel to this man... that the Messiah is coming to finally and truly deal with death and sin forever. If you feel a kinship with Daniel... if you feel brokenhearted... if you feel exhausted... if you feel anxious... if your sin is weighing you down, turn to the Lord. Jesus Christ has come, because you are greatly loved.

Let's pray.