

Pastor Ben Libby
 Sermon
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To Jesus Christ, who suffered once for sins in our place, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God. Amen.

The Word of the Lord which forms a portion for our sermon text this morning comes to us from the prophet Daniel, chapter 9, starting at verse 15:

Daniel 9:15-19 [ESV] “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. 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. 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. 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.”

This is the Word of God. Congregation may be seated.

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and from your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear fellow Redeemed...

Have you ever been personally frustrated about a lack of communication? We are more connected now than we have ever been before. We can send emails and text messages at the drop of a hat. We no longer need to wait for weeks while a letter is delivered in the mail. We can pick up a phone, almost anywhere we go, and talk to someone else on the other side of the country or even the world. It has never been easier to communicate with anyone.

And that is what can make a lack of communication even more frustrating. Has anyone ever told you “You never call! We

never hear from you anymore!”? It doesn’t take much effort to pick up a phone or even open up an app. And yet, we can often be bad at communicating with our loved ones.

You know this to be the case if you have ever been in a long-distance relationship. Distance can make even the simplest things hard. I personally was in a long-distance relationship for many years, and I was pretty bad at it! Something as simple and easy as picking up the phone can turn into work or even neglect if you’re not careful. It can be hard to communicate when you are a long way away.

When the prophet Daniel wrote the words of our text, the children of Israel were in a long-distance relationship with their God. They had no one to blame but themselves for this. They had been carried away into captivity by the Babylonians. This was a direct result of the nation's idolatry and unbelief. They were accustomed to worshipping and praising Him in His temple in Jerusalem. But for those in captivity, this was no longer possible. They were strangers in a strange land. They were a long distance from their home and their place of worship.

But, this did not mean that God wasn't with them in Babylon. He is not bound by the restrictions that we are: time and space. He is in all places at all times. It is as the psalmist said, **Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.**

And since our God is in all times and in all places, our communication is never limited to Him in any way either. Talk about Instant Messaging! We can pray anytime, any place to God. We have a direct line to His holy throne in heaven. That is what prayer is! We would be very foolish to not utilize such a powerful and important tool!

He has called each and every one of us here today. He calls us to repent of our many sins, and He gives us the reassurance that He will forgive those sins. He calls us to be His children and calls us to represent His name everywhere we go. Since He has called us in these ways, we need to remember to call Him back. We can always bring our petitions before Him. Nothing is too little nor too big for Him to handle. We need to remember to call to Him when we are overwhelmed, and we also need to remember to call to Him when He blesses us!

MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDIATIONS OF OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR SIGHT O LORD, OUR MAKER AND REDEEMER, AMEN.

This was an all-time low for Judah. They had once upon a time been a world power. When Solomon completed the temple, Israel was the most powerful country in World. But those shinning days were far in the rear-view mirror to someone like Daniel. Since that time, the country had been divided, invaded numerous times, and even come close to being destroyed. But God had delivered them from all of that. But despite the LORD's faithfulness, the people returned to their unfaithful ways. Then, God delivered them to the Babylonians. Their once proud city now lay in ruins and they now lived in Babylon.

But there was still a remnant of faith in these people. Daniel himself was a very faithful person. Everyone saw this in him, Israelites and Babylonians alike. He earned a prominent position in the foreign government because of his gifts. But even though he and others like him did well in Babylon, it was not Jerusalem.

But, finally, there was something to hope for. Our text before us this morning is Daniel's reaction to some very good news. He was reading scripture when it was revealed to Daniel, by the words of a different prophet, that this exile would not be definite. He was reading some words of Jeremiah, possibly this one: **Jeremiah 29:10 "For thus says the LORD, When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place.**

For the first time in a long time, this was good news for the captive nation of Judah. 70 years was a long time, but if this

prophecy was true, then that time was almost over. It is believed that this same year in which Daniel understood these words would be the year in which the children of Israel would be allowed to return to Jerusalem. Finally, an end to the captivity was in sight!

So, what does Daniel do? He prays, of course! The text before us is the tail end of his prayer. In these words, we see a very good example of prayer by someone who understood very well both the power of God and the frailty of man.

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.

Imagine, if somehow, you not only knew the President of the United States personally, but had a real great relationship. Your relationship with him was so positive that you even had a direct line to the White House. When you call, there is no transferring, no “please hold for the president”. That would be pretty great. You would have the most powerful person in the countries phone number. You would be able to ask him for anything, 24 hours a day. That would be a powerful resource.

While that would be nice, it is still not even close to the usefulness of the power of prayer. The President does have power and influence, but it is limited. He is limited by laws of the land, rights of the constitution, lines of jurisdiction, even limited by what man overall can do. God is limited by no such restrictions. He created not only our country, but the whole entire world. Not only did He create the world, but the whole entire universe! His power is truly unlimited, and not only do we have an opportunity to pray to Him, He ACTIVELY INVITES US to ask

Him for things. He is the highest of friends in truly the highest of places.

But, why would someone so powerful listen to the petty concerns and prayers of people so helpless as us? Truly, we have no merits or works that would grant us such an audience. **Isa 64:6 But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags;** Why would the Almighty, LORD of Hosts take a call from worthless sinners like us?

Well, Daniel address it plainly here. **For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy.**

Daniel readily admits to his own sin here. Which is pretty jarring actually. With most major figures in the Bible, we see both the good and the bad in their lives. But that’s not really the case with Daniel. From everything we know about him from scripture, he was a righteous man of God. We never see an account from him when he disobeyed God. But, of course, he was a man, and he was just as guilty of sin as we are. But, he also takes the blame for the people as well. **V15 we have sinned, we have done wickedly.**

Well, go back to imagining that you somehow had a special favor from the President. What would you use that for? Well, most likely you would save it for a time that you would really need it, wouldn’t you?

That’s another great thing about our God and how we pray to Him. We do not need to be selective at all when praying to Him. God wants us to pray to Him ALL THE TIME!!! **1 Thess 5:16-18 16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**

Well, truly if you do have carte blanche with the Master of the whole

universe, it might be a bit overwhelming. “You mean I can ask for anything?”

Well, if you ever need help with your prayers and what to ask for, there is a simple acronym to remember that makes for a good prayer. It is ACTS. Not the book of the Bible, *The Acts of the Apostles*, no rather A.C.T.S. It stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Adoration: praise God for who He is and what He has personally done for you. Confession: confess your sins and shortcomings to Him, for He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. Thanksgiving: verbalize what you are grateful for in this life and in the world around you. Supplication: pray for your own personal needs and for the needs of others. And then, finish your prayer like Jesus finished His, **not my will, but your will be done, O LORD!**

This then begs the question, “Is there ever a bad prayer?” The answer to that question is No and Yes. There truly is no bad prayer to God. We are told that the Holy Spirit makes our bad prayers good. **Romans 8:26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.** The Holy Spirit takes our unworthy and misguided prayers and makes them better before the ears of the Father. He is like a prayer spell checker. “Did you really mean?”

So, then how can we have a bad prayer? When we are praying to something other than God. In our New Testament reading, we are given an example by Jesus about the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. One had a good prayer, and one did not. The Pharisee prayed, ‘**God, I thank you that I am not like other people, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax**

collector. 12 I fast twice a week. I give a tenth of all my income.’ The Tax Collector on the other hand merely prayed, ‘**God, be merciful to me, a sinner!**’ Why was the Tax Collector justified and the Pharisee wasn’t? It was because of to whom they were praying. The Tax Collector was sincere, and actually prayed to God for His mercy. The Pharisee didn’t pray to God, he prayed to himself! He might’ve said **God**, but he was really praying about himself to himself.

That is why, when we pray, we need to remember to whom we are praying. We pray to God, and we need to take ourselves out of the equation as much as possible. It is He who does all the great things, we are just the people asking for them.

If you did somehow have a direct line to the White House, you must be pretty well connected. We have a direct line to the Almighty God. How are we so well connected to Him? We really shouldn’t be. What Daniel says here about Israel also applies to us as well. **we have done wickedly.** And yet, at the same time, we do have a really good relationship with God.

How is this the case? Well, because of Jesus! We have the best relationship with God because of God! We now can pray to God whenever because of the work of Christ. Before He came, our sins separated us from our God. The people of Daniel’s time would have to offer sacrifices, and even then, that was a mere foreshadowing of what Jesus would do. But Jesus did come, and He was the perfect payment for our lifetime of sin. His love for us far outweighed our sin against Him. **Romans 5:20 But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.** And now, because of that wonderful work of grace, we are saved. Now, we are called by the name of the One who saved us to spread that same name to others.

Verse 16 of our text really displays this glorious nature of our God while also confessing our sinfulness. Really, it is the two great teachings of the Bible in one verse: Law and Gospel. The end of the verse says **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.** This was the crux of the situation of the pain and misery of 70 long years for Daniel and the people. Their name itself had become an insult. And it was their own fault for their desolation.

But, even despite all that, God was faithful! The first part of that verse says **16 O Lord, according to ALL YOUR RIGHTEOUS ACTS, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy hill.** Why does God relent from His anger toward us? Because of God. God's righteous acts are displayed all throughout our lives, but no where was the righteous acts of God better displayed than on the cross. It was there that God Himself was the reason that we will live forever. Jesus not only gives us access to God, but also is the payment that justifies us before Him as well! He got our payment for our sin and we get His righteousness. There is no bigger favor that could be ever called in!

This prayer of Daniel's that we have before us this morning is an example of an excellent prayer. It checks all the X's off the A.C.T.S. list. Adoration for who God is? **15 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.** Confession for our faults and sins? **we have sinned, we have done wickedly.** Thanksgiving verbalizing what he was thankful for? **18 For we do not present our pleas before you because of our**

righteousness, but because of your great mercy. But to me, it is the supplication part that is interesting. **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."**

Daniel had just read that God would soon end the Israelites captivity. So, what was the jest of his prayer? Basically, it was this: "O LORD, that thing that You said You were going to do, please, keep on doing it!"

It's kind of ridiculous. Daniel was praying that God would do what He already said He was going to do. But, isn't that what prayer is? Us asking God for things that He was going to give us already. Martin Luther hits on this fact in every "what does this mean" about the different petitions of the Lord's Prayer. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. What does this mean? God's good and gracious will is certainly done without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it be done in us also!"

And that is the thing about Our God. He already knows what we need even before we do! Before Jesus taught His disciples that prayer, He prefaced it by saying **Matt 6:8 For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.** Sometimes, that is what prayer comes down to. He already knows what we need, but do we?

We have many needs in this world. But none was greater than the need that Jesus took care of. So, pray! Pray because God wants you to! Pray because He promises to hear and answer you, for Jesus' sake! Pray because our needs are great! And pray to thank your God for all that He has done for you, primarily saving you from your sins! AMEN.