



Potomac Hills

Presbyterian Church, PCA



By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.
Daniel 9:1-27

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English Standard Version

“Praying in the Darkness”

This is the 10th sermon in the series on the book of Daniel entitled,
“A Broken World and a Sovereign God.”

Daniel 9:1-27

“In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus [A–Ha–You –Ur–Seas], by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—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.

³ Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking Him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. 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, ⁵ we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from Your commandments and rules. 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. 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. ⁸ To us, O Lord, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against You. ⁹ To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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.”

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

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. 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. 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. 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.”

Heavenly Father, once again we have come to Your Word and today we find a great passage that is so simple and yet so profound. Lord, open our ears to truly hear. And we ask that by the power of the Holy Spirit, use this passage to help us know you better, love you more, and live in and by your grace. Teach us what it means to pray in the scriptural manner and may our faith match our words. Do this for each of us, this morning, in Jesus' name, and for His glory, Amen.

INTRODUCTION: *The Coming Evangelical Collapse*¹

Well, you may not have heard of this, but according to a recent spate of articles ... the church is doomed. Sad, but true. Michael Spencer, the Internet Monk, has written an op-ed piece in *The Christian Science Monitor* entitled, "*The Coming Evangelical Collapse*." Michael Spencer is a writer and communicator living and working in a Christian community in Kentucky. He describes himself as "a postevangelical reformation Christian in search of a Jesus-shaped spirituality." I don't know what that means either, but it sounds very spiritual.

This essay was adapted from a series on his blog, InternetMonk.com.

He essentially argues that because evangelicals have linked themselves to the culture war and because the culture war is now turning against evangelicals, that brand of Christianity will collapse within the next 10 years.

In this doomsday view, he lets us know that ...

"Within two generations, evangelicalism will be a house deserted of half its occupants. (Between 25 and 35 percent of Americans today are Evangelicals.) In the "Protestant" 20th century, Evangelicals flourished. But they will soon be living in a very secular and religiously antagonistic 21st century.

This collapse will herald the arrival of an anti-Christian chapter of the post-Christian West. Intolerance of Christianity will rise to levels many of us have not believed possible in our lifetimes, and public policy will become hostile toward evangelical Christianity, seeing it as the opponent of the common good.

Millions of Evangelicals will quit. Thousands of ministries will end. Christian media will be reduced, if not eliminated. Many Christian schools will go into rapid decline. I'm convinced the grace and mission of God will reach to the ends of the earth. But the end of evangelicalism as we know it is close."

Now, to give Michael Spencer credit, he does diagnose some severe problems pretty accurately. He lists seven reasons why the evangelical church will fall apart. His first, and probably most accurate reason, is "*The evangelical investment in moral, social, and political issues has depleted our resources and exposed our weaknesses. Being against gay marriage and being rhetorically pro-life will not make up for the fact that massive majorities of Evangelicals can't articulate the Gospel with any coherence.*"

And when you look at the evangelical church as a whole I think he's got a point. There are thousands of American Christians who can't tell you what they believe or why. And that's a real problem.

The rest of the reasons are way shakier and almost all of his proposed remedies are terrible. **Just my opinion.** And of course, once Mr. Spencer's editorial was printed, and then reprinted in the Drudge Report, the blogosphere lit up. Everybody responded to our coming collapse, and most of these responses were, in fact, even worse and less thoughtful than what

¹ The Introduction is adapted from and refers to an article from the online edition of *The Christian Science Monitor*, 3/10/09, found at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0310/p09s01-coop.html>. It also considers the few good responses to this article by Dr. Sean Lucas of Covenant Seminary, <http://www.reformation21.org/blog/2009/03/coming-evangelical-collapse.php>; Mark Galli of Christianity Today, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/marchweb-only/110-31.0.html>; and Dr. R. Scott Clark of Westminster Seminary, California, <http://heidelblog.wordpress.com/2009/03/11/the-survival-of-evangelicalism/>

they were responding to. Why? Because in everyone's rush to analyze the church, the culture, evangelicalism, theology, etc., and so on, they all forgot the single biggest reason the church is still here and will continue to be here.

And that reason is ... **GOD!**

Yes, hard-to-believe I know, who would have thunk it? The answer to, for, and about the church is ... **God!**

The church has a long history of doing stupid, dumb, sinful things and yet, by the grace and mercy of God, we're still here! And ... I could be wrong ...but I don't think the church has yet **exhausted** its repertoire of stupid, dumb, sinful things ... and yet ... I expect we'll still be around a long time from now.

The church exists not because **we ... get it, do it, teach it ... all right all the time**, but because **the Sovereign Creator God of the Universe** has ordained the church as **His means** of reaching **His** people with **His** Gospel about **His** Son.

However crazy that may sound.

Now in the midst of all these editorials, commentaries, responses, and blogs ... there was one sentence that jumped out at me. I kept going back to it again and again. And it was simply this, *"We need a new evangelicalism that learns from the past and **listens more carefully to what God says about being His people in the midst of a powerful, idolatrous culture.**"*

And I thought, "Aha." I know someone, from the past, who has something to teach us about being the people of God *"in the midst of a powerful, idolatrous culture."* And of course, that person is **Daniel**.

As we continue our study of Daniel, I'd remind you that in the first half of Daniel, we saw somewhat of a spiritual biography of Daniel as he was placed in crisis after crisis, and as he responded, by God's grace, in such a way that he honored God. And we've already said that when you move to the second half of Daniel the scene changes a bit. It's not unlike the book of Revelation where the first part of the book of Revelation focus on the war between the church and the world, and then the second part of the book focuses on that which is under and behind that war between the church and the world.

So also in Daniel.

Behind the spiritual biography in the first half of the book we move into the second half of the book and we find an account of what is **behind** the biography of Daniel. The spiritual experiences **behind and underlying** the public life.

This entire book is about the blessings of knowing God. Daniel is one of the great biblical models for what it means to know God. We talk about knowing God, and most of us, I would think, would say that we **want** to know God. And if you want to know what a person looks like who knows God, Daniel is a good picture of that. He was resolute; he was a man who loved God's word; was obedient to Him. He was a man who stood against the trends of the culture in his own day. This is a man who knew God and knew the blessings of knowing God, because Daniel was a man of prayer and because prayer reveals something very deep about us that perhaps nothing else in the Christian life reveals.

Daniel 9 also reveals Daniel to us in a way that no other passage in the book does. It's one of the longest recorded prayers in the Bible. And it has a lot to tell us about *"**what God says about being His people in the midst of a powerful, idolatrous culture.**"*

And so, with that in mind, let's continue our study of the Book of Daniel, since we're not following this in chapter order but chronologically, now we're moving to chapter 9, and we're

going to look at how Daniel survives all these years “*in the midst of a powerful, idolatrous culture.*”

And the first thing we see is that Daniel is ...

v. 1-3: **INSPIRED TO PRAY**²

We already know that Daniel prayed in times of crisis, but here we learn that such prayer was the expression of a life of regular, disciplined praying. Here in chapter 9, Daniel recognizes that a critical time has come for God’s people, and that realization grew out of his regular times of studying the Bible.

And the first thing we see is that Daniel’s prayer life is inspired. And it’s inspired **by his reading of the Bible**, look at verse 2, “*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.*”³ *Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking Him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.*”

Daniel is looking for the answer to the perennial cry of the people of God in exile, **Isaiah 6:11**, “*How long, O Lord?*” He was reading the Book of Jeremiah the prophet to find an answer to this heartfelt question — and he found the answer in the Scriptures, **Jeremiah 25:11-12**, “*This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.*”¹² *Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the Lord, making the land an everlasting waste.*”

And in **Jeremiah 29:10-11**, “*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.*”¹¹ *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.*”

Daniel was seeking to have his mind informed and his heart dominated by **whatever God said about his current situation**. Daniel’s reaction to what he read in Scripture has great significance for us today. It reveals great understanding of the Sovereignty of God and the responsibility of Man. He knew that what God has said was both specific and unconditional. This is something that God had ordained to pass. And yet, rather than say, “Well, if God is going to do it, then there’s no need to pray about it,” we find Daniel **devotes** himself to prayer, with one of the best descriptions of prayer found in the Bible, “*Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking Him by prayer.*”

Nor was it ordinary or brief prayer. The text tells us that his prayer was accompanied by “*pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.*”

God’s sovereign purposes are never revealed in Scripture as excuses for personal laziness, but rather as incentives for us to act upon what we read. For example, the fact that Matthew 28 tells us that all authority in heaven and earth had been given to Jesus didn’t mean that His disciples could sit back and relax. Just the opposite, in fact, it **obligated** them to go throughout the world with the gospel.

² The Exposition of the text and the conclusion are adapted from *The Communicator’s Commentary: Daniel* by Sinclair Ferguson, pages 185-204 (republished as *The Preacher’s Commentary: Daniel*); *Daniel: Reformed Expository Commentary* by Dr. Ian Duguid, pages 148-175; *The NIV Application Commentary: Daniel* by Tremper Longman, page 218-243; the sermon, “*The Prayer of Daniel*,” by Dr. J. Ligon Duncan, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS; *ESV Study Bible*, Daniel study notes by Dr. Duguid and Dr. Paul Wegner.

Likewise, here in Daniel 9, when Daniel sees that God had given a promise about the length of the Babylonian captivity, it took it as his **responsibility** to ask the Lord to fulfill His purpose. He recognized that God employs means to achieve His ends. The preaching of the gospel is the means by which Christ's sovereignty over the nations will be fulfilled; prayer for the restoration of Jerusalem was the means by which the Lord's word through Jeremiah would be fulfilled.

And so, Daniel, in reading the Bible, is inspired to pray. And so, in response to the word of God, Daniel pours out his heart to the Lord. And since this is not only one of the longest prayers in the Bible, but also one of the most instructive prayers in the Bible, let's look at what he actually prayed.

And the first thing that Daniel prayed about was ...

v. 4-19: **THE INSPIRER OF PRAYER**

Daniel has this long prayer and here we see that the longest part of the long prayer is about God Himself and our relationship to God. And there's much here that we can learn about how to pray. First, Daniel starts with an ...

- **INVOCATION**

Invocation is simply recognizing and acknowledging who God is and invoking, or appealing for, or soliciting, His presence among us. It's one reason we start every one of our services with an opening prayer. If you go to our church website, and go to the link on worship, you'll find a sample bulletin with a brief explanation of what we're doing in each of the various elements of worship.

And where we list the **Opening Prayer** you'll read the following: "Historically called "The Invocation." As sinners who are inclined not to worship God, we need to ask for help. We "call upon" or "invoke" God to be present with us, to orient our hearts and minds toward Him, acknowledging that we can only approach Him through His Son, Jesus Christ, and asking that He send His Spirit, who gives us the power to worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24) ."

And essentially, that's what Daniel is doing here. The focus of Daniel's invocation is on God's greatness and God's grace. He says the Lord is "**the great and awesome God,**" verse 4; "**To You, O Lord, belongs righteousness,**" verse 7; the One "**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,**" verse 15; who is indeed a mighty and powerful God.

Yet this God is also a God "**who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him,**" verse 4, faithfully fulfilling His promises to His people. He is a God to whom "**belong mercy and forgiveness,**" verse 9. In fact, both these words are in the plural in the Hebrew, suggesting God's **repeated** acts of mercy and forgiveness to His rebellious people. And it's the mercy and forgiveness of God that form that basis of Daniel's prayer.

And yet, if the God to whom Daniel prayed is faithful and righteous, the people of God have been exactly the opposite. They have been unfaithful and unrighteous, and so we see Daniel acknowledge that with a prayer of ...

- **CONFESSION**

Israel has repeatedly sinned and rebelled against this gracious and loving God. Look at verses 5-6, "*we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from Your commandments and rules. ⁶ We have not listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name.*"

And then again in verses 9-11, "*for we have rebelled against Him 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. ¹¹ *All Israel has transgressed Your law and turned aside, refusing to obey Your voice.*”

The contrast could not be greater between this faithful and holy God, who had been true to all His promises ... and the faithless and unholy people who had broken all their commitments and rebelled. Under the terms of the covenant that God had made with His people at Mt. Sinai, such a combination could only have one result: the destruction of God’s chosen city and the exile of God’s chosen people. And because the Lord is faithful and just, He brought about this promise as well, making His people the object of scorn among the nations.

And so we have Daniel confessing the sin of his people and acknowledging the justice of God’s actions. There’s no effort on Daniel’s part to make excuses for Israel or to challenge the fairness of God’s actions.

He acknowledges both the sin and the judgment of sin.

And yet there wasn’t **just** a promise of judgment for sin but also a promise of a new beginning **beyond** that judgment. When the rebellious exiles experience God’s judgment and repented of their sins, turning back to God, the Lord would restore them, **Deuteronomy 30:1-3**, *“And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, ² and return to the Lord your God, you and your children, and obey His voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, ³ then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, and He will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you.”*

This is the response that Daniel is seeking when he comes before the Lord with his ...

- **PETITION**

He asks that God would hear his prayer and show favor to his chosen city and his chosen people, verses 17-18, *“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.”*

And notice that he doesn’t ask this because of any righteousness in himself or because of any faithfulness in his people, but simply throws himself on the mercy of God and the honor of God’s name, verses 18-19, *“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.**”*

To show the greatness of His grace and vindicate the honor of His name, the Lord must once again redeem His people and restore them to Himself. And so Daniel prays with great confidence that God would hear his prayer, show loving kindness to His people, and restore His sanctuary.

And Daniel can do this because he is asking the One who is ...

v. 20-23: THE **HEARER OF PRAYER**

And hear God does. Look at the text, starting at verse 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, 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. ²² He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, “O Daniel, I have now come*

out to give you insight and understanding. 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.*”

Daniel cried out to the Lord, verse 18, *“O my God, incline Your ear and hear.”* And an angel of the Lord, Gabriel, appeared in confirmation that there is a God in Heaven who hears our prayers. Daniel sought God’s favor and Gabriel comes to tell him, verse 23, **“you are greatly loved.”**

Daniel begged God, verse 19, *“O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for **Your own sake, O my God.**”* And before he even finished praying he received a response. In fact, Gabriel told him that a decree was issued from the throne room of Heaven, verse 23, **“At the beginning of your pleas for mercy.”**

But not only is the Lord God Almighty the hearer of prayer, He’s the one, the only one, who can come to us with ...

v. 24-27: **THE ANSWER TO PRAYER**

“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. 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. 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. 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.”

A day was coming when God would make all things right. God would act, verse 24, *“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.”*

God doesn’t make clear the time. He mentions seventy weeks, or more literally, “seventy sevens.” Some think this means a literal period of 490 years, and others think this means a time of completeness, since both seven and seventy are numbers signifying completeness in the Bible. We see that in Matthew 18 when Jesus tells Peter to forgive his brother seventy times seven times. Nobody interprets that verse to mean that Peter had to forgive his brother 490 times, but not on the 491st time. Jesus was making a point that Peter’s perspective on forgiveness was far too small and needed to be greatly expanded.

So here too, the angel is letting Daniel know that the timescale needed to do away with all transgression and achieve complete restoration with God will arrive in due season, even though it will be long after Daniel’s life, but it will accomplish **everything** that God has designed for it.

Don’t get all caught up in the details and dates of these passages, they point us ahead to the fact that God is a covenant God, who, according to the words of that same Jeremiah the prophet, will establish a new covenant with His people, inaugurated by His Son, the Messiah, Jesus. And His words were, in fact, confirmed by the destruction of the city and its sanctuary in the first century, A.D.

With the coming of the Messiah Jesus into the world, and especially with His death and resurrection, the seventieth week has dawned. The victory over sin and death has been won. The New Covenant of which Jeremiah spoke is now here, which Jesus called, ***“The New Covenant in My blood, shed for many, for the remission of sins.”*** With the coming of Christ, all the things that Daniel 9 anticipated have been accomplished in principle — our sins are atoned for, our transgressions have been removed, and the word of the prophet is vindicated. However, this seventieth week isn’t over yet, the day of the Lord when God consummates history with the return of Christ. And until that day, we still drink the cup of the New Covenant, proclaiming the Lord’s death until He comes.

For Daniel this was hundreds of years in the future. But it was a promise of God. And for us, it’s still in the future, but no less than for Daniel; it remains a promise of God. God is not in the business of instant saints. His timescale for the sanctification of His people is far larger than we can easily comprehend. People aren’t like oatmeal. God chooses to work through lifetimes ... and God chooses to work through generations ... and God chooses to work through words of prophets and apostles who lived a millennium or two before us.

And yet God **promises** that God’s sinful people would be justified. They would be forgiven and accepted and restored and recreated. **They will be made righteous, 1 Peter 2:9-10**, *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”* ¹⁰ *Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*

And that’s true simply because He is ...

CONCLUSION: *The God of Great Grace*

Do you ever wonder why we don’t pray like Daniel? I mean, it can’t be that hard, can it? But, for the most part, we don’t. I think, one of the reasons for that ... there’s probably lots of reasons, but certainly one of them ... is that we really don’t think we’re praying to **the God of Great Grace**.

On the one hand, if we forget God’s greatness, then our prayers are usually way too small. In fact, I find that my own prayers are **almost always too small**. I don’t find myself praying for a great and mighty work of God’s Spirit in our church or in our community or in our nation. I don’t usually pray for a remarkable demonstration of God’s power in our church. I forget God’s greatness. I forget that He’s the One who created all things out of nothing, I forget that He’s the One who hung the stars in the sky and gave boundaries to the seas. I forget that He’s the One who raises up kings and brings them down again.

God is great ... but my prayers are small.

On the other hand, if we forget God’s grace, then our prayers are usually way too small **again**. I’m often tempted to think that **I’m beyond fixing**. Sorry God, I’m just too screwed up. The more I see of my own heart, the more I know that I’m just a sorry rebel and a wicked sinner. I don’t listen to God’s laws, I don’t take them to heart, and I surely don’t delight in them. And I know better. I read the Bible **professionally!** How great is my condemnation.

But then I look out at you ... and things get really bad. Lord, these people you’ve given me. God, they’re so screwed up. Look at how sinful they are. They don’t love their wives as Christ loved the church. They don’t listen to their husbands as the church follows Christ. They’re selfish, and they lie, and they say dumb hurtful things, even when they’re trying to be nice. They have all my bad habits and I hate that when their lousy lives shows me my own sin.

The reality is that each and every one of us is a broken cistern, a leaky vessel, damaged goods, and cracked pots. But then, wracked with despair and failing at prayer, I come across these words, **2 Corinthians 4:7-10**, “*But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.* ⁸ *We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair;* ⁹ *persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;* ¹⁰ *always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.*”

The surpassing power of God’s grace to do something with broken people. We don’t just despair, we don’t just sweep our sin under the carpet and pretend things aren’t so bad. But we remember God’s grace and confess our sin, throwing ourselves on the mercy of God. Because it’s true that I’m a filthy sinner, quite unfit for God’s use, and so are you. And yet this holy God, reaches down into the muck and mire of my sin-stained life, and sets my feet on a solid rock, sets His name upon you and me, calling us “Christian,” and choosing us, makes us a lamb of His own flock, a sheep of His fold.

My favorite prayer in the Bible, the one I can pray each and every day, the one I can pray in each and every situation, that one that’s always true and never fails, is simply this, “**Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!**”

Here is the motivation for real prayer. You don’t get what you deserve — you get mercy. And you do get what you don’t deserve — you get grace.

And so we can honestly pray, “Lord, I’m utterly unfit to be Your ambassador, but You have called me and sent me out to serve You. I cannot stand for even a moment in my own strength, and I have no words of my own to say. Lord, give me the strength to stand and the words to say. Accomplish Your purposes through me, and through this church, even though it’s filled with other sinners like me. Build this church, and build Your kingdom in this place, not because we’re worthy — far from it. Build Your kingdom because Your name is worthy ... and build Your kingdom because the people around here need to see Your glory. They’ll never see it through our own wisdom and strength; they’ll see Your glory only if You demonstrate it through taking deeply flawed and tarnished people like us and making our lives extraordinary demonstrations of Your grace.”

Notice that in the beginning of Daniel we are told that Daniel, while he was reading Jeremiah, discovered that the exile should be ending soon. He had been studying Jeremiah 25-29, which told the children of Israel that from the time of the exile there would be seventy years in captivity and then there would be a return.

But his response to that is absolutely startling. If you and I had heard that the exile was soon to be coming to an end, perhaps we would have called for a party in the streets. Gather together all the exiles and let’s celebrate the fact that God is going to liberate us. Daniel’s response to reading that and to discerning the times is to go the Lord in prayer.

And he didn’t stop praying when Darius issued that decree in Daniel 6, that we’re going to see next Sunday, that everyone should cease to pray to anyone but him for thirty days. You remember Daniel, chapter 9, happens chronologically **before** Daniel, chapter 6. Daniel was thrown in the lion’s den in Daniel, chapter 6, but that happened chronologically **after** this prayer. No wonder Daniel refused to stop praying! Gabriel had already met the man, God had answered his prayer, and **there was no one in the world** that was going to stop Daniel from faithfully praying to the God who had comforted him in prayer ... not **lions**, not **kings**, not

decrees. No wonder he refused to stop praying.

We have a God of Great Grace. Don't ever stop praying.

Think about that. You really need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

Heavenly Father, 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, incline Your ear and hear. Open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the church 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 church and Your people are called by Your name. Do this, now, we pray, in the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the One who lives, and reigns, and is coming again, now and forever. Amen.

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2 Corinthians 5:20-21

“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”