



Turning and returning * Daniel 9

June 20, 2021 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

One of the hardest things in human experience is admitting that you've done something wrong.

I remember being with my dad at a neighbour's workshop. I was messing around with a screwdriver and somehow dropped it into a space heater and I AGONIZED over admitting what I'd done. I knew that I had done something wrong, but I really didn't want to admit it. My pride stepped in and didn't want to admit anything less than perfection. (I did eventually admit it and it turned out okay).

But we're all like that. We all like to think that we are perfect people and that we always do the right thing but we don't, and all of us do wrong, from time to time. That's true broadly speaking but it's also true spiritually too. I don't know if you caught it, but a few weeks back, I quoted Solomon when he was dedicating the Temple, and right there in the middle of the temple dedication, he says – "...there is no one who does not sin."ⁱ We have all sinned and fallen short of God's glorious ideal.

Which makes today's passage really important. Nobody likes to talk about repentance but it's a skill we all need to master. And so we're going to learn at the feet of a master today; in Daniel chapter 9, Daniel prays one of the most powerful prayers in the whole of the Bible and it's all about turning from sin and returning to God.

So turn with me to Daniel chapter 9 and we'll hear what Daniel has to say.

Now, Daniel chapter 9 starts in a really interesting place. Verse 1 tells us that it was in the first year of Darius's reign; do you know what else happened in the first year of Darius's reign? The lions' den. This is taking place around that same time; my guess is AFTER Daniel came out of the lion's den alive.

And so, there Daniel is, in the first year of Darius's reign, sitting in his room, reading Scripture, and he comes across Jeremiah 29.

Now first off, I think it's really neat to realize that people in Scripture are READING Scripture – you see the importance of reading your Bible – but second, Daniel is reading a very important passage. He's sitting in Babylon, having been there for most of his life and reading the book of Jeremiah and in Jeremiah 29:10, God says 10 ... "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place."ⁱⁱ

You can almost picture Daniel doing the math – I was 'this old' when I got here and it's been 'this many years since then' and all of a sudden it hits him: the time has come. God said that the Exile would last 70 years; Daniel's been there seventy years – it's almost time to go home!

And so Daniel sets himself to pray that God would indeed forgive His people and bring them home. He clothes himself in sackcloth and ashes, he starts to fast to prove that he's serious about it and he begins to pray. Verse 4 –

4 I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands,

5 we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws.

Two crucial things, right off the top. 1. God is faithful. 2. His people are not.

There's a stark black and white contrast here – God is the great and awesome God. He is the very definition of faithfulness, utterly committed to the people who are His. Daniel is later going to point out that Israel owes God everything; He rescued them from slavery in Egypt and gave them every opportunity to thrive as a nation; He is utterly faithful...

...And yet His people are not. You'd think that God's faithful commitment would inspire loyalty in return but nope, they've sinned and acted wickedly and turned their back on all that God called 'good.' (Verse 6): Even when prophets came to call them back to God, God's people said 'Nope, we'll go our own way, thank you very much.'

And so, Daniel says –

7 "Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame--the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you.

8 O LORD, we and our kings, our princes and our fathers are covered with shame because we have sinned against you.

9 The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him;

10 we have not obeyed the LORD our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets.

That's comprehensive repentance, isn't it? Not 'I'm sorry if I offended you' or 'I'm sorry for this but it's just the way I am.' Daniel straight up says 'We failed you. You were merciful and good, utterly committed to us and we just did our own thing. You were faithful to us but we have failed to live in a way that is consistent with Your faithfulness.' That's repentance.

But with repentance, Daniel recognizes that there have been consequences for their rebellion. All that has happened to them has happened on account of their sin. Verse 11 he says –

11 All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you. "Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you."

Daniel knows his Bible – in fact, if you go to Deuteronomy 28:58-63, you'll see this – God says, hundreds of years before -

58 If you do not carefully follow all the words of this law, which are written in this book, and do not revere this glorious and awesome name--the LORD your God... (63) You will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess. 64 Then the LORD will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other.ⁱⁱⁱ

What happened? Well, the people did not carefully follow the words of the Law and so they were uprooted from the land and scattered among the nations. All this time in Exile has been directly because of his people's failure to honour God as they ought. These people were separated from God because of sin. Verse 12 he says -

12 You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing upon us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem.

13 Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us, yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth.

14 The LORD did not hesitate to bring the disaster upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him.

Daniel knows that they have paid the price for their sin. Dearly.

But he also knows that God is a merciful God. Remember verse 9? 9 The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him.

The people of God have stepped in it big time, but Daniel still has hope that God will forgive them and restore them. He knows that their sin is great but he trusts that God's mercy is greater. And I want you to notice here – that Daniel's plea for forgiveness is not rooted in who he is, or who they are as the people of God – Daniel's plea for forgiveness is rooted in who God is Himself. Verse 15 –

15 "Now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day, we have sinned, we have done wrong.

16 O Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. Our sins and the iniquities of our fathers have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us.

17 "Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. *For your sake*, O Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary.

18 Give ear, O God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that *bears your Name*. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of *your great mercy*.

19 O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! *For your sake*, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people *bear your Name*" (Dan 9:1-19 NIV).

Daniel doesn't come up to God and say 'See our good works? See how we changed our ways? You have to forgive us now.' No way! Daniel knows that all their works are like filthy rags before the Lord. But Daniel is not trusting in his character, but in God's character.

I remember once when I had the kids all to myself and they were being nuts. All night long, they did their own thing, they gave me sass, they kept climbing up on the parts of the couch you're not supposed to sit on, laying there like a lazy leopard and I kept saying 'Get down from there!' And after all that, they had the audacity to say 'Daddy, pretty please, can we watch one more show before bed?' And I said to them – 'given the way you've been acting, ignoring my rules, doing your own thing, why should I let you do that?' And it struck me, they should have said – 'Because you're kind. Because you're gracious.' It has everything to do with who I am and nothing to do with them. And it's the same with us and God.

Daniel asks that God would relent and restore His people – not on the basis of who THEY are but on the basis of who HE is. Daniel asks for forgiveness 'because of GOD'S GREAT MERCY.' Daniel admits – 'We've sinned and acted wickedly but You are gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, keeping His love and covenant with thousands of generations. Please forgive because You are a forgiving God.'

And God answered that prayer for Daniel. God restored His people, bringing them home. Ezra and Nehemiah and Zerubbabel led them back, not long before Jesus' time and into the present.

Daniel here shows us what repentance looks like, turning from sin and trusting in God. And God heard his prayer and forgave him.

And God answers prayer like that for us too. When we turn from sin return to God, God hears our prayer and restores us to Him. Not because of who WE are but because of who HE is. Admittedly though, it's a little different on this side of the Cross.

All Daniel knew was that God was merciful and forgiving; at the Cross though, we see the fullest expression of God's mercy and forgiveness.

Instead of sending us into spiritual exile because of our sin, God sent Jesus into Exile instead. At the Cross, He was separated from God so that we could be forgiven and restored to the God that we had forsaken. And it's only because of HIS mercy that we can come home.

Like Daniel, we don't rely on our own righteousness but on Jesus' righteousness alone. 'My hope is built on nothing less but Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, my best efforts, my greatest works, but wholly lean on Jesus' name.' That's the NT equivalent to Daniel 9.

God's mercy calls us to turn from sin and return to Him, all the while depending on Jesus' goodness. That's repentance. That's the road to restoration.

So, what do we do about this? Two thoughts, depending on where you are in your faith journey.

1. If you are more like the people of Israel, turning away from God, stepping outside of the boundaries of what God says is good, then I would say 'Repent.' Follow Daniel's example here and confess – 'You God are faithful but I have not been.'

And listen, I know, this is where pride pops and gets in the way of what's really a good thing. When I first started taking faith seriously, I really had to wrestle with this. By and large I was a moral guy; I was pretty nice; I wasn't dabbling in spectacular sin. But oh boy did I ignore God and go my own way. And oh by did my pride ever want to stop me from humbling myself before God. My pride said 'I'm fine because someone else is worse than me,' but in reality, I was living like Israel, ignoring God and far from home. I had to overcome my pride and admit, 'I've really stepped in it.' I have not been faithful to God the way He is faithful to me. And so I finally got over my pride and repented. I turned from sin and returned to God and was restored to Him. Join me in that if you haven't already.

2. If you have, then I think that there are two places where we can apply this passage.

First, this I think becomes the general default posture of our hearts. We've been forgiven. We've been renewed and restored to God, but we don't always live like it, do we? The more I grow in faith, the more aware I am of sinful instincts, but God is faithful – even when we are not. Make Daniel's heartfelt repentance a part of the posture of your heart. And when you sin, come back to God, because when we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So first, have an attitude of repentance.

And second, I think that Daniel teaches us something here about corporate responsibility. He was not the only one contributing to the sin that led to the Exile, not by a longshot, but he still prayed as if he were. He prayed not just for himself, but for his whole people. The great preacher Charles Spurgeon once said:

“Daniel’s prayer should, by the blessing of God’s Spirit, inspire us with the spirit of prayer; and ... his example, in forgetting himself, and remembering his people, should help us to be unselfish, and lead us to care for our people—even God’s people—to whom we have the honor and privilege to belong: (Sermons on the Book of Daniel, 99–100).^{iv}

We can follow in his footsteps, intervening on behalf of our nation, because there is no shortage of sin there. And the next Exile is coming – the eternal one. We can pray – Lord have mercy. Move people to repentance. Help us to turn from sin to rely on You.

When we turn from sin and return to God, God hears our prayer and restores us to Him.

Let’s pray.

ⁱ Not *if,* *when*! 36 "When they sin against you--for *there is no one who does not sin*--and you become angry with them and give them over to the enemy, who takes them captive to a land far away or near; 37 and if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captivity and say, 'We have sinned, we have done wrong and acted wickedly'... (2Ch 6:36-37 NIV).

ⁱⁱ See also Jeremiah 25:11 - 11 This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

12 "But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt," declares the LORD, "and will make it desolate forever.

ⁱⁱⁱ 58 If you do not carefully follow all the words of this law, which are written in this book, and do not revere this glorious and awesome name--the LORD your God... 63 Just as it pleased the LORD to make you prosper and increase in number, so it will please him to ruin and destroy you. You will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess.

64 Then the LORD will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods--gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known.

65 Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the LORD will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart.

^{iv} Quoted in Akin, Dr. Daniel L.. *Exalting Jesus in Daniel* (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 119). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.