

Prayer

R. David Pogge
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Today we are discussing prayers by Jesus and Daniel, so let's set the tone for the broadcast as Michael Miller sings, "The Lord's Prayer"

[Music – the Lord's Prayer]

Part 1

The Lord's Prayer is recorded twice in the Bible. First, you can find it in His Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew 6:9 – 13. Then he repeated the prayer in Luke 11:1-13. The second time he added a parable about a man begging his neighbor for food at midnight.

Ellen White offers some comments about the prayer and the associated parable in chapter 12 of Christ's Object Lessons, her excellent book on Jesus teachings. Here are some excerpts from that chapter.

Christ's disciples were much impressed by His prayers and by His habit of communion with God. One day after a short absence from their Lord, they found Him absorbed in supplication. Seeming unconscious of their presence, He continued praying aloud. The hearts of the disciples were deeply moved. As He ceased praying, they exclaimed, "Lord, teach us to pray."

In answer, Christ repeated the Lord's Prayer, as He had given it in the Sermon on the Mount. Then in a parable He illustrated the lesson He desired to teach them.

Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need."

Here Christ represents the petitioner as asking **that he may give again**. He must obtain the bread, else he cannot supply the necessities of a weary, belated wayfarer. Though his neighbor is unwilling to be troubled, he will not desist his pleading; his friend must be relieved; and at last his persistence is rewarded, his wants are supplied.

In like manner the disciples were to seek blessings from God. They were to give the bread of life to the people. Often they would be thrown into unexpected positions, and would realize their human insufficiency. Souls that were hungering for the bread

of life would come to them, and they would feel themselves to be destitute and helpless. They must receive spiritual food, or they would have nothing to impart. But they were not to turn one soul away unfed. Christ directs them to the source of supply. Would not God, who had sent His servants to feed the hungry, supply their need for His own work?

But the selfish neighbor in the parable does not represent the character of God. **The lesson is drawn, not by comparison, but by contrast.** A selfish man will grant an urgent request, in order to rid himself of one who disturbs his rest. But God delights to give. He is full of compassion, and He longs to grant the requests of those who come unto Him in faith. He gives to us that we may minister to others and thus become like Himself.

Christ declares, "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."

The Saviour continues: "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

God regards us as His children. He has redeemed us out of the careless world and has chosen us to become members of the royal family, sons and daughters of the heavenly King. He invites us to trust in Him with a trust deeper and stronger than that of a child in his earthly father. Parents love their children, but the love of God is larger, broader, deeper, than human love can possibly be. It is immeasurable. Then if earthly parents know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more shall our Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?

Christ's lessons in regard to prayer should be carefully considered. There is a divine science in prayer, and His illustration brings to view principles that all need to understand. He shows what is the true spirit of prayer, He teaches the necessity of perseverance in presenting our requests to God, and assures us of His willingness to hear and answer prayer.

Our prayers are not to be a selfish asking, merely for our own benefit. **We are to ask that we may give.** The principle of Christ's life must be the principle of our lives. Our mission to the world is not to serve or please ourselves; we are to glorify God by co-operating with Him to save sinners. We are to ask blessings from God that we may communicate to others. The capacity for receiving is preserved only by imparting. We cannot continue to receive heavenly treasure without communicating to those around us.

In the parable the petitioner was again and again repulsed, but he did not relinquish his purpose. So our prayers do not always seem to receive an immediate answer; but Christ teaches that we should not cease to pray. Prayer is not to work any change in God; it is to bring us into harmony with God. When we make request of Him, He may see that it is necessary for us to search our hearts and repent of sin. Therefore He takes us through test and trial, He brings us through humiliation, that we may see what hinders the working of His Holy Spirit through us. ¹

[Music – Just a little talk with Jesus]

Part 2

If anyone knew how to talk with Jesus, it was Daniel. His first recorded prayer is in Daniel, chapter 2, verses 17-23. Nebuchadnezzar had ordered all the wise men in Babylon to be executed because they could not interpret a dream for him.

Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven and said:

“Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever;
wisdom and power are his.

He changes times and seasons;
he sets up kings and deposes them.
He gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to the discerning.
He reveals deep and hidden things;
he knows what lies in darkness,
and light dwells with him.
I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers:
You have given me wisdom and power,
you have made known to me what we asked of you,
you have made known to us the dream of the king.”

It is sort of a cliché to say, “I give all the glory to God.” In Daniel’s case, however, he really did. There is no way Daniel could have known what the king dreamed, let alone interpret it. God deserves, and gets, all the credit.

Notice what Daniel does NOT say. Generally, when we praise God, we praise Him for His love for us. Daniel doesn’t mention love. He does not say, “Thank you God for loving us enough to save us from this death decree.” Instead, he praises God for his wisdom and power.

¹ White, Christ’s Object Lessons, Chapter 12, “Asking to Give”, <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/col/col12.html>

Perhaps the reason for this is because God didn't give the dream to Nebuchadnezzar to prove His love for Daniel. The dream proved God's wisdom and power to the exiled Jews and countless future believers.

The dream in question was about a statue with a head of gold, chest of silver, belly of brass, legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay, which is destroyed by a rock from heaven. It is clear from the rest of chapter two, and corollary visions in chapters 7 and 8, that God is predicting the course of European history. The Babylonian, Persian, and Greek empires are mentioned by name. The Roman Empire isn't mentioned by name because Rome had just been founded a few years before, and was still a tiny distant village unknown in the Babylonian empire. But the description of the fourth empire is so specific that there is no doubt it is Rome. The Roman Empire was later divided into the 10 kingdoms of Europe, as predicted by the ten toes of iron and clay. Finally, the rock from heaven that smashes the statue and sets up an eternal kingdom represent the second coming of Jesus.

This dream demonstrates God's foreknowledge of history, and His power to make it unfold according to plan. That's probably why Daniel praises God for His wisdom and power instead of His love.

This dream, and the resulting prayer of praise, apparently took place within a year or two of the beginning of the Babylonian captivity. Strengthened by this vision, Daniel continued to pray to the Lord throughout the captivity, even when it was illegal. In Daniel chapter 6 we find the famous story of Daniel in the lion's den. He was cast in the lion's den because he was caught praying openly in violation of the law. That's such a familiar story that we can skip over it, and jump to a very important prayer near end of Daniel's life.

Daniel had access to the prophetic writings of Jeremiah. When Babylon was invading Judah, Jeremiah wrote this prophecy, recorded in Jeremiah 25, verses 8 through 12.

Therefore the LORD Almighty says this: "Because you have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon," declares the LORD, "and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin. I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

"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."

Eight years later, Jeremiah wrote a letter to Daniel and the other captives in Babylon, telling them to "Build houses and settle down" because they weren't going to be free any time soon. In fact, in Jeremiah 29:10 he said,

This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.

Daniel had read these two messages from the prophet Jeremiah saying that the captivity would last 70 years. By the time we get to the 9th chapter of Daniel, the Jews had been in captivity for 67 years. The end of the captivity was predicted to be just 3 years away, and yet Daniel sees no indication that they will be sent back to the Promised Land. So, he asks God about it. We will read his prayer in just a moment, but first let's do some math.

Daniel was young when he went into captivity and interpreted the King's dream about the statue. Daniel chapter 1, verses 3 and 4 say,

Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.

In that culture, boys became men at age 13. If he had been younger than 13, he would have been considered a boy, not a young man. So Daniel had to be at least 13 years old when the captivity began. 67 years later he would have been at least 80, probably closer to 85, and maybe as old as 90. He was still a well-respected high-ranking court official when he prayed the prayer in Daniel 9. He was not going back to Israel himself at that age. Why should he care if the captivity ends in three years?

But, as we saw in the first segment of our broadcast, we should pray so that we can help other people. At the beginning of the captivity, Daniel interpreted the king's dream, which not only saved Daniel's life, but the lives of all the other wise men. But more than that, his interpretation of the king's dream and the subsequent historical fulfillment provided proof that the Bible is the word of God to countless believers.

Now, at the end of his life, Daniel prays again for confirmation of Jeremiah's prophecy to encourage the captives. With that in mind, let's listen to Daniel's prayer, recorded in Daniel chapter 9. Hear how he acknowledges God's right to punish the Jews for their disobedience. Hear how he argues that God should keep his word, not because the Jews deserve to be set free, but because God is merciful.

In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes ... [the 67th year of captivity] ... I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.

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

“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. O LORD, we and our kings, our princes and our fathers are covered with shame because we have sinned against you. The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him; we have not obeyed the LORD our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets. 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. 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. 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. 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.

“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. 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.

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

Daniel was praying for confirmation that the captivity was about to end in order to encourage younger Jews. He received even more than he asked for. The remainder of chapter 9 contains a remarkably encouraging answer of special importance to us today.

In response to Daniel’s prayer, God sent Gabriel to tell Daniel that not only would the captivity end as predicted, the Jew’s punishment would be followed by 70 times 7 years of probation, starting with the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem which would end the captivity. Gabriel said that 7 years before the end of the period of probation the Messiah would come. That was the very year that Jesus was baptized. Gabriel goes on to say that the Messiah would be “cut off” 3½ years later, which was when Jesus was crucified. 3½ years after that, Stephen was stoned, ending the 70x7 years of probation, and the gospel was given to the Gentiles.

So, not only was Daniel's prayer answered in a way to give comfort to the exiles, it also foretold the exact dates of Jesus baptism and crucifixion, assuring Christians today that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

We can, and should, pray for the same spiritual understanding and guidance that Daniel prayed for.

[music – The Prayer]

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