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Good morning!

It is so good for us to be in the house of God. It is so good to worship and to re-focus our eyes onto Jesus.

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We have just spent the last six weeks taking a carful look at the book of Daniel. We even read, or at least heard, every word of scripture from the first six chapters of Daniel. It was a lot to take in at times, but it was clear that these old, old stories land directly into the center of our lives. However, Daniel as a book is not six chapters, it is in fact 12 chapters, and I thought we ought to give the rest of this book some time to breathe. So six sermons on six chapters and one sermons for the next six chapters seems like it ought to work so get comfortable…

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Actually, when you hit chapter seven, you have entered a whole new thing. These chapters are all recounting dreams and visions. This is similar to the stories we have already heard but the characters are different. This time around it is Daniel who has the visions, and he needs them to be explained. He is now the one in a bit of a panic and terrified at what he has experienced. But the explanations are given, and they are spoken to Daniel by the likes of Gabriel. Daniel also speaks with “one like a Son of man”. He appears to Daniel dressed in white, with a face like lightning and eyes like burning torches and feet like bronze. The same description of Jesus that we heard today from John’s revelation. And so these heavenly messengers come alongside Daniel and lay out what is going to happen in the future. And as a result, many parts of these chapters sound and feel like the book of Revelation. The last chapter even talks about the end of time, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment and most importantly, the victory and reign of God. That is the main point of Daniel, it’s the main point of Revelation.

First of all, I want to encourage you to go through and spend some time with these chapters. They are confusing and strange, but they are filled with hope and can help us adjust our modern Western worldview to one that is more thoroughly biblical. It would be an error for us to overlook this section of Daniel, but I do what to draw particular attention to what I think is a stand out section to this half of the book. Between grand and terrifying visions, confusing and future oriented explanations, we come across chapter 9 which lets us in on a much different scene…

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Daniel alone in prayer to God. He is not talking about strange imagery or future events. Daniel is pleading to God about his troubles in the here and now and as he does so, we will see how

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Daniel keeps his mind on the past, his feet in the present, and his heart in the future.

Let me show you what I mean. Daniel 9:1-3. READ. We are told this is occurring during Darius, so whatever the details, Daniel is toward the end of his life here. He has served a very good career as a wise man to a king in a foreign country. He has spent his life in faithful service to that empire while at the same time living faithfully to God. And here we find him knee-deep in Bible study. Specifically the book of Jeremiah,

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who by the way, lived during Daniel’s lifetime. And Daniel reads about Jeremiah’s prophecy that God’s chosen city, Jerusalem was actually going to be destroyed and God’s people would be sent off and displaced for 70 years.

 Daniel read this news, and he believed it. I mean he lived through the destruction of Jerusalem, he himself had been deported to another nation. And now is heart is stirred by hope. He understood Jeremiah to be a true prophet of God. He understood these words to be God’s words. And if Daniel was doing his math correctly, the 70 year timeline was almost up. Maybe God would shorten the sentence. Maybe he would bring his people back home early? And so what does Daniel do? He did what he always does… he prayed. The text says he pleaded with God. He fasted, he wore sackcloth and ashes. In other words, Daniel humbled himself before God and he begins his prayer with praise. READ 4

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 This opening sets the framework for everything else. Given any circumstance or outcome, these truths cannot be shaken. God is great and awesome. God keeps his promises. God is faithful to those who obey him. Daniel has set his mind on the past here, on the things he knows about God from Scripture and on his own experience of God’s mighty hand in his own life. See Daniel is facing what very well could be a crisis of faith. His faith tells him that the temple in Jerusalem is God’s chosen dwelling place, that he himself is part of God’s chosen people.

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Circumstances are telling him that this cannot be true. God’s promises have not come to pass? Circumstances say that your faith is wrong! How many of us have been there before? We experience these types of crisis don’t we? Though none of us have undergone military conquest and forced deportation, we have received that call from the doctor. We have experienced betrayal by the hands of loved ones, we have been devastated by unforeseen accidents or evil actions. And if we haven’t, we certainly know someone who has. This life, this world constantly proclaims to us, your faith must be wrong. Give it up!

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But Daniel won’t give it up. He clings even more tightly to the God he knows keeps his promises, promises made in the past, a past that Daniel keep in mind.

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He then turns to confession. And here he is interceding for his people…he speaks to God on their behalf. He names the wrongs that they have committed collectively, as a people. But Daniel never uses the term “they”, “your people, the ones over there”. No. Daniel ropes himself into their condemnation. He stands with them. All through-out this prayer he says “we”. Think about that step. Think about how monumental this step was to take. Daniel was a righteous man…he trusted and obeyed God when nobody else would. He listened when the prophets spoke, he stood up for truth at the cost of this life! If I were Daniel, I would never willingly identify with those faithless Israelites who trust in gods of wood and stone. I would never willingly cast my lot in with theirs. And yet, in verses 5-11 are all devoted to confessing: Daniel admits, we have sinned. We have not listened. We are ashamed. We ignored you, God.

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Are any of these statements true of Daniel? No, but also yes.

No, compared to the average Jew living in Jerusalem, Daniel lived differently. He was faithful and listening and paying attention to God. But could it be said that Daniel was sinless? No, we can’t quite go that far. Daniel knew that comparing himself to his contemporaries was a meaningless activity in pride. Daniel was humble…he knew all too well of his own sins. He knew that, from God perspective, he had no place to stand except in with the other sinners. So even though Daniel was more faithful than others, he can still, with all accuracy say that he too is a sinner against a holy God.

 Verse 13 is an admission that none of this should be surprising. “All this trouble came upon us, exactly as it was written in the Instruction of Moses.” It was all right there all along! This is actually old news! God, you are so faithful that you could actually be called courteous because our consequences were clearly laid out. We knew exactly what we were getting into. I think we would call that good parenting. He continues, “but we didn’t try to reconcile with the LORD our God by turing from our wrongdoing or by finding wisdom in your faithfulness.” In other words, we blew it! And now trouble is upon them, trouble that they deserve.

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Daniel says, “God has been right in every move he’s made.”

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Then Daniel says “But now Lord.”

 His feet are firmly planted in the present.

Daniel began by praising God for his awesome faithfulness, he admitted that they have done wrong, that they are getting exactly what was spelled out for them. H is mindful of all these past things, but presently Daniel says, “But now Lord…”

 But now Lord, please turn your raging anger away from Jerusalem.

Verse 17-18: READ Let me read that last line again.

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My friends, we love and serve a God of great compassion. Our God leans toward mercy. James 2:13 says that mercy triumphs over judgement.

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Is our God a righteous judge who brings down the gavel in sentencing? Yes, he is. Is our God a loving Father who heals the brokenhearted? Yes, he is that as well. Is God a split personality? Do we have to worry about which God we will interact with on a given day? No. God is not split, but he is both. A good Father disciplines with justice and a good father forgives with compassion. He deals with what is happening right now. Daniel knows this and even though God is just to bring punishment, Daniel asks for mercy anyway. He then closes his prayer in verse 19. (READ) In other words, this is your show God. You are in charge and you have put your own holy name on this project. You may have picked a lemon, but all the nations know that we are called by your name. What happens to us reflects on you Lord. And so by helping us and saving us from destruction, your name will then be attached to a great victory.

 But let me ask you this: Is God more interested in a successful PR campaign or is he more interested in the sate of our hearts? God wants your heart. I think about this as a father myself. Now, most of you know of my children. They are pretty good as far as kids go. I love them dearly. And it has happened more than once where we will be in a public place, like a restaurant,

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 and as we are getting prepared to leave someone will approach me and tell me how wonderful and well-behaved my kids were. Well that’s a pretty nice compliment and you know where my mind goes next? Golly gee, I must be one heck of a dad. I sure do look good right now. They are good kids aren’t they? I mean, how could they not be? Just look at who is raising them! Honestly, my heart goes right to pride. In those moments I don’t even really bother to give my wife any credit. But at the end of the day, I know my kids are not on this planet just to make me look good. In my heart of hearts I want them to love and serve the Lord. I want their hearts to belong to God.

 This is God’s desire as well. God saved the people from Egyptian bondage. He parted the Read Sea, he defeated the most powerful army on earth at the time. He had made a great name for himself! He could do it again. Yet, God’s priority is the heart of his people.

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And Daniel’s marvelous prayer is answered! Gabriel himself appears and speak directly with Daniel. That is very exciting, but the answer itself is not what Daniel had hoped. Gabriel reports that God’s people have continued to disobey…they have not repented and so this time of trial will be extended 7 times longer! That’s 490 years! So someone might look at this and conclude, “Well okay, what’s the point? It didn’t work. Why bother? Daniel’s prayer seems to have actually made things worse!”

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Well. I will grant you that prayer is not an effective way to accomplish what you want. It’s not about what you want and it never has been. Yet, in his prayer, Daniel echoes the Lord’s desire. When Daniel asks for God to relent and turn from his anger, God’s heart is there too. He is not sending Babylon to destroy his own people with some malicious gratification. His people’s behavior and sin have forced his hand.

 But Daniel has his heart set on the future. And he knows a good prayer speaks God’s will back to God. It expresses the heart of God. Charles Spurgeon said, “It is grand when our mouth is full of God’s word, for there is no word that can prevail with him like his own.” Daniel knew God’s word, but we are even more blessed than Daniel. Why? Because we can look to the clearest picture: Jesus on the cross and an empty tomb. God gives himself in love and ensures victory for his children. That is where our hearts lie…in this future victory.

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A good prayer is humble. It does not insist on its own way. It recognizes my proper place before God. It keeps my mind on the past and what I know to be true of God.

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A good prayer is honest. It acknowledges a true and accurate account of my current circumstances and tells God about it. It keeps my feet firmly planted in the present.

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A good prayer asks for the impossible. It sets my heart on the future. Israel has been desolated. They have no chance of military victory. God has already decreed this punishment. Daniel and his people are impossibly overpowered and out matched as well as unfaithful. But Daniel knows what the Apostle Paul knows. He knows that with God all things are possible and so the impossible outcome becomes the perfect prayer request.

We have learned so much from Daniel and the amazing life he lived. We have benefitted from his faithful example. Let’s learn from his prayer life too. With our minds on the past, we humble ourselves, with our feet in the present we confess on behalf of our country, our church, our family. And with our hearts set on the future, we speak out the heart of God and then we ask for impossibilities knowing the Jesus is coming in victory.

Amen.