

True Confession

Daniel 9:1-19

2017 marks the five hundredth anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. It was on October 31, 1517 that a German monk named Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg challenging the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church to answer the charges. In 1520, Martin Luther wrote an essay which he called "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church." What he meant was that forces and powers that were foreign to Christ and to his Word had captured the mind and heart of the church. She was in bondage to godless forces. Specifically in his day Luther saw these forces in the Roman Catholic Church. But are they any less at work in our day? John Piper writes this:

Millions of church-goers today think the way the world thinks. The simple assumptions that govern behavior and choices come more from what is absorbed from our culture than from the Word of God. The church shares the love affair of the world with prosperity and ease and self. Many groups of Christians are just not that different from the spirit of Babylon, even though the Lord says that we are aliens and exiles and that we are not to be conformed to this age. So, like Israel of old, much of God's church today is captive to godless forces.

... Much of the Christian movement today has become a desolation of disobedience and disunity and dishonor to the name of Christ. So the way Daniel prays for the desolation of his people is a pointer for how we can pray for the desolation of ours.

Last time we saw looked at the first two verses of Daniel 9. We said that verse 1 teaches that 1) **Effective prayer recognizes our circumstances in view of God's plan** (Dan. 9:1). Prayer is how we line ourselves up with the purposes of God. In verse 2 we said that 2) **Effective prayer is prompted by scripture** (Dan. 9:2). Daniel's prayer was prompted by reading the prophet Jeremiah. His prayer was saturated with scripture. When God's word abides in you, when it finds a home in your heart and in your mind, then you will pray effectively.

Today I want us to draw out of this passage some more principles concerning prayer. Specifically I want us to see in Daniel's prayer some elements of true confession. Daniel here is coming before the Lord acknowledging his sin and crying out for forgiveness, for cleansing, for restoration.

Most of Daniel's prayer here in chapter 9 is confession of sin. Confession means being truthful about God and about sin.

How does Daniel pray a prayer of confession of sin? What does true repentance look like?

First,

1. True Confession seeks the Lord with humility.

Evidently Daniel took prayer very seriously. Verse 3,

3 Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

“Then I set my face toward the Lord God.” In other words, he didn’t just take a passing nod, he fixed his gaze on the Lord God. There was a passion, there was a persistence. There was intensity and humility in his prayer.

Fasting means to be so serious about prayer that you don’t have time to eat. You get so focused on the Lord that food no longer matters. Wearing sackcloth meant putting aside his good clothes and putting on rough burlap, signaling his mourning over the sins of Israel. Sitting in ashes recalls the destruction of Jerusalem and declares his solidarity with his exiled brothers and sisters.

True prayer changes us. Prayer makes a difference with God when prayer makes a difference with us. If you want your prayers to change things, let them first change you—your habits, your schedule, your priorities, your daily routine, and your inward focus. When that happens, your prayers will be like arrows that hit their target in heaven.

In verse 4 Daniel wrote, **“And I prayed to the Lord my God, and made confession.”** Even though Daniel may have been one of the most godly people of his day, Daniel’s prayer is totally opposite from that of the Pharisee in Luke 18 who **“prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.’”** In true prayer there’s no place for self-confidence, there’s no place for self-seeking, there’s no place for self-righteousness. All of that is lost in true confession.

Daniel doesn’t see himself as better than others at all, in fact he sees himself in solidarity with everybody. Notice the pronouns that he uses in his prayer, throughout the prayer he says things like **“we have sinned”**(vs. 5, 8), **“to us belongs shame of face”** (Vs. 7, 8), **“we have rebelled”** (v. 9), **“We have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God”** (v. 10), **“We have not obeyed”** (vs. 10, 14), **“we have done wickedly”** (v. 15).

Daniel didn’t just put the blame on others. He knew that his sin and his wicked heart were part of the problem. Here was a man who understands that he is just a sinner among sinners. This is the true nature of brokenness. It doesn’t see itself as better than others, it sees itself as the same, if anything worse. True confession seeks the Lord with humility.

2. True Confession is specific about sin.

Confession is being truthful with God about our sin. It means recognizing sin as sin and calling it bad names, not soft names: things like wickedness and rebellion and wrong (v. 5) and treachery and shameful (v. 7) and disobedience (v. 10).

The issue is not admitting that we have just messed up and made our life miserable. The issue is admitting that there is something much worse than our misery, namely, the offended holiness and glory of God.

Listen to how Daniel specifically confesses their sin. Verse 5, **“we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments”**; verse 6, **“Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name...”**; verse 7, **“... because of the unfaithfulness which they have committed against You”**; verse 8, **“we have sinned against You”**; verse 9 **“we have rebelled against Him”**; verse 10, **“We have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in His laws, which He set before us by His servants the prophets”**; verse 11, **“Yes, all Israel has transgressed Your law, and has departed so as not to obey Your voice”**; verse 13, **“we have not made our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth”**; verse 15, **“we have sinned, we have done wickedly.”**

There is a difference between feeling miserable because sin has made our life miserable and feeling broken because our sin has offended the holiness of God and brought reproach on His name. True confession is calling sin, sin. 1John 1:9 says, **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us [our] sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** The word confess there means literally “to say the same.” Confession is saying the same thing about our sin that God says about it. It is agreeing with God concerning our sin.

3. True Confession accepts God’s discipline.

You see this element of confession first in verse 7,

7 O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us shame of face, as it is this day--to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those near and those far off in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of the unfaithfulness which they have committed against You.

Daniel accepts the fact that he and his people are in exile because God sent them there. The Lord drove them away to other countries because of their unfaithfulness.

Daniel expands on this thought in verses 11-14,

11 Yes, all Israel has transgressed Your law, and has departed so as not to obey Your voice; therefore the curse and the oath written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against Him.

12 And He has confirmed His words, which He spoke against us and against our judges who judged us, by bringing upon us a great disaster; for under the whole heaven such has never been done as what has been done to Jerusalem.

13 As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us; yet we have not made our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth.

14 Therefore the Lord has kept the disaster in mind, and brought it upon us; for the Lord our God is righteous in all the works which He does, though we have not obeyed His voice.

Daniel confesses that the trouble in which he and all Israel finds itself is because of the chastening discipline of God. True confession accepts responsibility for all the trouble that has come as a result of our sin.

God's discipline is remedial. His desire that people would turn from their sin and return to the God who loves them. Hebrews 12:6 says, "**For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.**" It is proof of our adoption as the children of God that He disciplines us when we sin. He does it to make us more holy, as in Hebrews 12:10-11, "... **but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it,**" (Heb. 12:11).

In true confession we seek the Lord with humility, we get specific about our sin, we accept the chastening of the Lord because of our sin, and finally:

4. True Confession appeals to the character of God.

Daniel is able to come to God in prayer and make this true confession because he knew his God. Look at verse 4,

4 And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said, "O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments,

Daniel bases his prayer of confession on who he knows God to be. Throughout his prayer Daniel uses two names for God, both translated Lord. You see them both in verse 4. First he says, "**And I prayed to the LORD my God.**" The LORD there is Yahweh, Jehovah. It is God's covenant name with His people that He revealed to Moses at the burning bush. The LORD my God is the "**I am that I am.**" Daniel recalls in verses 10-14 how the LORD gave them His law through Moses. He is the God who keeps His covenant of love with His people.

The second word, Lord, in verse 4 is *Adonai*, meaning sovereign Master, my authority, my Lord. It recognizes God's rightful sovereignty.

Daniel confesses that God is "**great and awesome**" (v. 4), that "**righteousness belongs to You**" (v. 7), "**Lord our God is righteous in all the works which He does**" (v. 14). Daniel recognizes God's holiness.

Look also at how he stresses God's mercy and love: verse 4, **"who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him"**; verse 9, **"To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness"**; verse 18, **"we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies."**

True confession recognizes that God is a holy God. He is completely righteous and set apart from sin. But the Lord is also full of mercy toward sinners. He loves and He forgives. We have a God who is willing to forgive, a God who is faithful, who has steadfast love and mercy, a God who is righteous and merciful and will forgive.

Daniel appeals to God for forgiveness and restoration for the sake of the Lord's name. Daniel is concerned for God's reputation, His name, His glory. In verse 15 Daniel prays, **"And now, O Lord our God, who brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and made Yourself a name..."**

He is saying "God, You showed Your great name when You brought us out of Egypt. And the whole world was saying, 'What a God is the God of Israel, He delivered His people from Pharaoh's great army and that was only the beginning. He brought them into the promised land and destroyed all their enemies.' There was no God like this God of the Israelites. But look now, God, what do You think people are saying about You now? That whole land of Israel and Judah was destroyed, all the people were taken captive, many were slaughtered. There is no temple and the city of Jerusalem is in shambles. God, Your name is on the line. It's because of our sins and our wickedness but we've become a reproach and Lord, Your name is defamed because of it." Verse 17,

17 Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate.

That's the point, do it for Your name God. Do it to put Your righteousness on display, do it to put Your mercy on display, do it to put Your grace on display, do it to put Your loving kindness and Your goodness and forgiveness on display. Do it for Your own sake.

Then listen to how the prayer comes to its climax in verses 18b–19:

18 O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies.

19 O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name."

Daniel appeals to God to forgive and restore for His own Name's sake. True confession appeals to God on the basis of His character, His name.

We are also those who are known by His name. And God has an infinite zeal for His own name. He will not let it be reproached and made a byword indefinitely. That is our deepest confidence. God is committed to God. God is committed with explosive passion to the glory of His name and the truth of His reputation.

I believe that Daniel's attitude is sorely lacking in our Christian churches today. A passionate concern for the name of God is sadly missing. The church has often made the name of Jesus an object of scorn by our duplicity—trying to go by the name Christian and yet marching to the drum of the world. So the world sees the name "Christian" as nothing radically different—perhaps a nice way to add a little component of spirituality to the other parts of life that basically stay the same. The name of God has been blasphemed among the nations because of us and many of us just go on like it's normal, like everything's okay.

Listen, it's not okay that our love affair with the world has caused the name of the Lord to be defamed.

True confession is based on the character of God. It is concerned for His name, His glory. So that's the essence of our prayer of true confession. We are called by Your name. We live by Your name. Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory. For Your name's sake, O Lord, save. For Your name's sake, revive. For Your name's sake purify and heal and empower your church, O Lord. For we are called by your name.

Prayer:

Father, we come to You now, confessing our sins and our unworthiness, confessing that we don't deserve anything, and all that You have given us is by your grace and mercy in Christ Jesus. Forgive us all of our sins. Cleanse us and wash us, that we might be an honor to Your name, and that we might be useful to the advancement of the Gospel and the extension of Your glorious Kingdom.

We pray for Your church. Lord, we look at the church and there is so much there that dishonors You. Your name is so often dragged down and dishonored by sin and indifference and shallowness. Lord, we ask that You would restore Your church, that You would transform the church into Your holy bride. God, we confess the sins of those who call themselves Christians. The sins of those who say they're at Your church. We ask, O God, that You would not allow Yourself to be dishonored, but that You would take action to glorify Yourself in the midst of Your church.

We pray, O God, that the Babylonian captivity of Your church would end, and that Your church would come forth freed from its idolatry, washed and cleansed and purified. Do it for the glory of Your name.

Father, glorify Yourself. Glorify Your Son, Jesus Christ. Glorify Your name in the church. This is our prayer of confession. We are utterly unworthy. We seek nothing for ourselves, but only for the glory of Your great name. For Christ's sake, Amen.