

Life Group Notes

Sunday 28th November 2021

Speaker: Andy McCullough

Title: Daniel: Powerlessness and Prayer

Passage: Daniel 9:1-24

1. Daniel was a man of prayer.

All throughout his story we have frequently seen him praying. In chapter 9, we have the privilege of a written-down, published and circulated prayer. The most important thing about Daniel was that he was a pray-er. As a dis-empowered, forcibly displaced, stateless person, part of a despised minority, all he can do is pray. Doing is overrated. Praying is underrated. When we work, our range of impact is the length of our arms. When we pray, our range of impact is the length of God's arms.

2. The prayer itself- what do we learn?

What is he praying about? Daniel has been reading Jeremiah 25, where Israel's exile to Babylon is predicted as 70 years. Now Babylon has been destroyed by the Persians, Daniel sees this as the trigger to pray for the restoration of Jerusalem.

Confession (4-6). Daniel confesses sin as the reason for the exile. You could say he is a victim: he was 15 or younger when it happened. But in terms of how Christians see the world, we are in a mess because we have sinned. In the UK, our hyper-individualism gets us confused about the Bible's idea of sin and consequence. Paul summarises the idea of these verses with his famous, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." People were made in the image of God – with something glorious and divine and eternal in us. But sin entered the world, bad choices and pain and evil were unleashed in the world, and they came from inside us!

Consequences (8-12). Daniel acknowledges three consequences of sin. **1. Shame:** the cold shoulder of God. **2. Separation:** Exile/ dislocation from the presence of God. **3. Stuff Happens:** The "calamity" of which these verses speak is the evil, pain and mess that is rife in the world, which entered through the door opened by sin.

Requests (16-19). Daniel makes three requests in light of these three consequences. **1. Redirection** ("turn away your anger"), begging the question – if wrath is turned away from Jerusalem, where does it go? The answer to stuff happening. **2. Radiance** ("Make your face shine") – demonstrate your intimacy, attention, involvement. The answer to separation. **3. Responsibility** ("we bear your name"). Our honour is bound up with your honour. The answer to shame.

3. The answer – bigger than Daniel imagined (20-24).

Gabriel brings an answer that is bigger than the restoration of the Jews to Jerusalem after 70 years. He speaks of the restoration of all people to the presence of God resolving the universal problem of sin after 70x7 years – ie a cosmic escalation to a cosmic answer for a cosmic problem. Because the return to Jerusalem happens (the following year) but only partial. The inclination to sin remains unremoved. The wrath of God is turned away but where does it go? All await Jesus. The Jewish story is a template or a paradigm of the bigger human story.

Joyce Baldwin writes that Gabriel "is announcing that God has found a way of forgiving sin without being untrue to his own righteousness. This assurance was what the prayer had been feeling after; it was the great longing expressed in the OT as a whole."

Three things that Daniel was praying for are ultimately fulfilled in Christ. **1. Radiance** ("Make your face shine" - (attention, involvement, intimacy) – solution to separation, is resolved once for all in the birth of Jesus (incarnation). **2. Redirection** ("turn away your anger and wrath") — solution to stuff happening, is resolved once for all in the death of Jesus (atonement). **3. Responsibility** ("we bear your name!") Solution to shame, is resolved once for all in the resurrection of Jesus, when a new human family bearing God's name is initiated.

Questions:

1. What does it mean to be a man/woman of prayer? What do you love about prayer?
2. Why is it important to confess sin? What is the importance of the truth that “all have sinned?”
3. In what ways are you aware of shame in your life?
4. Have you got “stuff happening” in your life/family/ situation?
5. Of the three requests – redirection, radiance and responsibility – which is the most meaningful to you, and why?
6. How does Jesus resolve the problem of sin?
7. What did you learn from this story and what are you going to do about it?