

Will the Exile Work?

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Preacher: Jonathan Gemmell

[0 : 00] But please do have a seat and let's pray together. Father God, we thank you so much for the God that you are, for the grace that you've shown, for the mercy you've poured out, for the price that it cost you in your Son, the Lord Jesus.

So Lord, I pray this time together gathering in your word would be useful to us, that we would hear you speak through your word, that we would leave clinging to your Son, the Lord Jesus, and we would do it all in the power of your wonderful Holy Spirit, who lives in us to conform us to his glorious image.

So bless us and help us, be with us, give us attentive minds, open hearts, malleable wills, and eyes ready to be fixed on Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Amen. So we're in Daniel's world. We're in the really tricky second half. Today we're going to focus predominantly in chapter 9. And the question I think that lies behind this chapter is, will the exile work?

I wonder, have you ever been to prison? Have you ever been to prison? I've been to prison over 40 times. But not as an offender, not in handcuffs or a jumpsuit.

[1 : 26] I've been to prison about 40 times, because when I was at university, I did some work in this place, Crag Inches Prison, to the south of Aberdeen in the district of Torrey. What we did in prison is, me and a load of mates from university, we went in to play football with the inmates.

It was prison rules. It was pretty brutal. I wish I had more than one pair of shin pads on at the time. But we would play football. We would get to know the guys. We would then sit around afterwards. We would share some testimonies, short talks from the Bible. We would drink Coke and eat Mars bars. And we all had a great time. And I remember one guy in particular called Harry.

Harry became a good friend. I think he was also a good friend to a lot of the prison staff. They saw him quite a lot. And I remember we were talking about the next week and who was free to play. And Harry said this to us, I won't be able to play next week.

I'm getting released. But I'll probably be able to play the week after. And sure enough, we missed him for a week.

[2 : 31] And then the next week, there he was in his Celtic top, beaming from ear to ear, ready to kick us up and down the park all over again.

It's a major issue, isn't it, in the criminal justice system. Do we send people to prison for correction, or do we just send them there for punishment?

Is it rehabilitation, or is it merely incarceration? Does prison work? Is it a suitable deterrent? Do people come out with changed lives and changed attitudes?

It's a big question that's going around in our political system at the moment. What is the purpose of prison? And I think a very similar question lies behind Daniel chapter 9.

Daniel chapter 9. Is it a real key period for Daniel and the people of Israel in Babylon? They've been in exile. It's not been a prison like Crag Inches, but it's kind of the same idea.

[3 : 34] On account of their sin, their repeated disobedience, their failure to honor God and worship Him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, God allowed them to be deported, to be exiled in the grip of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire.

And I don't think we truly appreciate the horror of this. That in God allowing His people to go into exile, God was kind of undoing what He had been doing for His people for the last thousand years. That He promised Abraham that you would have a land, that you would be my people and I would be your God, that you would be a blessing. And with the exile, it seems that everyone packs up, and that plan that God had been working out amongst His rebellious people goes back to the bottom of the pile.

So what we read in Daniel chapter 1 verses 1 and 2 about Jehoiachin being taken captive and people being exiled to Babylon is a national disgrace.

And people would wonder, why is this happening? So I think if we get that in our minds, that God's people have gone into exile as punishment, then I think we start to get a bit more of a handle and a bit more behind what's going on in chapter 9.

[4 : 56] So let's have a look at Daniel chapter 9, and just the first three verses as we see Daniel's preparation. In the first year of Darius, son of Xerxes, a Mede by descent who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom in the first year of his reign, 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 70 years.

So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting and in sackcloth and ashes. It's the first year of King Darius.

This happens in the same year that Daniel goes into the lion's den. We don't know whether this is before or after. And Daniel is reading his Bible.

He's reading his Bible and he's most probably reading something from Jeremiah, probably chapter 25 or chapter 29. And as he reads, he discovers what the plan is.

Jeremiah 29 puts it like this. This is what the Lord says. When 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place.

[6 : 16] For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you.

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you, declares the Lord, and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.

So Daniel's reading his Bible. As he reads his Bible, he learns of God's plans. As he learns of God's plans, it drives him to prayer. I wonder, does that happen in our lives?

That as we read of who God is, what he's done for us, does that drive us to prayer? Does our Bible reading fuel our prayer? Because it certainly seems to work in Daniel's life and he's all the better and stronger for it.

So when Daniel's reading Jeremiah, he hears of this 70 years. And the thing for Daniel is these 70 years are nearly running out.

[7 : 24] Daniel is exiled in about 605 BC. The first year of King Darius is about 539 BC. Using my calculator this week, I realized that this is the 66th year of a 70-year exile.

They're nearly finished. And when Daniel realizes that, he prays. Daniel's been a remarkable man of prayer. He prays in chapter 2 earnestly because his very life depends on him being able to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

He prayed after he got the interpretation of the dream, giving thanks to God that he was the God who reveals mysteries. In chapter 6, we learn that he repeatedly, habitually, perpetually set aside three times a day for prescribed prayers to seek his God.

Day after day, month after month, year after year, decade after decade for 66 years during his exile in Babylon.

And look at him, he's earnest. This isn't sitting down for a quiet time with a cup of tea and your slippers on. He does it with prayer and petition in fasting and in sackcloth and ashes.

[8 : 44] It is an appropriate physical expression of the attitude he comes to God with. He has come to do real business with the Lord.

This isn't ticking off the checklist of the day. Oh, I should pray today. Check. This is an emergency prayer offered in the heat of the moment. This is a deliberate act to come before God for prayers and petitions with a penitent heart.

We see sackcloth and ashes in Nineveh. At the preaching of Jonah when all the people of Nineveh repent. We see it in Esther's time before Esther goes before the king.

They all put on sackcloth and ashes. So their physical expression is a mark of their earnestness.

And I guess the question is, why then, if they're nearly home, does Daniel spend so much of the chapter praying a prayer of confession?

Surely he would be singing, Daniel's coming home. He's coming home. He's coming home. Daniel's coming home. That's what we would do. It's nearly over. The time is nearly through.

[9 : 54] But why does he spend so much time in confession? Well, Leviticus 26, I think. Moses foreshadowing the exile. This is what it says.

If you still do not listen to me, says God, I will turn your cities into ruins and lay waste your sanctuaries. And I will take no delight in the pleasing aroma of your offerings.

I myself will lay waste the land so that your enemies who live there will be appalled. I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste and your cities will lie in ruins.

Then a little bit further down. But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors, their unfaithfulness and their hostility towards me, which made me hostile towards them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies.

I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham. And I will remember the land. But Moses says, exile is coming all that time before.

[11 : 03] And he says, if they confess their sins, seek me with all their heart. I'll remember them and bring them back. So in chapter 9, there is real excitement about the return.

Exile has been really tough. And yet Psalm 137, And by the rivers of Babylon, we sat down and wept when we remember Zion. This has been a difficult stint.

There's real excitement about getting home. But there's real apprehension. Will God's people have learnt their lesson from exile? If sin caused their exile in the first place, then are they going back as different people?

Or will the cycle just start all over again like Harry? Goes to prison, comes out, goes to prison, comes out. Will it be exile, sin, and then exile again? That's what Daniel is worried about.

And so we see him in chapter 4, praying. And so let us read this together. I've written it out for you. What I want you to do is all read the green bits.

[12 : 04] The green bold bits. The bits about sin, as it so happens. Lord, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments.

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 ancestors, and to all the people of the land.

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

We and our kings, our princes, and our ancestors are covered with shame. Lord, 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 and prophets. All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you.

[13 : 25] 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 word spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing on 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 on 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 on us, for the Lord our God is righteous in everything he does, yet we have not obeyed him. Now, 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.

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 ancestors have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn.

[14 : 44] to all those around us. It's pretty powerful stuff, isn't it? He's not playing at that. He's not whizzing through the adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication that we so regularly structure our prayers around.

And notice that it's confession in two directions. It is confession about God's goodness, his rightness, his character, and it is confession about their wrongness, how far they've fallen, how they have not only sinned, but they have willfully refused to obey.

They've not done this in ignorance, they've done it in arrogance. And so they say things like verse 7, Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame.

You are righteous, we are covered with shame. And that's the truth that lies at the very centre of the Bible.

That God is good and righteous. And that we, on account of our sin, willfully rebelling against him, are covered with shame. And until we get that, until we get the depth of our sin, we will never turn to God as a saviour.

[16:09] Until we get that before a holy God, we have fallen so short, and are covered in so much shame. Until we pray prayers like Daniel, God can do nothing to help us.

You are righteous, and we are covered with shame. The very essence of Christianity is that it is a rescue religion. It is a religion where God rescues us.

Yet again, the kids talk falls so perfectly in line. Why does God send Moses to rescue his people from Egypt?

Daniel knows that the exile was thoroughly deserved, but he is worried that the 70 years won't have worked. They may get home, but they are still just as sinful, so they won't be home for good.

And Daniel takes time to contemplate his sin. It's quite a long time in the chapter to pray. It's a significant proportion where he declares his sin and the sin of his people.

[17:21] He is not dodging it. He is owning it. This is Daniel, who seemingly is the holiest guy on the planet at the time.

He has been this model, this example of what holiness looks like. And he is here on his knees in sackcloth and ashes and fasting, saying, I failed and we failed.

Face down, broken on the floor on account of his sin, pleading to God. Not brushing over it, not making excuses, saying, we have sinned.

And it's got to be something that we cultivate in our hearts, that we own our sin. That as we own our sin in relation to God's holiness, it will cultivate a humility, a dependence, and a thankfulness for the Lord Jesus.

Until we realize that our sin is our biggest problem, we will never cling to Jesus, our final answer.

Jesus says, Mark chapter 2, it is not the healthy who need a doctor.

[18:33] There's no one queuing up at the Brunsfield doctor surgery who is in fighting fit health. It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

I've not come to call the righteous, but sinners. Until we own the fact that we are sinners covered in shame, we will always be slow to come to Jesus and ask for help.

Until we realize we're very lost, we won't ever come to the one who finds us. Until we realize we're eternally exiled from God's presence, we'll never come to Jesus in order that we'll come home.

It's not just a first time thing. Daniel is not an unbeliever. He is a true Christian who is serious about his sin, who comes to God pleading for help.

If we turn to Jesus, then everything we have done is given to Jesus and everything he has done is given to us. That one of the beautiful things about the gospel is that I come as a sinner and Jesus comes as a savior.

[19:37] And as I come to Jesus, he takes my sin and gives me his salvation. This is all over the New Testament. There's some wonderful verses. 2 Corinthians 5, 21.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. He himself, Jesus, bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.

By his wounds you have been healed. If we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

My fear for myself and my fear for our church is we're all too comfortable with our sin. We're all too ready to keep on making the same mistakes day in, day out and never take it seriously.

And yet the Bible says we are to war against our sin. We are to hate our sin. We are to put off the old man and put on the new self. That we are to be growing in holiness.

[20:46] And I think for myself and maybe some here we're all too readily defeated by sin and just keep on going in the same rut doing the same thing.

And surely the first way to wage war against sin is to own it. And to confess it to God. And if we have trouble then that's time to bring in some accountability and invite others.

Because until we get serious about sin we will never be defeating it in our lives. And that is one thing that we see loud and clear from Daniel that he is serious about his sin and is determined to defeat it.

Because he knows his very life depends on it. And whether he'll be safely home or not. Second thing is Daniel's confession. Third Daniel's petition.

This comes in the end of the chapter. The end of the prayer. Now 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. [21 : 47] We have sinned. We have done wrong. 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 ancestors have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around you.

Now our God hear the prayers and petitions of your servant for your sake Lord. Look with favour on your desolate sanctuary. Give ear our 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. Lord listen Lord forgive Lord hear and act.

For your sake my God do not delay because your city and your people bear your name. See how God focused the petitioners.

Daniel is not there saying God we have done our time it is time to let us out. God I have been so good for you in Babylon surely you could just let me go home. His concern is for God's glory and God's reputation.

[22 : 59] It is your city your holy hill it is your people the people that bear your name it is your reputation God that we want to be seen by the whole world so would you bring us home to show that you're not only a right and good God who punishes his people but you are a saving God who is merciful and forgiving and who will bring them home and rescue.

It is a God's glory focused prayer. This isn't Daniel coming with a shopping list would you do that would you give me that would you sort that out he's saying God would you glorify your name and that's massive that is massive for me when I look at my own prayer life and how me centered it so readily becomes.

Daniel's pleading because God has attached his name graciously to his people to Jerusalem and to the temple and he says God restore your glory and let everyone see it.

and see how he comes verse 18 this is an incredible verse one that I think we could keep right in the forefront of our minds as we pray we do not make requests of you because we are righteous we're not coming to cash in our good things we have no right to request anything but we come humbly before you because you God are great in mercy that would revolutionize our prayer lives if we don't come as dependent children who have kind of earned our way God I did five quiet times this week it's now time for the blessing it's not a slot machine we don't make these requests because we are righteous but because of your great mercy and these short statements Lord listen Lord forgive Lord hear and act God you're in charge you're the

Lord you're the creator I am the creature you're the you're the boss all the stuff that I've learnt through so far being in Babylon is that you're the boss and so I'm coming to say listen forgive hear and act will it work though have God's people been reformed will they be home for good when they get back from Babylon well let's see God's reaction verse 20 while I was speaking and praying confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the Lord my God for his holy hill while I was still in prayer Gabriel the man I had seen in the earlier vision of chapter 8 came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice he instructed me and said to me Daniel I have now come to give you insight and understanding as soon as you began to pray a word went out which I have come to tell you for you are highly esteemed therefore consider the word and understand the vision this is such an encouragement to pray I think before we get into all the weeks and what it means

[26 : 12] I think there's some real gold to encourage us in these three verses I remember I had coffee with Fraser last Friday and his watch was still on Boston time which was slightly unhelpful as I did need to know what the time was and had no idea what the time difference was that was because Fraser had been in Boston recently Daniel has been in Babylon for 66 years and yet he's still on Jerusalem time do you see that about the time of the evening sacrifice he is in Babylon but

he's definitely not of Babylon he is still holy God it's great isn't it God is so infected his vision and his life that he runs his whole life depending on God verse 23 as soon as you began to pray

God wasn't even waiting for Daniel to finish his prayer before he sent the answer I just get the sense from this that God is so eager to hear and answer our prayers he's like in the starting blocks eager to hear desperate to hear from his people longing that we would turn to him and pray there seems to be a more eagerness in God to hear our prayers than there are in his people to be eager to pray I think that is wonderful if we could grasp that that God is eager to hear our prayers he's not just tolerating us he's not just like oh there goes John again he needs some help but he is eager as soon as soon as you started to pray a word went out if that doesn't put a bit of fuel and energy into our prayer lives I don't know what will and then look what he says end of verse 23 as soon as you began to pray a word went out which I have come to tell you for you are highly esteemed that God highly esteems

Daniel that Daniel has been in Babylon for 66 years loads of what he's done has been behind the scenes as far as we know we've only got details of a few days of his life and yet throughout it all he has been consistent he has been loving God he has been pursuing holiness he has been prayerfully inclined and God says you are highly esteemed because I've seen it all it's an encouragement isn't it to do stuff behind the scenes and then we get this vision this vision that seems that more people have written about than you could ever imagine no one's very clear I'm not very clear this is the blind leading the blind I feel like I'm leading you all across a frozen lake where the ice is very thin and some of us stand every chance of falling in but this is what I've gleaned so far God's solution let's read it let's read verse 24 first seventy sevens are decreed for your people in your holy city to finish transgression to put an end to sin to atone for wickedness to bring in everlasting righteousness to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place I think that is the summary of what is to come that God says this is what will happen Daniel is worried that the exile won't be what he wants it to be and they'll be back in exile and God says actually I'm working on a far longer time period it is not now we're home after seventy years but he says seventy seven sometimes translated seventy weeks I am working on a far longer time scale than than you and I know you haven't changed so it is going to be me who's going to do these things I'm going to finish transgression I am going to put an end to sin I'm going to atone for wickedness I'm going to bring in everlasting righteousness I'm going to seal up vision and prophecy which it takes to mean fulfill it all so there's no more mystery and I'm going to anoint the most holy place this is what God will ultimately do all the things that caused God's people to go into exile he will bring an end to he will do it himself it'll be a gracious act some of it has been done in the Lord Jesus that we'll see that the penalty for sin was conquered by the Lord Jesus but transgression and sin and wickedness still is prevalent he will bring in everlasting righteousness that'll be a perfect kingdom where God rules and reigns forever he will seal up vision and prophecy that everything will be clear it will no longer be looking in a mirror dimly it will be seeing face to face and to anoint the most holy place which I take is the ultimate end of what the temple was meant to be God dwelling in the middle of his people not symbolically but forever forever it's a wonderful vision and then we get the weeks which you know I think that's the main thing and the plain thing this is what I've got we can disagree at the door and fight afterwards if necessary not to seven weeks hope returns seven to 62 weeks the city is rebuilt but in distressing times after 62 weeks [32 : 02] Messiah is killed the anointed one will be put to death and we'll have nothing the city will then be destroyed the final week there'll be opposition distress difficulty this ruler will rise he will make a covenant pulling people away from God and then in the end there'll be an end of sin an end of God's enemies and he will rule and reign all the things that he promises to do in verse 24 so Daniel is worried he says God will it work will the exile mean that we're finally home and God says no I am working on a far longer time scale you thought 70 years was enough I'm talking about 70 sets of seven however long they are and then you'll finally be home and safe forever and I will ultimately be your God face to face and you will be my people in perfect obedience and you will be in the place that I'm establishing forever not because you were righteous but because

God is great in mercy and now a little bit further along than Daniel was we see the true depth of that mercy as God would enact his plan to send his only son to live a perfect life we failed to live the only man who didn't need to pray Daniel's prayer who never turned away who always obeyed God even to the point of giving up his life on a cross so that we who have disobeyed can be treated as those who always obeyed and those who deserve to be exiled forever can be welcomed in God's

