

February 12, 2012

## *Extraordinary Prayer and...Fasting*

Daniel 9:1 – 19

My conviction is that the church needs a season of extraordinary prayer. We talked about this a couple of weeks ago, but I really didn't finish what we began, so we'll try and do that today. Throughout history we tend to see a pattern with the people of God. They are continually falling into periods of spiritual stagnation, followed by vital renewal. Initially there is a wandering away from God that leads to a cultural accommodation of the philosophy and practices of the surrounding culture. Things get really bad. Then we see a collective turning back to God, the raising up of new leaders and a "covenant renewal," a restoration of spiritual vision and vitality. Over and over we read, "**Then the people cried out to the Lord.**" '**Revive us O Lord**' becomes the prayer of the church.

And although as we look at the seasons of revival throughout the Bible and in church history they are not identical in practice or form, there is one thing that always precedes revival and one thing that is always present in revival – **it's prayer**. It is the only thing that is always present in every revival. Some revivals were characterized by extended times of corporate singing, like the Welsh revival. Some were characterized by the Pentecostal phenomenon – speaking in tongues, like Azusa Street. Some were characterized by powerful preaching, as in the Great Awakening with men like Wesley and Edwards and Whitefield. But in all accounts of revival in the Bible and in church history, **it is extraordinary, corporate, persevering, repentant prayer** that marks each one. It is prayer, not for personal needs, **but for the presence and reality of God among his people**.

There is a collective sense among the people of God that what they need is the manifest presence and power of God among them. There is admission of the fact that the church has ceased to be salt and light in the world. There is acknowledgment that those who ought to be able to speak truth and love and life into the culture have become clanging cymbals and sounding brass. We recognize that we are objects of derision, not emulation. We have become powerless to be a seasoning influence in the world – our light is a flickering candle hidden under a bushel and does not light our way, much less illuminate the world. If you look inside many of our churches, what you see is a reflection of the world. And there rises up a collective cry for God to revive His church in extraordinary prayer.

**Extraordinary prayer is a heart-cry from people who are desperate for God.** It is prayer that takes you out of the realm of routine and ordinary duties. It is prayer that says to God, '*I want to see Your power and Your presence in my life so much that I'm willing to go to any lengths to get it*'. Extraordinary prayer takes you outside the camp – outside the routine – into something special. We saw last time, when the relationship between God and His people had been broken by the golden calf incident that Moses built a tent outside the camp where Moses and anyone who really wanted God, really wanted the presence of God, would go to pray. And we saw that there were three main characteristics of this kind of prayer. **Extraordinary prayer is corporate, is persistent, and it is repentant.**

**It is corporate prayer.** It is the church praying for Him to come in and restore the church and demonstrate His power and glory among the nations. It begins with individuals – Isaiah says that he will pray: *until her righteousness goes forth like brightness, and her salvation like a torch that is burning*. Isaiah 62:1b – 2 In other words he will set himself to pray until the righteousness of the people of God shines like a torch in the land. He will pray until the testimony of God is once again demonstrated in the people of God. *The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; and you will be called by a new name which the mouth of the LORD will designate*. Isaiah 62:3 And then he moves to corporate prayer for the same thing: *take no rest for yourselves and give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth*. Isaiah 62:6-7 In other words, 'Join me in this – pray with me for this – let's storm heaven together until we see this happening'.

**Extraordinary prayer is persistent prayer.** Isaiah says: *On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; all day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the LORD, take no rest for yourselves and give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth*. Isaiah 62:6-7 It is the nagging prayer of the widow who wants justice from the judge. It is the prayer of the man who won't stop knocking on the door of his neighbor. It is Abraham making a nuisance of himself with the Lord as he pleads for Sodom and Gomorrah. It is a weary, broken Jacob holding on to God and not letting go until he gets the blessing. It is doing what Martin Lloyd-Jones says: '**Give Him no rest. Give yourself no rest. Keep on. Bombard God. Bombard heaven until the answers come**'. Or what Thomas Goodwin says, '**Sue Him for it – sue Him for it**'.

Because we are not trying to persuade God to do something He is unwilling to do. On the contrary – we pray persistently **because** God says that He wants to do something. We read in Ezekiel last time that God told His people that He was going to give them a new heart and put a new spirit within them and save them from all their uncleanness. He promises to revive His people and transform all the devastation caused by their sin. He will do this, He says, for His name's sake and for a testimony to the nations of His saving power. And then He says, ***This also I will let the house of Israel ask Me to do for them.*** Ezekiel 36:37a In other words God says, ***'I will revive My people so that My name will once again be holy in the earth – BUT they must ask for it'***. That is, the means God uses to carry out His will of reviving His people so that they become a blessing to the nations is prayer. Pray for this, ask for this, bombard heaven for this, the Lord says – because this is what I want to do.

**And extraordinary prayer is repentant prayer.** It is characterized by repentance over the realization of our lack of love; over our sorrow at the absence of joy; when we see that we have no passion to see the lost come to Christ; it is when we come to the recognition that we have little appetite for the things of God – but a big appetite for a lot of other things. Renewal always begins with a deep conviction of sin and moves to a sense of wonder and enjoyment of grace and love. The deeper you feel your sin-debt, the more value you place on the wonder of the payment. As John Newton wrote, ***‘T’was grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved.*** It is a gospel-based repentance. A repentance that is gospel-based is essential. Without reference to the gospel, our hearts would repent out of fear of the consequences and God’s rejection. But the gospel leads us to repent because Jesus died for our sins so we would not be rejected. **Legalistic remorse says, “I broke God’s rules,” while real repentance says, “I broke God’s heart.”**

Revival seems to sweep in on the heels of repentant prayer. Tim Keller relates the following story of revival in Korea around the turn of the century. In 1900, Christianity in Korea was still very small, maybe 4 tenths of one percent of the population. But in 1903 in the city of Wonsan, there was a Canadian missionary, R. A. Hardie, who was doing some biblical research on the subject of prayer. He came upon Luke 11:13: ***‘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!’*** The Spirit of God deeply convicted him that his missionary work had been motivated by a desire to prove himself to others and God; that he had not based it on grace, prayer, and the Holy Spirit. Instead of faith in Christ’s justification, he was seeking to justify himself, and this had led to a lack of joy, prayer, and power. He gave this testimony to a Korean congregation, publicly repenting of his pride, hardness of heart, and lack of faith in Christ. This was electrifying in a largely Confucian culture where losing face was considered unthinkable. The people began to repent, pray, and seek the Holy Spirit in their midst. Awakening spread in and around the region of Wonsan and the churches began to grow.

As a result of this growing awakening, in 1907 in the city of Pyongyang, 1,500 people gathered for a conference. The preacher concluded the sermon and called for prayer, encouraging them to pray aloud if they wished. One observer testified that ***‘The whole audience began to pray out loud and in unison. Suddenly they burst into a roar of prayer as people were feeling a strong urge to prayer. The prayer that sounded like the falling of many waters captivated the whole congregation’***. William Blair, a Presbyterian missionary, was present and later described the scene: “The whole audience would break out into audible prayer, and the effect of that audience of hundreds of men praying together in audible prayer was something indescribable. Again, after another confession, they would break out into uncontrollable weeping and we would all weep together. We couldn’t help it. And so the meeting went on until 2 a.m., with confession of sin and weeping and praying. ...We had prayed to God for an outpouring of His Holy Spirit upon the people and it had come’.

William Blair says that after the week was over: ‘The Christians returned to their homes, taking the revival fire with them. It spread to practically every church. Schools canceled classes for days while students wept out their wrong doings together. We had our hearts torn again and again by the return of little articles and money that had been taken from us over the years. All through the city people were going from house to house, confessing wrongs, returning stolen property, not only to Christians but to heathens. A Chinese merchant was astounded to have a Christian walk in and pay him a large sum of money he had obtained unjustly years before. The whole city was stirred. The cry went out over the city until the heathen were in consternation’. This began the long march of Christianity through Korean society and culture over the last 100 years. Today Christians comprise nearly fifty percent of the population.

**Confession and repentance are a hallmark of extraordinary prayer.** In the passage we read this morning, we see Daniel engaged in some extraordinary prayer. It wasn't just routine stuff – it was outside the camp kind of prayer. *In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans-- in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking Him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.* Daniel 9:1-3 Daniel had been in the word and had probably read this passage many times before, but at this moment it seemed to leap out at him: *I... perceived in the books the number of years that... must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.* **And his response was to pray and fast for the accomplishing of God's will.**

The situation in Daniel's time was that the people of God were held captive by a foreign, godless power because they had forsaken God and turned away from Him as a nation. Daniel mentions this in verse 11 and again in verse 13 of His prayer: *All Israel has transgressed Your law and turned aside, refusing to obey Your voice. And the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against Him...As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us; yet we have not entreated the favor of the LORD our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by Your truth.* I would say we have a similar situation in the church today. It is tempting to apply this to the state of our nation today, and I do believe we can. However, the slow slide into moral and spiritual decadence in our nation has happened in full view of the Church in America – and it is the church, the people of God, that God always seems to hold accountable. In 1520, Martin Luther wrote a treatise which he called **The Babylonian Captivity of the Church** in which he compared the Jewish captivity centuries earlier to the condition of the church in his day. He maintained that the church had been invaded by powers foreign to Christ and His word that had captured the hearts and minds of the people and the church was in a kind of Babylonian bondage.

And I believe that is the situation in much of the church today. Materialism, moral relativism and moral failure, preaching that focuses on health, wealth, and success, messages designed to make you feel good, concern over political correctness, and a post-modern mindset that echoes what the world says all have crept into the church and captured the minds and hearts of God's people. A large majority of the church-goers today think the way the world thinks and acts the way the world acts, and viewed from outside – there seems to be no difference. In its headlong pursuit to be relevant – the church has lost its savor and really doesn't impact the culture around it the way perhaps it once did. Several times Daniel mentions a deep sense of shame that the people of God feel because of their condition, and he prays confessing and repenting: *To You, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, as at this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which You have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against You. To us, O LORD, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against You.* Daniel 9:7-8

And I would say that in the church, all those who have not embraced the world into the church, who consciously fight against its influence in their homes and lives and churches, nevertheless feel this shame because we know the church ought to be different. Because we know that the church ought to be living as strangers and aliens, citizens of heaven, not of earth – because we cannot pray as we once did in our schools or read and teach God's word there, and the church did not stand up and fight the godless forces that made those changes – because divorce is as common in the church as out of it – because abortion has been institutionalized in our society and many Christians think it is okay – because homosexuality is a choice and a lifestyle and not a sin and has been welcomed into many congregations – because God's picture has been ripped apart as men marry men and women marry women, or buildings. Because of this, because it is not just society at large that embraces this but increasingly the church – we have a deep sense of shame.

As a result, the people of God in Daniel's day had become a byword and God was mocked: *because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people have become a byword among all who are around us.* Daniel 9:16b A byword is a disparaging or abusive word or phrase or even a proverb that speaks scornfully or reproachfully about someone or something. It meant that the nations looked at Israel and laughed at God – they mocked Israel's God. I believe that is the way it is with the church and the world today. Just watch any Hollywood movie or network television production that includes a pastor, priest or some reference to the church and what you get is derision and scorn and mocking. When is the last time the pastor or the Christian was the hero? And that in large part is due to the fact that the church no longer reflects the glory of the Lord because it reflects the world. We have made the name of Christ an object of scorn.

So what shall we do? I believe we should do what the people of God have always done when they have seen the degradation of the church and the absence of the manifest presence of God among them – **we need to go outside the camp** – we need to set ourselves to seasons of extraordinary prayer and fasting. Prayer with fasting says to God '***This much, O Lord we want to hear from heaven. This much O Lord, we want to see Your mighty hand move in our lives and in the world around us – to see Your kingdom come and Your will be done – right here, right now!***' I believe that if the church of God sets herself to seasons of extraordinary prayer and fasting we will see God move in ways we never imagined – in our lives, in the lives of those for whom we pray – in our communities – in our nation and in the world. So how should we pray?

First we **pray according to the word of God**. That is where Daniel began and I believe that is where we should begin. *I, Daniel, perceived in the books*. When Daniel got into the word – his heart got burdened for extraordinary prayer and fasting. Daniel's prayer started with the word of God and it was saturated with the word – sentence after sentence comes right from the text, and the books of Deuteronomy, Exodus, Psalms and Jeremiah are either alluded to or quoted outright. His prayer overflows with truth because it overflows with the word. What has God said to His people? *"Yet even now," declares the LORD, "Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments." Now return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in loving kindness and relenting of evil.*" Joel 2:12-13 *"Sow with a view to righteousness, reap in accordance with kindness; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD until He comes to rain righteousness on you."* Hosea 10:12 *"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."* Habakkuk 2:14

Secondly, **we pray confessing our sin**. Daniel spends a lot of time confessing the sin of his people: *I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep His commandments, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from Your commandments and rules. 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.* Daniel 9:4-6 This is simply to speak the truth about our condition – not to soft soap the issue. It means agreeing with God about our wickedness, rebellion and treachery and disobedience. It means owning the shame. It also means recognizing God's righteousness and His mercy and forgiveness. It means that we have a sense of brokenness and remorse and guilt before God – recognizing that our sin has not only offended God but brought reproach on His name and the nations mock Him because of us.

Thirdly **we pray remembering the mercy and goodness of God**. *And now, O Lord our God, who brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and have made a name for Yourself, as at this day, we have sinned, we have done wickedly. "O Lord, according to all Your righteous acts, let Your anger and Your wrath turn away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy hill,* Daniel 9:15-16a It reminds and assures us that if God saved a disobedient and rebellious people once at the Red Sea, He can and will do it again. **Remembering the past mercies and goodness of God toward His people will motivate and sustain prayers for His people in the present.** This is why I love to read historical accounts of the mercy and goodness of God among the nations. This is why it is important to continue to recount the mercy of God in revivals in the past.

Finally, **we pray appealing to God's passion for His own glory**. Listen to Daniel: *Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for Your own sake, O Lord, make Your face to shine upon Your sanctuary, which is desolate. O my God, incline Your ear and hear. Open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by Your name. For we do not present our pleas before You because of our righteousness, but because of Your great mercy. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for Your own sake, O my God, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name.*" Daniel 9:17-19 God's people have God's name, and their ground of righteousness is not theirs but His. And because God has a passion for His own glory, He will not let His name be reproached and made a byword forever. But He will act, He will move, He will thunder from on high when His people who are called by His name, humble themselves with prayers and fastings to see His kingdom come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Who knows what God might do through a church given to extraordinary prayer and fasting for His kingdom to come and His will to be done?

*Our gracious heavenly Father,*

*Grant us to humble ourselves and pray, to seek Your face and turn from our sinful ways. We have sinned against You, O Lord, and we have become powerless to be a seasoning influence in the world. We have not loved You with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Open Your eyes and see our desperate situation, our coldness of heart and apathy toward prayer and the things of God and forgive us. To You O Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness. O God, incline Your ear and hear. Pour out on Your people the spirit of grace and supplication for Your Name's sake and Your glory. Ignite a burning passion for Your kingdom to come and Your will to be done. What we desire is for Your manifest power and presence to be displayed in and through us. For we do not present our petitions before You because of our righteousness, but because of Your great mercy. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for Your own sake, O my God, because of Your glory and Your people who are called by Your name, we pray in the precious and powerful name of Christ Jesus our Lord, Amen.*