

# Elements of True Prayer

## Examining the Prayer of Daniel- Part 7

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Tuesday October 27, 2009

### Daniel 9:1-19

**1** In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans;

**2** In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

**3** And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:

**4** And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments;

**5** We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments:

**6** Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

**7** O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee.

**8** O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee.

**9** To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him;

**10** Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

**11** Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him.

**12** And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem.

**13** As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth.

**14** Therefore hath the LORD watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the LORD our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice.

**15** And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly.

**16** O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us.

**17** Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake.

**18** O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies.

**19** O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.

So here Daniel prays and fasts and repents- not only for the people of God- but also for himself. And as this man fervently and effectually prays- we see eight different elements of true intercessory prayer emerging and flowing out of this marvelous prayer. Now these eight elements are not *explicitly* taught here in **Daniel 9**- but they are *implicitly* found here. They are not the *purpose* of the prayer- yet they become, for us, a very good purpose- because they help us to see what is included in true intercessory prayer:

True Prayer is:

1. Generated by the Word of God
2. Grounded in God's Will
3. Characterized by Fervency
4. Realized Through Self Denial
5. Identified With God's People
6. Strengthened Through the Confession of Sin
7. Dependant on God's Character
8. Completed in God's Glory

Now in previous studies- we have already seen that true intercessory prayer is generated by the Word of God; Grounded in God's Will; and Characterized by Fervency. And last week -we began to see that True Prayer is realized in Self Denial and we need to go further into that tonight.

#### **4. True Prayer is Realized Through Self Denial- Part 2- The Connection Between Prayer and Fasting**

### **Daniel 9:3**

**And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:**

After Daniel studied the Book of Jeremiah and knew that it was God's Will to deliver the Children of Israel out of their Babylonian bondage- he began to pray and along with his prayer- Daniel fasted.

As you may remember- I called us as a Church to join with me in fasting one day a week (Tuesdays ) through the month of December. And in doing this- we join hundreds of thousands of other believers from around the world in the Biblical discipline of fasting. For you- fasting may be new. But for the Christian Church throughout its 2,000 year old history- fasting is not new.

### **Fasting in the History of the Church**

In the *Didache*- a manual of Church instruction from near the end of the first century- it says,

"Let not your fasts be with the hypocrites, for they fast on Mondays and Thursdays, but do your fast on Wednesdays and Fridays." (Didache 7:1)

The issue of which day to fast is not important for us- but the question of whether the Christian Church- from its earliest days- encouraged believers to fast? And the answer to that question is clearly, "Yes!" In other words- the early Church sought to distance itself of the *emptiness* of ritualistic fasting without losing the *value* of the practice itself.

Epiphanius- a Bishop in Italy in the fifth century, said,

"Who among us does not know that fasting is observed by Christians throughout the world?"

John Calvin, the great Reformer of the 16th century, said,

"Let us say something about fasting, because many, for want of knowing its usefulness, undervalue its necessity, and some reject it as almost superfluous; while, on the other hand where the use of it is not well understood, it easily degenerates into superstition. Holy and legitimate fasting is directed to three ends; for we practice it either as a restraint on the flesh, to preserve it from licentiousness, or as a preparation for prayers and pious meditations, or as a testimony of our humiliation in the presence of God when we are desirous of confessing our guilt before him." (*Institutes*, IV.12, 14, 15)

Martin Luther wrote,

"Of fasting I say this: It is right to fast frequently in order to subdue and control the body. For when the stomach is full, the body does not serve for preaching, for praying, or studying, or for doing anything else that is good. Under such circumstances God's Word cannot remain. But one should not fast with a view to meriting something by it as by a good work."

In more recent times- the Evangelical Church in South Korea has taught the rest of the world a lesson in prayer and fasting. The first Protestant Church was planted in Korea in 1884. One hundred years later there were 30,000 Churches. That's an average of 300 new churches a year for 100 years. Today Evangelicals comprise about 30% of the population of Korea. God has used many means to do this great work. One of them is a recovery not just of dynamic prayer, but of fasting-prayer. In the OMS (Overseas Missionary Society) Churches alone more than 20,000 people have completed a 40-day fast—usually at one of their "prayer houses" in the mountains.

## **A Call to Fast**

God has confirmed in my own experience the value of fasting in getting long-prayed-for breakthroughs. I believe that if we seek the Lord with the hunger of fasting- there will be many more such breakthroughs that we long for. Is there something you have been praying for a long time? Is there an unbeliever you would like God to awaken to spiritual things? Is there a broken relationship you would like God to reconcile? Is there a perplexity of direction on the horizon of your life? I believe that God is calling us to rediscover the place of fasting in appropriating his power.

I suggested a few months ago that as a Church- as many as could or would- that we join in with Daniel and fast corporately as a Church for 24 hours- skipping breakfast and lunch each Tuesday. Thus we would not eat between supper Monday and supper Tuesday. Instead we would try to devote some of the time given to those meals to meditation on God's Word and to prayer for spiritual awakening and for the advancement of Christ's Kingdom around the world. I don't know how many are actually doing this- but some are.

## **Many Ways to Join the Spirit of Fasting**

Now I realize that this will not work for everyone. Some have schedules that make that unworkable. Others have physical conditions that make fasting unsafe. Don't worry about that. There are many ways to join in with the *spirit* of fasting- if you cannot actually fast. One woman wrote me- whose job won't fit with this schedule. She wrote in part:

“I have a couple things that I believe may be more of a fast for some than food. I thought that not watching television for a week or a month or a particular night of the week when I normally watch it may be more of a fast than food. Instead of watching my favorite program I spend the time reading and praying and talking with my family about what I just read. I wonder if there might be others for whom this would be an acceptable fast and would be a focused time of prayer for them.”

But even if you do that- please don't ignore God's call on your life to fast if you can't be a part of the Tuesday focus. And if you cannot fast- and your heart is willing- God will lead you, as he did this woman, to something fruitful for you.

Martin Lloyd-Jones said in his great book on the Sermon on the Mount,

"Fasting, if we conceive of it truly, must not . . . be confined to the question of food and drink; fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose. There are many bodily functions which are right and normal and perfectly legitimate, but which for special peculiar reasons in certain circumstances should be controlled. That is fasting."

## **Fasting: An Intensification of Prayer**

The very course of history was changed when Daniel prayed this prayer- with fasting. We must acknowledge that Daniel did not only pray- but he also fasted. And this is important for us today because during my lifetime- there has been a reawakening of *worship* around the world and a reawakening of *prayer* around the world. But there really doesn't seem to be a reawakening of fasting- except in very hard and dangerous places like Korea and Africa.

But might God not ordain that His fullest blessings to the Church when we prevail in prayer- along with the intensity of fasting? And that's really what I think fasting is at its heart. Fasting is simply an intensification of prayer. It is a physical exclamation point at the end of our prayers. When we pray, "*We hunger for You to come in Power.*"- as we fast and pray that way- we are saying, "*I really mean it, Lord! This is how much, I hunger for You.*"

## **How is Our Fasting Different From Daniel's?**

So we know that Daniel fasted here- but does Jesus teach us to fast too? Many sincere believers teach today that fasting has been all but done away with in Christ and that New Testament believers should not fast today. But is that true? Is fasting a part of the "old wineskins" left over from the Old Testament shadows that has no place with the people of God today or is fasting a vital part of New Covenant reality in Jesus?

Richard Foster, who wrote the book *Celebration of Discipline*, said in his chapter on fasting of **Matthew 9:15**,

"That is perhaps the most important statement in the New Testament on whether Christians should fast today."

And that's probably true. So let's give close attention to **Matthew 9:15** and ask the Lord to teach us from it what we should know and what we should do in regard to fasting.

## **Why Didn't Jesus' Disciples Fast?**

### **Matthew 9:14**

**Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?**

Now here in **Matthew 9:14**- the disciples of John the Baptist come to Jesus and asked why Jesus' disciples didn't fast? So evidently Jesus' disciples were not fasting while He was with them.

## **While the Bridegroom Is with His Attendants**

But Jesus answers this question with what is called a "Word Picture". And in the very next verse- Jesus said:

### **Matthew 9:15-17**

**15 Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.**

**16 No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.**

**17 Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.**

And with those Divine Words- Jesus teaches us two things about fasting:

**1. To the Old Testament mind- fasting was basically associated with mourning in that day.** It was an expression of broken-heartedness and desperation- usually over sin or over some danger. It was something you did when things were not going the way you wanted them to.

But that's not the situation with the disciples of Jesus. And this is the second thing that Jesus teaches about fasting in this section:

**2. The Messiah has come and His coming is like the coming of a Bridegroom to a wedding feast.** And this is just too wonderful an event to mingle with fasting. So by saying this- Jesus was making a tremendous claim for

Himself. In the Old Testament God had pictured Himself as the "Husband" of His people Israel (**Isaiah 62:4f.; Jeremiah 2:2; 3:20; Ezekiel 16:8; Hosea 2:19f.**).

And now God's Son- the long hoped for Messiah has come and He claims to be the "Bridegroom" — that is, the Husband of His people- who will be the *true* Israel (cf. **John 3:29**). So this is the kind of partially veiled claim Jesus made about His Own identity with God. If you had ears to hear- you could hear it. God, the One Who betrothed Israel to himself in covenant love- has now come in human flesh.

And this is so stunning and so glorious and so unexpected in this form that Jesus said,

"You just can't fast now". This first coming of Jesus is too happy and too spectacular and too exhilarating. Fasting is for times of yearning and aching and longing. But the Bridegroom of Israel is here. After a thousand years of dreaming and longing and hoping and waiting- He is finally here! So the absence of fasting in the band of disciples was simply a witness to the Presence of God in their midst.

### **"Then They Will Fast"**

But then Jesus also said,

**... but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.** And the key word in this statement is- "**then**". "Then shall they fast." So just when is then?

Some have suggested that Jesus was referring to the several days between His Death and Resurrection. So His disciples would fast just for *those* days. But that is very unlikely for several reasons. One is that the early Church fasted after the Resurrection, as we have seen in **The Acts 13:1-3** (cf. **The Acts 14:23; 2Corinthians 6:5; 11:27**). The other is that in **Matthew 25:1-13** Jesus pictures His *second* coming as the arrival of the Bridegroom. So in other words- the Bridegroom is taken away until the second coming of Christ.

So I think Arthur Wallis is right in his sixth chapter of *God's Chosen Fast* when he says:

"The time to fast is now. Jesus is saying: 'While I am here in your midst as the Bridegroom- you should rejoice and not fast- but I am not going to remain with you. And while I am gone- you will fast.' That time is now."

Now it is true that Jesus is present with us by His Spirit. But Paul said in **2Corinthians 5:8**,

**We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.**

In other words- in this age- while the Bridegroom is gone- there is an ache and a longing- a homesickness- inside every genuine Christian that Jesus is not

here as fully and as intimately and as powerfully and as gloriously as we will realize Him in Heaven or when He returns. And it is that ache and that longing and that sorrow that motivates us to fast.

## **New Cloth and New Wine**

But then Jesus said something very crucial in verses 16&17:

**16 No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.**

**17 Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.**

The patch of "new cloth" and the "new wine" represent the new reality that has come with Jesus- that the Kingdom of God is now here. The Bridegroom has come. The Messiah is in our midst. And that is not merely temporary. He is not merely here and then gone. The Kingdom of God did not come in Jesus and then just vanish out of the world.

No, Jesus died for our sins once for all. He rose from the dead once for all. And the Holy Spirit was sent into the world as the real Presence of Jesus among us. So this Kingdom is the reigning Power of Christ in the world- subduing our hearts to the King and creating His people out of a people who were not His people who will believe Him and serve Him.

The Spirit of the Bridegroom is gathering and purifying a bride for the Bridegroom. And this is the new wine.

## **Old Wineskins Cannot Contain the New Wine**

And Jesus says, The old wineskins can't contain it. So what is the old wineskin? In this context it seems to be fasting. Fasting was inherited from the Old Testament and had been used as part of the Jewish system of relating to God. Now Jesus says, the old wineskins of fasting under the understanding of Judaism can't contain the new wine.

So what shall we say? In verse 15 Jesus says that we will fast when the Bridegroom is gone. And in verse 17 he says that the old mentality of fasting cannot contain the new wine of the Kingdom. So what are we to do? Do we fast or not?

## **New Wine Demands New Fasting**

And the answer is that the new wine demands new fasting. And this new fasting is based on the mystery that the Bridegroom *has* come, not that He *will* come. So the new wine of His ongoing Presence calls for a new kind of fasting.



In other words- the yearning and longing and ache of the old type of fasting was not based on the glorious Truth that the Messiah had come. The mourning over sin and the yearning in danger was not based on the great finished Work of the Redeemer and the great Revelation of Himself and His Grace in history. But now the Bridegroom has come. And in coming- He struck the decisive blow against sin and against Satan and against death.

So the great, central, decisive act of Salvation for us today is past- not future. And on the basis of that past finished Work of the Bridegroom- nothing can ever be the same again. The wine is new. The blood is shed. The Lamb is slain. The punishment of our sins is executed. Death is defeated. The Bridegroom is risen. The Spirit is sent. The wine is new. And the old fasting mindset is simply no longer adequate.

### **What's New About the New Fasting**

So what is new about the fasting that we should fast now is that *this* fasting rests on all this finished Work of the Bridegroom. The yearning that we feel now for revival or awakening or deliverance from corruption is not merely a longing and an aching because the "First Fruits" of what we long for have already come. The down payment of what we yearn for is already paid. The fullness that we are longing for and fasting for has appeared and we have beheld His Glory. So it is not merely a future hope but a present reality.

We have now tasted the Powers of the world to come, and our new fasting is not because we are hungry for something we have not yet tasted- but because the new wine of Christ's Presence is so real and so satisfying. The newness of our fasting is this: its intensity comes *not* because we have never tasted the wine of Christ's Presence- but because we *have* tasted it so wonderfully by his Spirit and cannot now be satisfied until the fullness of Joy (Jesus) arrives. We must have all He promised. And as much now as possible.

So I urge you to join in the fasting. Not because you *haven't* tasted the new wine of Christ's Presence, but because you *have* tasted it, and because you have tasted and seen- you now long, with a deep joyful aching of your soul- to know more of His Presence and Power in our midst!

I love you all.