

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

AMONG LIONS | GOD, WE NEED YOU

AARON BROCKETT | SEPTEMBER 25, 2022

Alright, alright. What's up, Traders Point family? How are we? Good to see you. I want to welcome everybody gathered across all of our locations and those of you tuning in online. We're so glad to have you.

It's hard to believe that today we are wrapping up this series that we've been in for nearly two months now in the book of Daniel. So if you have a Bible, go ahead and find Daniel, chapter 9. That's where we are going to be.

As you're turning there and getting settled for the message, I just want to remind everybody about what kind of church you walked into today. We are really, really passionate about three primary groups of people. Men, women, and the next generation.

With that in mind I want to celebrate something, and I want to forecast something before we jump in. The first thing is, I want to celebrate last night at our Downtown campus. We had Youth Night. Anybody join Youth Night last night? Yeah, a handful of people.

So we packed the place out Downtown and just hundreds and hundreds of students in the next generation came together to worship, encourage each other, and to figure out what their next steps are as they follow Jesus. I just want to thank everybody who made that possible.

We want to come alongside the next generation because there are so many things about growing up in the world that they are growing up in now that are so challenging. And yet, at the same time, I am so encouraged when I see the faith and the resolve of the next generation. If you are a parent of a student, mark it on your calendars, November 12th is the next one and we'd love to see them there.

And I just want to forecast something coming up. Fellas, Men's Night is coming up Friday night, October 28. It's going to be from 5 to 11 p.m. It's hard to believe it's been since 2016 when we did the last one of these. So we're bringing this thing back.

I sat in a planning meeting on Thursday just to kind of get an update on where things are at, and I was blown away with the things that we've got prepared for that night. So, guys, registration is open. Sign up right away. This would be a great event for you to invite your friends, your neighbors, your fishing buddy—the guy you've been inviting to church but will never come, invite him to this. Alright?

Léonce Crump is going to be here. He is a friend of mine who used to play in the NFL and now he is a pastor, which is like the best kind. And Léonce is as big as a truck and he's going to be here. So this will be a great event to invite a friend to.

And then, ladies, we've not forgotten about you because in February we're going to bring Women's Night back as well. So that is coming up as well. Hey, we can give it up for that.

I just want you to know your generosity, ongoing generosity, not only helps us pivot to meet immediate needs, it helps us to care for men, women, and the next generation so I just want to thank you guys for that.

I was reading a book by an author by the name of Martin Buchannan. He wrote this book on sabbaths called *The Rest of God*. And in it he told this story of his wife's grandmother who grew up in Canada during the Canadian gold rush.

She had this large boulder in her back yard that was too big for her to move. So she just decided to clean it up, polish it up a little bit, make it look like a nice little centerpiece for her garden.

So she gets this polishing rock paper stuff to kind of sand it all out. And she's scrubbing away on it, and she noticed that there were a few gold flakes that began to appear on the surface of the boulder. Now, this is during the Canadian gold rush.

So she immediately begins to wonder if she's got this huge chunk of gold sitting in her back yard. So she starts scrubbing faster and faster and faster, more gold flakes begin to appear on the surface of this boulder. And she's already imaging how she's going to spend the money.

Then she stops to take a break and kind of wipe the sweat from her brow and that's when she noticed that her wedding band was very, very loose. She looked at the top, it was totally fine. She looked at the underside and she had been sanding away her wedding band. She hadn't struck gold at all. And it was worn down razor thin.

And in that book he said that oftentimes this is what can happen when we begin to chase after and pursue the things that we think are truly important and can sustain us, we end up sacrificing the things that are truly valuable, like they are literally slipping through our fingers.

As we wrap up this study in the book of Daniel, one of the things that I just want to point out is that all throughout Daniel's life, Daniel has been able to keep his eyes fixed on that which is truly important, valuable, and the things that sustained him in the midst of radically changing circumstances, both in culture and in his personal life.

If you are just now joining us for this series, the bad news is that you're jumping in right on the very last installment. The good news is that next week we begin a brand-new

series in the book of 1 Peter. Alright? So come back for that. Actually, 1 Peter is going to be a great follow-up to Daniel because it covers a lot of similar themes that we find in Daniel, just in New Testament perspective.

Just by way of review, especially for those of us who have maybe slept since the last time you listened to one of these messages, Daniel and his three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego grew up in their hometown of Jerusalem. And when they were teenage boys, Nebuchadnezzar from Babylon attacked Jerusalem, and besieged it, which meant that he took Daniel and his friends, kidnapped them, enslaved them, took them back to Babylon.

Once they get there they are put into this three-year training program designed to put distance between them and God. And the big idea was that once they graduated with a master's degree in paganism, they would look, think, act, and talk more like Babylon than Jerusalem. That they would begin to reflect more and more the kingdom of men rather than the kingdom of God.

And it's just a really, really good reminder that that training program is still alive and well today. You and I are being shaped more and more into the image and likeness of something or someone. The question is, who is it?

Well, for Daniel and his friends this indoctrination program failed miserably. They didn't fight Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon and they didn't run and isolate themselves from Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon, instead they took what Jeremiah the prophet said in chapter 29 seriously. He said, "Stay in exile."

Those three words don't make any sense. Why in the world would I choose to stay in exile?

And he goes, "Hey, this is where God has sent you." So God sent them into exile. And then it says, "Pray for the peace and prosperity of the city. And that's exactly what Daniel and his friends did. They just jumped right in. And they started serving for the good of Babylon. And they got jobs, and they got promotions within Nebuchadnezzar's administration, which, by the way, could have easily been seen as treason by those from their hometown.

And Daniel just really walks this fine line, showing all of us how to live for God within a very godless culture. Daniel was not a prophet, a priest, or a pastor. He just worked in the marketplace. And he was able to live for God in a way that was winsome and attractive to others without compromising anything that he believed.

It's important as we wrap up chapter 9 today just to remind ourselves why they found themselves in this mess to begin with. How did Jerusalem end as exiles in Babylon to begin with? And there are really two reasons. We covered this in the first couple of weeks in this series.

The first was simply this. The continual disobedience of God's people in Jerusalem. God had warned them over and over and over again. He was like, "Hey, unless you turn back to Me, then I'm going to allow you, I'm going to send you into exile." And eventually, in 605 BC that's exactly what He did.

Now, with that said, I think it is important for me to stress and double stress the fact that for us today, there is no sin in your life or mine that is too big for God to cover by His grace. You cannot out sin God's grace. However, unrepentant sin....

What that simply means is, "I'm going to refuse to acknowledge it. I'm going to refuse to drag it out into the open. I'm going to refuse to come clean from it." Unrepentant sin always leads people into exile.

The second reason is that—this is something we often overlook—God loved Babylon even though Babylon didn't love or acknowledge God. God loved Nebuchadnezzar and wanted Nebuchadnezzar to know Him. And God loved Belshazzar. And God loved the people of Babylon.

And He didn't just sit back and wait for them to figure that out on their own. He sent Daniel and his friends as exiles into that land so that way people could see it and hear it and feel it from a live human being.

This just brings out the reality that is true for so many of us. If we were to sit down and get together over a cup of coffee and I would say, "Hey, man. Tell me about your life. If you are a follower of Jesus, tell me how that happened. Tell me how that began your experience of transformation." And chances are that you would mention the name or the names of people that God brought into your life and used in big, big ways because God always uses people to change people. And I'm so grateful for that.

This is one of the reasons why Daniel is just like a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ. The book of Daniel may have Daniel's name slapped on it, but it's not really about Daniel. It is about Jesus. And God would send Jesus as an exile of sorts into our world because He wants us to know of His love and His grace.

Well, the first 6 chapters of the book of Daniel are populated with all of the really great stories that, if you grew up in church, you remember hearing in Sunday school and Vacation Bible School. You know, fiery furnaces and the lions' den. Alright? And then the last six chapters are all of the weird stuff. It's like apocalyptic literature, all of the prophecy.

And, by the way, I know I didn't cover chapter 7 and 8 over the last couple of weeks and that's just the way it worked out. Alright? I wasn't intentionally trying to get out of it. I'm not afraid to teach those passages. Maybe a little bit. But Ryan did a really, really good job with all of that.

But here's how I will explain it to you today. The first six chapters of Daniel describe what was going on around Daniel—the cultural change, and the personal circumstances, and the world events that he went through. Chapters 7 through 12, all the prophecy stuff, it is telling us what is going on inside of Daniel as he's living through it. What it does is it gives us a glimpse of his fears, his anxieties, and his concerns. Actually, what this shows us is that Daniel was a human being after all.

So, over the past couple of weeks if you've been tracking with us in chapters 7 and 8 we saw that Daniel had clearly been eating way too many late night microwave burritos. So he was having these really crazy psychedelic dreams. Here's the amazing thing about it. He could interpret other people's dreams, but he couldn't interpret his own. So God sent Gabriel to come down and help Daniel interpret his own dreams.

As we come to the conclusion of chapter 8, Daniel is having some sleepless nights. He is absolutely wrecked over two things: the condition of his exiled home, Babylon, as well as the condition of his real home, Jerusalem. And what Daniel is doing in chapter 9 is that he is reflecting back on the decades that he has spent in exile.

Now, think about this. Think about what you were doing when you were 13. So when Daniel was 13 that's when he gets kidnapped and taken into Babylon. Now, he is an old man in his 80s or 90s and he's thinking, "I just spent my whole life as an exile." And he's sort of reflecting back. And it's not as if he is resentful of it. That's the amazing thing about it.

As I was reading this last week, there is this old movie that popped into my mind. I don't know how many of you have seen it, it's with Richard Dreyfuss called *Mr. Holland's Opus*. Any of you remember that movie? And in that movie, Mr. Holland has these dreams of becoming this world-renowned composer of music and instead, due to life circumstances, he had to take a job at a local high school as a band teacher.

And he's sort of resentful of it, and he's bitter over it, and he's thinking, "This is going to be for a semester." And then the semester turns into a year. And then a year turns into five. And five turns into a decade. And these students come and go. And this whole time he's growing disillusioned, and he sees this dream of becoming a composer slip out of his fingers.

So the day finally comes when it's time for him to retire. And all of his students and his former students gather together in this auditorium and that's when he realizes that they have become his opus. He has had these dreams of going and creating all of this popularity, fame, and wealth for himself and his music, when in reality he was an exile of sorts impacting all of the lives of his students.

And in a very similar sense, that's the setting as we come to chapter 9. Daniel has been in exile for nearly 70 years. And he's doing some reflecting. And I want to pick this up in verse 2 of chapter 9. So follow along with me. It says:

"I, Daniel, learned from reading the word of the Lord, as revealed to Jeremiah the prophet, that Jerusalem must lie desolate for seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and fasting. I also wore rough burlap and sprinkled myself with ashes." Daniel 9:2-3 (NLT)

One of the first things I just want to point out about the verses that we just read is that Daniel is an old man, but he is not done learning and growing. And I love that about him. It says that he's still got his Bible open and he's taking notes because he knew what maybe you and I need to be reminded of today, that we might retire from a career or a job one day, but we never retire from following after God. All of life—it's this life-long process of continuing to grow.

I love it every time that I get around some older, seasoned people who say, "You know what, man? I just really felt like my spiritual life didn't take off until I got north of 70." And I'm like, "Really?" It just shows us that there is always more and more for us to learn and grow and contribute. And Daniel's got his Bible open. He's been reading it his whole life. And there is still more to mine out of it.

And he's spent the majority of his life reading the prophet Jeremiah. And one of the things that Jeremiah stressed over and over again is that Jerusalem would be in exile for 70 years.

Now, Daniel was taken into captivity in 605 BC. Chapter 9 begins in verse one by saying, "The first year of Darius," which we know was 538 BC. So, math has never really been my thing, but that's roughly 70 years. And Daniel is realizing this. Daniel is recognizing the time of exile is almost over according to the prophet Jeremiah.

Now, I've got a question for you. If you were in Daniel's sandals, wouldn't you be excited about that? Man, I would. I'd be like, "Alright, man. I'll get my bags packed and I know the first thing that I'm going to when I land at Jerusalem national airport. I'm going to jump on that Uber camel and I'm going to go straight to In-N-Out Burger and I'm going to get a double, double animal style with a chocolate shake. That's what I'm going to do. And I'm sure I'd be calling friends and family, "Hey, we've got to hook up. We've got to catch up again."

But Daniel doesn't seem to be excited. In fact, it says that he covered himself with burlap and sprinkled himself with ashes. This is the idea of somebody who is in mourning. So what about Daniel is causing him to mourn?

I think that what's on Daniel's mind here is a couple of things. I think Daniel had truly grown to love the people of Babylon. And he wanted them to know God desperately. I also think the other reason why is because Daniel is thinking simply this, "Has 70 years of exile been enough?" Which is a wild question. It's this idea, has this been enough to soften our heart of hearts? Are we ready to be free? Are we prepared to go back and live for God?

It kind of reminds me of what we've been through over the past three years with the pandemic. I remember hearing lots of people talking about this to the point that I just got nauseous every time I heard the term, maybe you did as well. People would say things like *new normal* or when are things going to go back to *normal*?

And then we'd begin to talk about, "Well, what is normal anyway?" And, "Is that the kind of normal we want to go back to?" And just think. It would be horrible to wait this crisis out just to snap back and go back to the way we were living before. And honestly right now, I don't know. I don't know if it's truly marked us, if it's truly changed us, if it's brought us closer to God or not.

But I think it is a very similar sentiment that Daniel was saying, "Are we ready to go back to normal? Have our hearts really been impacted? Have we really grown closer to God?" That's the sentiment that Daniel is getting at in chapter 9. And in verse 4 he goes on and he says:

"I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: 'O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your covenant and keep your promises of unfailing love to those who love you and obey your commands.'"

Keep in mind this is from a man who has been in exile for 70 years saying that to God. Verse 5:

"But we have sinned and done wrong. We have rebelled against you and scorned your commands and regulations. We have refused to listen to your servants the prophets, who spoke on your authority to our kings and princes and ancestors and to all the people of the land." Daniel 9:5-6 (NLT)

I just want to point out in Daniel's prayer, notice this, how many times he says the word *we*. He's including himself in it. Now, keep in mind, remember who Daniel is. Daniel is a guy who was above reproach. He had no accusations. He had no scandals. The dude lived a stellar life. His enemies could not find any dirt on him. And yet, here in this prayer, he's including himself in it. He's like, "God, we have sinned against You."

Have you ever noticed that the only time we do that is when we are associating ourselves with groups of people that make us look good?

So here's an example. I am so grateful that fall is in the air and football is back. Can I get a good amen? Yeah, all is right in the world as long as the leaves are changing and it's crisp outside and football is on.

But have you ever noticed that when our team is winning, it's *we*. Right? You remember when the Colts used to win. Remember way back when that happened? Right? We would say things like, "Man, we won today!"

Really, we? I didn't see you on the field.

"I've never worn a jersey. I've never made a tackle. I've never caught a pass. Come to think of it, I can't remember the last time my heart rate got over 100. But we won today."

But then when we're losing, it's not we. What is it? *They*. They don't know what they are doing. They can't call a play. They need to get their act together. So that's what is happening.

Well, here in Daniel, chapter 9, Daniel says we throughout this whole prayer. And, by the way, it's a losing team. Look at verse 7:

"Lord, you are in the right; but as you see, our faces are covered with shame. This is true of all of us, including the people of Judah and Jerusalem and all Israel," in other words, he's not just talking about Babylon.

All who are exiles *"scattered near and far, wherever you have driven us because of our disloyalty to you. O Lord, we and our kings, princes, and ancestors are covered with shame because we have sinned against you."*

I love verse 9. *"But the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving,"* aren't you glad that statement is there? Man, I am. We have all sinned against You, but God is merciful and forgiving, *"even though we have rebelled against him. We have not obeyed the Lord our God, for we have not followed the instructions he gave us through his servants the prophets."*

So, he's saying, "Hey, Babylon has sinned against God. We all know that. They are a pagan nation." But here's what Daniel is doing, he says, "But so is Jerusalem. So are God's own people." What he's saying is that the sin and rebellion that is found in God's house with God's people needs to be dealt first before He'll deal with the decadent sins of Babylon.

It's just a great reminder, especially within this really divided culture in which we now live, that he is showing us that this is not an us versus them kind of a thing. It's not us pointing fingers at somebody else, somebody who thinks differently, lives differently, votes differently than us, "Yeah, God. They need to get their act together."

He's saying, "No, we're all in the same boat here. There are not good guys and bad guys. We're all bad guys. There is only one saving good guy and His name is Jesus Christ.

And Daniel is saying, "Hey, listen. God is not looking at us going, 'Man, look at them.'" Right now God's not looking down on us going, "Look at that group gathered at Traders Point. I'm so proud of them. And I saw them all raising their hands a little bit earlier. Man, they are serving. You know, they are laughing at Aaron's jokes even when they are not funny, making him feel good. And I'm just so proud of them. You know where they could be right now? In all of the places they could be in the world, they're in church right now."

And He's not looking at what's happening in Vegas right now with a gag reflex, "I can't believe what is happening in that hotel room, that casino, or that back alley. I wish they could be more like the good people at Traders Point."

No, this is not an us versus them kind of a thing. In fact, this is a reminder that before we pick up the binoculars to look at the sins of other people, we should look in a mirror and just simply say, "God, is there anything in me? God, is there anything in me that maybe I'm not seeing that needs to be brought to the surface?"

You know that old phrase, maybe you've heard it if you grew up in church, "I'm going to hate the sin but love the sinner." Aside from that not being found in the Bible anywhere, it's very condescending. We shouldn't hate the sin and love the sinner; we should love the sinner and hate our own sin and say, "God is there anything in me that I need to come clean with?"

We know that Daniel has lived an exceptional life. I can't think of anything, any area of disobedience. Now we know that Daniel was a human being, so we know that he had sin in his life. But what Daniel is doing here is he is really ratcheting it up a level. Daniel is sort of owning sin he is not explicitly guilty of. And once again, he is foreshadowing Jesus Christ who did the same for you and me.

Daniel didn't make any excuse for it. Daniel didn't try to get out of it. Daniel is like, "No, God. We've all sinned against You."

How many of you have ever been accused of doing something that you were innocent of? Doesn't it just make you feel great? What's your automatic response? Well, to defend and to explain. At least it is for me.

I remember when I was in the fifth grade my teacher was a lovely woman named Mrs. Jones, who actually, if you notice the facetiousness in my voice, we didn't care for her very much. Now, this is a little bit of a risk because I don't know if Mrs. Jones is watching right now so I'll just say that I think the statute of limitations covers me on this. And Mrs. Jones if you are watching, love you, but not so much then.

So I remember our class, we didn't really care for her very much. She was kind of grumpy. And I remember one afternoon she left the classroom to go make a copy or something and one of the girls in our class said, "Hey, guys. When Mrs. Jones walks back in, let's all just break out into laughter."

You know, fifth graders are not really known for their reasoning abilities. Everybody was like, "Oh, yeah. That would be great." And I remember sitting there thinking to myself, "I don't get it. I don't understand why this would be funny." Now, I'm not saying that just to say that I was being a goody two shoes, I'm just not the brightest bowl on the shelf. So, I was like, "I don't know. I don't get it. I don't understand."

So I was very, very confused and it all happened very, very fast. Mrs. Jones walks back into the classroom. Sure enough, everybody in the room breaks out into laughter. I just kind of sat there with a big, dumb grin on my face. I didn't laugh. I was just like, "No, this is very confusing. I don't understand what's happening here."

But Mrs. Jones thought the entire class laughed and she responded about like you thought that she would. She was very upset. It was very disrespectful. And so she told all of us that we were going to stay after class that day and all of us were going to write 100 times on the chalkboard: I will not laugh at Mrs. Jones when she walks into the room because that is very disrespectful.

And as I was up at the board writing that out, I wrote: I will not laugh at Mrs. Jones while she walks into the room because that is very disrespectful. And under my breath 100 times, I said, "But I didn't do it." And I remember pleading my case with her and telling her that, but it did not matter because as far as she was concerned the whole class was guilty.

And Daniel could have done something very similar in his prayer. He could have been like, "Hey, God. You know Babylon, with all of its decadent sins, needs to come clean, needs to repent before you. And, God, all of the people of Jerusalem too. But me, on the other hand, God, I'm not guilty of the same thing."

Just imagine how that conversation could have gone down. God could have said to Daniel, "Daniel, My people have deeply disappointed Me with their sin." And Daniel could have responded with, "I know, right? And I was kind of thinking about this when I was being faithful to you in the lions' den. I mean, God, do You remember that? And I hate to bring that up, but You know, I did put my life on the line."

But Daniel didn't do any of that. Daniel steps right in and he claims responsibility for sin he is not explicitly guilty of. And it teaches us this thing: Daniel is a leader and so are you regardless of your age, your season of life, your gender, your occupation. If you're influencing anybody in your life right now, you're a leader. This is what Daniel teaches us:

Leaders worth following accept responsibility for problems that are not always their fault.

And in this culture of finger blaming and blame shifting, that's pretty rare. And Daniel says, "Hey, man. We're in this together." And, once again, this is, in a sense, a foreshadowing of Jesus.

If you aren't clear on what the gospel message is, the gospel message is that God created you and loved you, and sin came in and severed that relationship. There was no way that you could pay off your debt. You and I are not getting to heaven by our own merit. It is impossible. And God knows it.

So He sent Jesus to live the life that you and I could never live, to die the death that we deserved to die, and to walk out of a grave to conquer death on our behalf. When God saw Jesus on a cross, He saw your sin and your shame, and He nailed it there. And now when He sees you today, He doesn't see your merits, He doesn't see your sin. Your life is hidden in Christ. He sees the righteousness of Jesus and says, "It's paid in full."

So, in verse 20, Daniel goes on and he says:

"I went on praying and confessing my sin and the sin of my people, pleading with the Lord my God for Jerusalem, his holy mountain. As I was praying, Gabriel, whom I had seen in the earlier vision, came swiftly to me at the time of the evening sacrifice. He explained to me, 'Daniel, I have come here to give you insight and understanding. The moment you began praying, a command was given. And now I am here to tell you what it was,'" now I want you to notice this very last part, it says, "'for you are very precious to God.'" Daniel 9:20-23 (NLT)

Some translations say greatly loved by God. Others say treasured by God. That's kind of the idea. And this is such an incredible thought. It's amazing really, when you think about it. Stop and think about what Daniel has been through up and until this point in his life. Things have not gone Daniel's way, let's just say that.

Daniel was kidnapped, he was enslaved, he was castrated, he had been set up and betrayed by co-workers and rivals—his life has been no walk in the park. And here Gabriel comes and says to him, "Daniel, you are greatly valued, you are greatly treasured, you are greatly loved by God," which begs the question that I wrote out in my notes last week.

It was like, "Man, I'd like to see what God does to His enemies."

Daniel's life hadn't been easy at all. He's been in exile his whole life and now Gabriel says, "You are greatly loved by God." What would convince Daniel of that?

I think that many times what ends up happening, I know this is true for me in my life, I end up equating God's love for me with life's ease. And so the more that things go my way, then I think, "Okay. God is just showing His love for me." But that isn't always the case, even for Daniel.

See, going through challenging seasons, which we all will—and maybe you're in one right now—that does not mean that God has abandoned you or forgotten you. In fact, it just might mean the exact opposite, that He's right there with you.

You remember the fiery furnace when we walked through that passage a few weeks ago? God could have extinguished the flame. He could have brought them out. But instead, His way of saving was to be in it with them. And that's what the very name of Jesus means, God with us.

I don't mean to explain away life's challenges and difficulties too easily. Life's hard. There are no easy answers. But one of the answers is that God, right now, wants to refine you and me. He's more concerned about your character and the type of person that you are becoming than just giving you and me our way all of the time. What God will oftentimes do is He will knock away the support structures of everything we are leaning our life up against so that way we are left with no choice but to be completely dependent upon Him.

And in Daniel, chapter 9, in this great prayer, Daniel is essentially crying out what we were just saying a few moments ago:

God, we need you.

And this right here is the key to understanding the consistency and power of Daniel's prayer life.

I don't know about you guys; I'll just be real confessional with you. My personal prayer life has been something that I've struggled with my whole Christian life. My prayer life has been filled with more stops and starts, more ups and downs, and inconsistencies than I would care to admit or care to count.

Some of you, that might surprise you. You're like, "Well, you're a pastor. Don't you pray all of the time? Isn't that what you do for fun?" Well, I'd like to tell you that but: no. There have been lots of times when I back up and I get a running start and it's like, "I know I need to spend more time in prayer." Maybe it's like at the beginning of the year, maybe the beginning of a new season. I'll get all fired up. That's what I do. I'll try to fire myself up, so I'll read some quotes on prayer.

Martin Luther King one time said, "To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible for him to be alive without breathing." And I'm like, "Oh, that's firing me up."

And I'll read Martin Luther. Martin Luther said one time, "I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours of the day in prayer." And I'm like blown away, "He has so much to do that he's going to spend the first three hours.... Give me that tattoo." I get all fired up.

And then I jump in and then my mind starts drifting three minutes into the prayer. And I'm saying, "Man, what's my problem?" And oftentimes I've thought or I've assumed that my failure to pray is just a lack of self-discipline or spiritual maturity. And knowing me, that's probably true, but not really the real reason why my prayer life goes stale.

And I just wonder if any of you can relate to me, that a lack of prayer in your life is not necessarily a lack of self-discipline or devotion. But it is a failure to truly grasp how God really sees you. How truly patient He is with you. How compassionate and tender He is with you. He wants to hear from you.

For the longest of times I would always assume, “You know what? God loves me. That’s just one of His jobs to love me, but He doesn’t like me because I keep going back on my word, and I keep telling Him I’m going to do the thing and then I don’t do it. I don’t think He cares for me very much.” Therefore, I’ll avoid Him.

And the way that God sees you is with this compassion for you. It’s just like what Gabriel said to Daniel, “You are greatly loved by God.” Daniel could have assumed, “God has exiled me in Babylon for 70 years, He must not care.” And Gabriel says, “Oh, no.”

I want you to remember this. This is today’s sermon in a sentence:

Prayer is not the way we get God to love us. It is the result of knowing how much He does.

And when you begin to realize how much God really loves you, prayer is not this thing that you feel obligated to do, prayer is this thing that you are always doing because you want to talk to your heavenly Father.

Well, I want to finish up verses 24 and 25. This is where it gets a little tricky, but it’s not as tricky as what we might make it out to be. So hold on. Verse 24 says this:

“A period of seventy sets of seven has been decreed for your people and your holy city to finish their rebellion, to put an end to their sin, to atone for their guilt, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to confirm the prophetic vision, and to anoint the Most Holy Place. Now listen and understand! Seven sets of seven plus sixty-two sets of seven will pass from the time the command is given to rebuild Jerusalem until a ruler—the Anointed One....”

That’s capitalized, which means what? It’s talking about Jesus. Alright? Once again, I’m not sure but Jesus.... Yes, it’s referring to Jesus.

Until Jesus “comes.” Daniel 9:24-25 (NLT)

That’s a mouthful. Very confusing. What is Gabriel saying? God’s plan of rescue and restoration.... Keep in mind: Babylon, Jerusalem—Daniel has been in exile—and he’s saying, “Hey, Daniel. God’s plan of rescue, God’s plan to restore Jerusalem will take place over 70 sevens or 70 sets of sevens.” Now, some of you are like, “Great, clear as mud. What does that mean?”

I studied this passage last week and I read what every preacher wants to hear from the commentaries. Commentary after commentary said this, “This is one of the most difficult passages in Daniel. Very controversial, this one.” And I thought, “Oh, goody. I can’t wait for Sunday.”

It’s actually not as complicated as what we think. We have a tendency—Ryan did such a great job walking us through this over the past couple of weeks.... When it comes to apocalyptic literature, we have a tendency to read things like this and think, “Well, there is some sort of secret message that just has to be decoded. We just need to crack this

mysterious code in the Bible.” And that ends up distracting us from the clarity and the complicity of the gospel.

Listen. The Bible was never meant to be decoded. It is meant to reveal a Savior. And there have been multiple attempts by really, really good scholars to try to interpret the 70 sevens. There are a lot of different viable options.

But I love what Bryan Chapell says about this. I just want to read what he says about this. He says, “When it comes to the 70 sevens, it is as though God is saying that the plan of His rescue is immeasurably greater than the trials of the captivity.” What a great sentence. “God’s plan of rescue is immeasurably greater than the trials of the captivity.”

So God’s plan of rescue, which, by the way, would be the gospel message, He’s not just talking about Daniel and Jerusalem, He’s talking about us today. It is immeasurably greater than the trials of our captivity. And the way that we interpret the 70 sevens, or 70 sets of seven, is just basically God saying, “This is an infinite number of perfections. I’m going to come and infinitely perfect all of what you’ve been through.”

It’s very similar to whenever Peter asked Jesus in Matthew, chapter 18, “How many times should I forgive, Jesus?” And he thinks that he’s really buttering Jesus up, “Like seven times?” And Jesus is like, “No, seventy times seven.” It’s the same type of sentiment.

God is saying to Daniel and He’s saying to you and me today, in our exile, “How much time have you spent in captivity? I’m going to rescue you and My rescue is going to be like 70 times seven.” Meaning that God’s rescue and His redemption and His restoration is going to eclipse whatever it is that you and I are going through.

So I just want to wrap up with this question:

What are you going through?

What is captivity for you? Maybe right now your captivity is a marriage that is hanging on by a thread. Maybe your captivity is overwhelming anxiety that you just can’t get a handle on. Maybe your captivity is going toe to toe with an addiction that is getting the better of you every time. Maybe it’s the loss of a job. Maybe it’s some sort of relational conflict. What is captivity for you?

Can I just ask, are your eyes in the right place? Are you sanding away the wedding ring, so to speak, are you chasing after what you think will really sustain and provide or are you resting in the grace of your heavenly Father?

Right now I just want to do what the book of Daniel is designed to do—draw our eyes to the only One who can change anyone. And in these final moments together, I just simply want to place before you a question. What have you done with Jesus? Have you drifted from Him? Have you ignored Him? Have you responded to Him?

Today, I just want to give you an opportunity to lay claim of that which Jesus died for you to have. God's plan of rescue, God's plan of restoration, God's plan of redemption no matter how hard life gets, how unfair it is, how much pain you have to walk through, it's going to be infinitely greater. And right now He promises to be with you in it. And that's a promise you can claim right now, today.

So with that in mind, let's pray together.

Father, we thank You so much that You are a God who is just and fair. And You are also a God who is merciful and gracious. And if it wasn't for that, we wouldn't stand a chance.

So, God. Here we are exiles in 2022. And so we confess our sins before You. We ask that You would examine our hearts in these final moments that we're going to be together today. Search us. Show us what we need to repent of and return from.

God, I just ask that if there are some here today who are uncertain about where they stand with You, their relationship with You, that they would not leave uncertain, but that they would respond to that grace that You've made available through Jesus Christ.

God, thank You so much that the message and the example that Daniel is for us today, that when we are among lions, we can continue to look to You to sustain us and to restore us.

So, God, in these final moments together would You just meet us right where we are sitting today and would You speak? We ask this in Your name: Amen.