

# Confessing Sin & The End of Sin (Daniel 9)

## How Do You Deal With Your Sin?

How do you *deal with your sin*? When you do those things you ought not to do, or you do not do those things that you ought to do, how do you respond? How do you react when something you have said, thought, or done, niggles away at your conscience?

There is a huge spectrum of possible responses to this question aren't there?

From distress on the one hand, to a disinterested shrug of the shoulders.

From religious striving, to resignation.

From sorrow over your lack of piety, to a celebration of your liberated progress.

From throwing yourself into good works to somehow make up for failure, to diving headlong into the sin which you cannot overcome.

The poet W.H. Auden (Awe-den) observed the uneasiness we feel when confronted human sinfulness. In one of his poems, he reflects on the way we do anything we can to distract ourselves and deny the reality of our depravity, lest we face the despairing reality of true predicament.

*Faces along the bar, (he writes),  
Cling to their average day:  
The lights must never go out,  
The music must always play,  
All the conventions conspire  
To make this fort assume  
The furniture of home;  
Lest we should see where we are,  
Lost in a haunted wood,  
Children afraid of the night  
Who have never been happy or good.*

If this distraction and denial was true at the outset of World War II, isn't it true of the world around us now with the incessant distractions of social media, screens, and streaming. And of course, we too can swing between denial and despair. One moment we can be completely complacent and the next we are consumed by guilt and shame. So the question is, how *should* we deal with the reality of our sin?

Well, Daniel 9 is all about this question of how we respond to not only our own sin, but the sin of all God's people. In fact, it is the great unanswered question in the book of Daniel to this point. We have been following the exemplary lives of Daniel and his friends as they live in exile, as they have remained faithful to God in a foreign land. But Daniel chapter 1 verse 2 hangs like an ominous shadow over the whole book. There we read:

*And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into (Nebuchadnezzar's) hand.*

It was God himself who sent his people into exile as a result of Israel's failure to be faithful to God and follow his commands in the first place. Behind the question of how to live faithfully in exile, is the question of sin and forgiveness.

Will God bring an end to exile? Is there hope of restoration? Will God have mercy on his people despite their transgression?

Faced with these questions, Daniel himself responds with one of the most stirring prayers of confession in all the Scriptures, and he sets forth a pattern for how we should respond when we too are faced with the reality of our sin and its consequences. He does not deny his sin, but faces reality head on. He is not consumed by despair but runs to God in hope of finding mercy.

But even more than that, this chapter contains a gracious revelation from God *in response* to Daniel's prayer. He promises Daniel *the* good news of an ultimate answer to the problem of our sin. So as we consider our own sin this morning, and as we hear of God's response, I'm going to pray that God would help us.

*Heavenly Father,*

*Please prevent us from denying our sin this morning  
and please protect us from despair.*

*Would you reveal to us both the depths of our sin,  
and the depths of your grace.*

*Most of all, show us Christ,  
and the full and free forgiveness we have in him.*

*Amen.*

# Humble Confession of Sin

So let's begin with Daniel's prayer in the first half of this chapter. And what I want us to notice today is the way that the whole prayer flows from Daniel's understanding of *the character of God*.

Just listen again to how God is described,

*in verse 4*

then again in *verse 7*

"the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving" we read in *verse 9*

Daniel says in *verse 14*,

a reality which has been seen in his mighty and righteous acts for his people (*verse 15*).

Daniel's prayer paints a grand picture of God.

And his confession of sin and his request for restoration, are both decisively shaped by his understanding of who God is, and how God acts.

In other words, in light of God's righteousness, Daniel recognises the reality of his own sinfulness. And yet, that same understanding of God's righteousness, along with God's mercy and forgiveness, prompts Daniel to run to God as the only hope he has in the face of that sin.

## Recognising the Reality of Sin

You can see the first aspect of this at the beginning of Daniel's prayer. He exclaims the righteousness of God and then piles up terms that not only express the reality of his sin, but also what this sin is like.

Sin is a falling short of God's perfection.

It is doing wrong, instead of the righteousness of God.

It is a wicked rebellion against the rule of God.

It is a turning away from and transgressing the laws and commands of God.

It is a failure to listen to the Word of God.

Perhaps at the root of all of these things is a loveless and faithless response to the covenant love and faithfulness of God.

I remember I used to get so frustrated with my Mum when I was at school, because if, hypothetically, I spent all afternoon playing video games she would say something like, "Would your friend Ben be sitting at home playing video-games?" My friend Ben you see was super smart, but also a hard worker, and compared to him, I looked quite slow and lazy. It was an unfair comparison. Why couldn't she compare me to one of my other friends who played way more video games and did far less work than me! Anyone can look good if you just make sure you are comparing yourself to the right person!

And isn't that the way we sometimes approach our sin? It's easy to downplay or to deny the sinfulness of our own life when we compare ourselves to each other. But compared to the blazing purity of God, the reality of our sin is utterly exposed. Sin is so much more than little mistakes here and there. It is a failure to relate rightly to the righteous God of the universe.

Viewed in the light of God's righteousness, we can see clearly the extent and depth of our sin, we are able to grasp more fully the nature of our sin, and as Daniel goes on, we also come to terms with the result of our sin.

In his righteousness, God judges sin. As Daniel says in verse 14:

*The Lord did not hesitate to bring the disaster of exile on us, for the LORD our God is righteous in everything he does.*

Far from being a contradiction to his righteousness and love, God's judgement is what happens when his perfect love is confronted with wickedness in the world. God was perfectly righteous in sending his people into exile.

## Running to God

And yet, at the very same time, the righteous character of God is Daniel's great hope of deliverance. Daniel has just compared the life of Israel, with God's perfection, and just spoken of God's just judgement against their sin. In a way, it would make sense for him to *run away* from God, to seek some place to hide from his wrath.

But Daniel knows that the only safe place of refuge, the only place he can run to, is God himself. So he makes his plea in verse 16:

*Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill.*

Listen as he continues, for the reason that God might respond to Daniel's urgent prayer,

*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."*

There is nothing in himself, or in his compatriots, that Daniel can call upon as a reason for God to hear and answer their prayers. It is only the commitment that God has made to the nation of Israel, and God's faithful, covenantal love for his people that offers any hope of mercy at all.

It is the promises of God revealed in the Scriptures, and God's track-record of faithfulness, that give Daniel hope, and drive him to his knees in prayer. We're told exactly this in the opening verses of this chapter. Daniel was probably reading these words from the prophet Jeremiah. We can read them too today in Jeremiah chapter 29, from verse 10:

*This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my good promise to bring you back to this place.*

*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."*

With these promises in his hands, and with this understanding, is it any wonder that Daniel prays as he does?

And this is really I think that profound truth that we are given in Daniel's prayer. *In the end, how we respond to our sin depends on what sort of God we believe in.*

If we only view God as a permissive grandparent figure, then we will be prone to downplay our sin, as if God just looks at our misdoings with a rueful smile and a shake of the head.

But if we reduce God to some sort of divine sergeant-major, we might grasp something of the seriousness of our sin, but we will never run to God in the way Daniel does. Instead we will hide our sin, or try to fix it up ourselves before we feel "good enough" to come before God again.

But the God of the Bible is, as Daniel says, so much more great and awesome than this. His perfect righteousness reveals to us the very depths of our depravity. His holiness sets him apart from us, and shows to us the seriousness of our own sin. And yet, *at the very same time*, God's righteousness and holiness, and his covenantal love for his people is the very thing that disposes God mercifully towards those who trust in him. As one theologian describes it,

*God's holiness is a marker not only of God's distinction from the creation but also of God's driving passion to make the whole earth his holy dwelling. Although God alone is essentially holy, he does not keep his holiness to himself but spreads his fragrance throughout creation.*

This should totally blow our minds! This God, who is at once perfect in justice and love, abounding in righteousness and mercy, utterly distinct and yet drawing near to us, is not something we discover for ourselves.

This is the God that is *revealed to us* in the pages of the Bible, this is the God that Daniel knows. And so Daniel prays in humble confession, recognising how utterly sinful he is, but also running to the mercy of God as his only hope, as Israel's only hope, of forgiveness and restoration.

# Gracious Revelation of the Christ

And as we see in the second half of the chapter, Daniel's hope in God does not put him to shame. For God does hear, and act, and he answer's Daniel's prayer. Daniel tells us in verse 21

*While I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice.*

God sends his angel to give Daniel another vision. A vision that answers Daniel's prayer in a way far beyond what he had asked or imagined.

## The end of exile ->

For Daniel had been praying for the 70 years of exile to come to an end, and now God speaks to him about a period of 70 'sevens'. Of course, the number 7 is highly symbolic in Hebrew literature. Just as God created the world in 7 days, the number seven is used all over the place in the Bible to signify wholeness and completeness. God is stretching Daniel's vision beyond a period of seventy years, so that he might see God's ultimate plans and purposes for the very fullness of time.

So we read in verse 24:

*Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and 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.*

Daniel had been praying for the end of exile, but God tells Daniel that he is going to bring an end to the very thing that brought about the exile itself. God is not only going to show mercy and offer forgiveness, he is going to give the gift of right-

eousness to his people, fulfil his every promise, and restore his presence among his people.

This is the big picture of God's purposes for his people, and indeed for the world. And contains a wonderful promise: God himself has determined to deal once and for all with the problem of human sin.

## **The restoration of the sanctuary ->**

The following verses then focus on the details of this big picture, and how God will bring about these things he has promised.

First, Daniel is told about the first sixty-nine sevens. The first seven 'sevens' most likely refer to the time of exile itself, the seventy years that Daniel has lived through in Babylon. Then, as Daniel had hoped, God would bring his people back to the land. The city of Jerusalem would be rebuilt, the temple would be restored. But, as you can read about in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, this was no return to glory for the Jewish people. These would be, as Daniel is told, *times of trouble*, as they face more pressure and persecution from different kings and their kingdoms.

This was no doubt bitter-sweet for Daniel. The city and sanctuary he loved would be rebuilt, but the suffering and struggle of his people would continue. But, and here is the point: the physical city, and the sanctuary in its midst with all its sacrifices for sin *were never meant to be the ultimate hope of God's people*. They were shadows, pointing to a far greater reality. Daniel was concerned with city, sanctuary, and sacrifice, but in the final seven, God tells Daniel about *the person* they were pointing to all along.

In the final seven we are told that The Anointed One would come. The Hebrew word for the Anointed One is The Messiah. In Greek, the Messiah is called the Christ. In verse 26 we are told that the Messiah, The Christ, would be put to death and have nothing. In verse 27 we are told that this death of the Christ would establish a new covenant with his people. That by his death, he would put an end to sacrifice and offering. However cryptic and confusing this vision may sound to us, it becomes crystal clear in the light of the gospel of Jesus the Christ, doesn't it?

On the night before he was put to death Jesus declared that by his death he would establish a new covenant in his blood. And as he laid down his life on the cross, he gave himself, in the words of the book of common prayer, as the full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.

In his vision, the Lord wanted Daniel to see beyond the sanctuary, and the sacrifices, to what they foreshadowed. As we read in Hebrews chapter 9 from verse 24,

*Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own.... But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many.*

And so, there is also a sting in the tail of Daniel's vision. For in the final seven, not only would the Messiah be put to death, but, as we read in verse 26 *The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary.* And again this is clarified in verse 27: *At the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.*

Now these are some of the strangest sentences in the Scriptures, but I think they point to the destruction of the temple by the Romans that would take place mere decades after the time of Jesus. And if that is the case, then these verses contain a sobering warning. For in his Son, God had provided the true place in which people could approach him. Jesus' sacrifice was the one that brought full, final and free forgiveness. And so those who still clung to the shadows and the symbols, those that still sought to deal with sin by their own devices, there was only one terrible prospect: judgement and destruction of the most terrible kind.

And so let me ask you again, how do you deal with you sin?

The message of Daniel 9 to us today is this: by our own power and will, we can never extricate ourselves from the grip of sin; only God can rescue us, and in Christ, God has done it.

To deny our sin, to downplay it, or ignore it is a disaster. Like Daniel we must see our sins in the light of the perfect righteousness of God, and humbly confess that we fall far short of his glory. And then, like Daniel, we must put our trust in the perfect righteousness of God, and place our hope in his faithfulness and mercy. And so we look to the Anointed One, the Christ, who died for us, and has dealt with our sin once and for all by his blood.

And so we need not be consumed by guilt and shame, for there is reason for great joy. As we sing in that wonderful hymn:

*When Satan tempts me to despair  
And tells me of the guilt within  
Upward I look and see him there  
Who made an end to all my sin.*

What then must we do?

Each of us, every day, must look to Christ, in humble repentance and confident faith.

As we gather here at church and in our home groups and prayer triplets and at youth group, we confess our sins to each other and together to God, and then we also point one another to the hope we share in Christ, reminding each other of God's gracious revelation of the gospel.

And as we go out into the world, we must proclaim the wonderful news of salvation that is found in Christ for all who put their trust in him.

The Apostle John offers a fitting conclusion and exhortation to all of us in his first letter. It is printed there on your sermon outline, and I hope you can see the way in which it brings together much of what we have considered this morning.

*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.*

*My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*