

Powerful Prayer

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Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 0 0] study in the book of Daniel. And you'll remember that the book of Daniel tells the story of a man named Daniel who lived in the late 7th and 6th century BC. And Daniel was a faithful Israelite who was living in exile in Babylon. And the book of Daniel has two main points. First of all, it's meant to encourage us that no matter how bad things seem, God is still in control. God rules and he reigns over the nations. It's not just meant to encourage us, though, it's also meant to instruct us. As Daniel lives in Babylon, we are meant to learn how to live faithful lives in a foreign land. Now, we've been switching back and forth between these ideas of encouragement and instruction. In Daniel chapters 4 and 5, we were looking mainly at encouragement, seeing that God's the one in charge no matter what's going on in the nations around us. And we've turned recently back to instruction. And I remember I told you last week we're taking a step back to look at some secondary themes that are lying below the surface for us. Last week, we looked at the idea of work. What does

God think about our work? How is he at work in it? And how do we move forward with joy? This week, we're going to be taking a look not at work, but at prayer. Because we don't just get to learn from Daniel about how to thrive in the secular world when it comes to our employment, but we also learn a lot from Daniel about his prayer life. And so we're going to do something a little bit different today, which is read sections from two different chapters of the book of Daniel. I'm going to jump back with you all to chapter 2. You'll remember chapter 2 is the part that Mark Bates came as a visiting preacher and brought to us. And then I'll also read a section from chapter 6, which is where we're at right now. And as we come to this, thinking about prayer, of course, prayer is something that's both on the one hand easy, on the one hand challenging and hard. It seems simple enough, right?

It's just talking to God. And yet when it comes to actually doing it, it seems incredibly hard, at times impossible. So what is it that's actually going to motivate us to pray? Why should we pray?

You'll notice, by the way, that's a different question than how should we pray. We're not going to tackle both this morning, but we're going to be looking at the question of why should we pray. As Christians, we know we're supposed to pray, but we don't necessarily desire prayer.

So we'll look to Daniel here as our model of what it looks like to live a faithful prayer life. And we'll see from him our encouragement. What we see in his life can be true in ours as well. And so I invite you to turn with me now. We're going to start in Daniel chapter 2, verses 17 through 23, and then we're going to turn to Daniel chapter 6. I think, I believe, verses 6 through 11. So an easy way to track with me would be to be in your worship guide. Since both sections are printed there, you can, of course, also track along in your Bible or on your phone. You may just have to do some fast flipping. And so as we come to this, remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read now, starting at Daniel chapter 2, verse 17.

[3 : 0 7] Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said, blessed be the name of God forever and ever to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons. He removes kings and sets up kings. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and hidden things. He knows what is in the darkness and the light dwells with him. To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and might and have now made known to me what we asked of you, for you have made known to us the king's matter.

Now we turn to chapter 6, starting with verse 6. Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, O king Darius, live forever. All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction that whoever makes petition to any god or man for 30 days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions.

Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document so that it cannot be changed according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked. Therefore, King Darius signed the document and injunction.

When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he had done previously.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your word that you've given us, which is always timely and relevant.

[5 : 18] We ask that you would use it this morning in a powerful way in our lives, that you would show us your grace and your encouragement for us. You'd also show us your challenge, that we would leave here with your power to obey your commands, that we would understand the power that you give us and the access that we have to you through your son and our savior, Jesus Christ.

And it's in his mighty name that we pray now. Amen. Amen. Amen. I've been telling you all from time to time stories from this book called Candles Behind the Wall, and it's about the church under communism.

It focuses both on Germany and also on the Soviet Union. And there's one section where it talks about the persecution that was happening to pastors and Christians under the Soviet Union.

There was all sorts of pressure that they would give them to, quote, cooperate, and they used both threats and promises to get them to do what they wanted to do. And, of course, some Christians caved to these demands.

Others, however, responded in a very different way. It tells us this here. The Christians under pressure often responded in exactly the opposite way that their persecutors intended.

[6 : 31] A member of an unregistered Baptist congregation explains it. They wanted to destroy the church, but during those times, the congregation was stronger than ever.

They held together like never before, and they prayed more often than ever. At home, our children didn't pray a prayer they had learned by rote. They prayed from the heart with their own words.

And so we see here these Christians who are suffering, were suffering under persecution in the Soviet Union.

Rather than giving in to it, their response was actually to become stronger as a community and stronger not just in that way but in prayer and praying together as families and as a church. We're looking at prayer this morning, and we see something similar here in Daniel chapter 2.

If you remember back to the time we were in that chapter, there was this story that King Nebuchadnezzar had had a dream. And, of course, it's not unusual to have a dream, but his demand was unreasonable and unusual.

[7 : 35] He demanded that the wise men of his kingdom tell him two things, not just the interpretation of the dream, which is what they'd been trained to do, but also the dream itself. In other words, he wanted them to read his mind, which, of course, was impossible.

Right? And so when he realizes it, they're not going to be able to do this for him. Remember, we find out that he threatens death to all the wise men.

Daniel, being a wise man, is included in this. So Daniel and his friends have the threat at them.

They are going to face death as well. And that's where we pick up here. That's the context for what we read this morning in verses 17 and 18.

Daniel, knowing that he and his friends might be about to be killed, has an immediate response. We see in verses 17 and 18, Daniel goes to his house, made the matter known to his friends, remember Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

In other words, Daniel goes to his friends with a prayer request. He's going to his community. He's going to his life group or his small group saying, we have this great concern. There is this threat on us and this danger.

[8 : 53] There's only one thing that's going to get us out of it, and it's this, me being able to interpret the dream. And so there's only one answer for this impossible situation, which is that we have to pray to God.

We're going to have to ask him to help us in this situation, because we cannot do this by ourselves. And then we see here, look with me at verse 19, there's an immediate response.

They have this group prayer, right? He gathers his friends. He shares this prayer request. Verse 19, then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. There's a direct connection here. There's a reason that verses 17 and 18 are followed by verse 19. This is not a coincidence, but the narrator here is telling us God revealed the vision because Daniel and his friends prayed.

And then Daniel goes on to have this prayer of thanks and says the exact same thing. Daniel's prayer acknowledges that God answers prayer. He does this both generally and specifically. First of all, he tells us generally that God answers prayer.

[9 : 55] Verse 20, we're told God has wisdom and might. And not only does God have this wisdom and might, he gives it out. Verse 21, he gives wisdom to the wise, knowledge to those who have understanding.

So we see God has these things. He shares them with people in general. But it's not just that he shares them with people in general. Daniel then drives to the point, God has answered his prayer specifically.

Look with me here at verse 23. In other words, God revealed the dream to Daniel because Daniel and his friends prayed.

Now I'm going to put this in a more drastic, shocking way. Had Daniel and his friends not prayed, it's very likely God would have not revealed the dream.

In other words, it mattered that they prayed. And so the point for us is this. Very simply, God answers prayer.

[11 : 13] God answers prayer. Now, this might sound simple and simplistic to say that our prayers matter, right? Not just individual prayers, but corporate prayers.

This is a group of people who are coming together. John prayed for us this morning, the congregational prayer. That was not a ritual. That was something powerful where we came before God as a community.

And John represented us giving our requests before God. We believe that moment mattered. It's not something that we were doing just to go through the motions, but we were calling out to the living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, knowing that we have access to him through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

And so he hears and he answers. Brothers and sisters, it matters that we pray. It matters that we pray individually. It matters, as Daniel did here, that we pray corporately.

It matters when we pray to God for our country. It matters when we pray to God for our work. By the way, that's probably part of what Daniel is praying for here, right? We can imagine in this way he prays three times daily.

[12 : 17] A lot of his prayers probably have to do with his work as a government administrator we talked about last week. It matters when we pray for our neighbors and our family. And it matters when we pray to God with others in our community.

That's what Daniel's doing here, remember? Daniel finds his friends, he shares this great need, and then they join in it all together. We could say that Daniel, if he was a member at Cheyenne Mountain, Daniel would have gone to his life group, and he would have asked for prayer or his Bible study.

Maybe Daniel was a member, maybe he was part of the band of brothers. Daniel went and he asked for prayer about this situation that he was facing at work. Because he knew that God answers prayer.

In fact, we're told this in the New Testament as well. James, near the end of his letter, says this, Brothers and sisters, the prayer of a righteous man or a righteous woman has great power as it is working.

That's what we know and trust and believe as Christians. Now, you might be thinking, of course, this is obvious. This is what every Christian believes.

[13 : 51] We all say that God answers prayer. We all say that it matters. Yes, that's true. That doesn't necessarily make it easy. Easy to say, not easy to believe.

Easy to talk about prayer and intellectually recognize that we need prayer. Much harder to actually act on that. Much harder to actually believe that taking time to pray is going to be the most productive thing that we can do, rather than immediately tackling the problem at hand.

So here it cuts to the heart of what we actually believe. Remember, we've been talking in Daniel chapters 4 and 5 about the fact that God's in control. He's the one who rules and reigns over the nations, right?

Our prayer life reveals whether we actually believe that's true. If we believe that God is the most powerful one, that he is more powerful than any king or kingdom or nation, of course, we would pray to him, right?

Of course, we would go over the head of every other ruler in this world. And yet, for me and for you, often, that's not the truth, right?

[15:04] This morning, when we prayed the Lord's Prayer, it was a political act. We were stating that God is the one in charge. He's the one who knows and controls. When we pray for our leaders, we are also making a political act.

We're saying God is so powerful that he can change and shape and form and give and stop them. And so it's one thing to read and preach about Daniel chapters 4 and 5.

It is another thing to actually believe it. It's worth noting here as well that if there's anyone in the world who did not need to pray, it was Daniel.

Daniel, incredibly gifted, right? He was chosen from a young age because he was so smart and so good-looking. Remember that from chapter 1. He probably had an incredible ability to think strategically.

He was good at strategy and tactics. He had high EQ. He knew how to get along with people well. He had the skills to get the job done. If there was anyone who could afford skipping his time of prayer, it would be Daniel.

[16:09] He would be more justified in doing it than any of us here because he was so smart and so gifted and so talented. And yet it's Daniel who comes back three times a day as we see in chapter 6.

He considers prayer to be his priority. It's what he gives himself to over and over again. A man named Paul Miller says this in his book on prayer called *A Praying Life*.

If you are not praying, then you are quietly confident that time, money, and talent are all you need in life. You'll always be a little too tired, a little too busy.

But if, like Jesus, you realize you can't do life on your own, then no matter how busy, no matter how tired you are, you will find the time to pray.

Of course, sobering and convicting words, but also reminding us what Daniel knew. Despite his talents and his gifts and abilities, Daniel's only hope, what preserved him and kept him, the reason that he made it to Daniel chapter 6 when he's in his 70s or his 80s, is because he came before God and prayed.

[17:22] It's because he and his friends gathered together and brought their needs before the Lord. And so, brothers and sisters, why do we pray? We pray because we know and believe that God actually changes things.

Prayer actually makes things in this world different. We see that in Daniel's life. We know it in our life as well.

However, what do we do when circumstances don't change? Any of us who've lived life as Christians for a long time know there's times, there's moments when we pray to God over and over for something, right?

And God chooses not to give us those things. And there's a reason here for prayer beyond just the fact that God answers that he's powerful and he changes it.

Daniel here is in Babylon, right? Prayer did not stop Israel from going into exile. And so, we see as we're looking at our motivation for prayer, it's not just that prayer changes the circumstances around us.

[18:25] It's not just that prayer changes things and the world. We also see that prayer changes us. I ask you to turn now with me to Daniel chapter 6.

And we have a different story that we started last week. Remember, last week we had Daniel, the good worker. There was this complaint brought against him. Not a complaint, but jealousy, right?

The other workers were jealous of him. He was being promoted. First, he was one of the top three. Then he was going to be the top dog in the entire empire because he was such a good worker. And so, they thought to themselves, what are we going to be able to do to take Daniel down? And we read this in verse 5 last week. We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in the connection with the law of his God. So, they know if they're going to trap him, they're going to have to attack him at the place of his religion because he's such a good worker. There's no other way to find fault with him. And so, we read today the next step in this plot to take Daniel down. These men who are jealous of him go to the king and they say, hey, king, we have this great idea.

[19 : 30] We think you should pass a law that forbids people from praying to anyone but you for 30 days. And the plot, of course, is clear, right? We know Daniel's not going to go for this.

He will continue praying. We'll catch him. Then we'll be able to get rid of him because he's going to get thrown into the lion's den. Now, we'll look at more of that next week, right? But this is the plot that's being set up.

We're going to catch him in his prayer life because this is what we know characterizes Daniel and this is the way we can take him down. And so, we come to verse 10, which is really our focus today. Daniel finds out about this and we read, What does Daniel do to the threat of death if he prays? He ignores it and he prays. Chapter 6 is the end of the story of Daniel's personal life in Babylon. Daniel chapter 7 and 12, we're going to get a look at his visions that he had.

So, we're at the end here. This is a man who, for decades now, living in Babylon. Remember, he came as a youth. He's been building this habit and practice of prayer.

[20 : 54] He has seen God over and over deliver and answer. He has been able to remain faithful and continue to look towards Jerusalem all these years.

He hasn't been taken in by the culture. There's something wonderful and impressive about Daniel here. In other words, the point is this. Daniel's practice of prayer has shaped and formed him to stand strong.

Daniel's practice of prayer has shaped and formed him to stand strong. Why is he able to ignore this rule and just simply go on praying? Because decade after decade, year after year, he has been shaped into this type of person who recognizes that God is the one who's actually in control.

He was able to continue praying because he had been praying. He had years of recognizing that God's the one in charge. Years of experience with answered prayer.

How do you have the strength to stand when things get hard? How do you have the strength to do what Daniel does here?

[22 : 08] Well, you have to recognize, as we talked about in chapters 4 and 5, the true king and the true kingdom. How do you become a person that recognizes the true king and the true kingdom?

You do it in prayer. That's what we did this morning. I'm going to keep coming back to this over and over. When we prayed the Lord's Prayer together as a church, we were recognizing the true king and the true kingdom.

Yes, we were praying that God would be at work in this world. We believe he answers those prayers, and our prayer this morning changes the things around us. Also, it changed us.

We reminded ourselves again that it is God's kingdom that's in heaven that we look to be on earth.

We recognize that it is God, not the government or kings or rulers, who gives us our daily bread.

We recognize that God is the one who is able to forgive us of our sins when the culture around us can only offer to cancel. We saw prayer change us.

[23 : 14] We also see something else here in verse 10. It's not just that Daniel has this habit of prayer that he's continued throughout his life. He also has a direction to his prayer. We're told there are windows in his house that face towards Jerusalem, and that's the direction he points when he prays.

Why? Well, there's one reason that's the most clear, and that's in 1 Kings 8. There's this discussion of what God's people are supposed to do when they're in exile.

That's where Daniel is. And we're told in 1 Kings 8 that when God's people are in exile, they are supposed to pray towards Jerusalem. So in a simple way, in one manner, Daniel is simply being obedient.

He's someone who knows the Bible. He knows he's in exile. He clearly understands the story, and so as an obedient Israelite, he's facing towards Jerusalem. But why is it so important to God that his

people in exile face in that direction?

We know now it doesn't matter where we face when we pray. God hears our prayers regardless, and he hears Daniel's prayer. Well, I'll give you one way. As Daniel looks towards Jerusalem in his prayers, he is reminded of the true reality, the true king, the true kingdom.

[24 : 28] In other words, he's living in exile with all the pressures of that world and that culture around him, and three times a day, he points himself back to God and his presence and his city.

He has to be reminded over and over again of what is true. And so there's a sense, brothers and sisters, when we prayed the Lord's prayer this morning, we were setting our eyes towards Jerusalem.

We were setting our eyes towards the heavenly kingdom. We were reminding ourselves of what our true home is. We were reminding ourselves of who is actually in control in this world.

There's this book I highly recommend called Hearing the Message of Daniel, and he makes a few points about Daniel's prayer and the direction of Jerusalem.

He says this, To pray towards Jerusalem, then, was to align himself in the direction of the God of Israel and to embrace that God's purposes and values. It was like taking a daily compass bearing for his life, enabling him to set everything else in its true perspective in relation to the reality and the requirements of Yahweh his God.

[25 : 44] For Daniel, then, the key to the future and all the purposes of God, the meaning of life, and the source of his ultimate values, lay not in the city Nebuchadnezzar had built, but in the city Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed.

Brothers and sisters, the same is true for us. Our hope lies not in the cities here on earth in which we live, but in the heavenly kingdom that we long to see one day.

And so this is how Daniel remains faithful year after year. It's how he protects himself from compromise to the world around him. He's constantly in prayer, reorienting himself.

He has that compass so he remembers what is true and who's in charge. It's not just that prayer changes the circumstances around us.

Prayer also changes us. As many of you know, I became a homeowner about two years ago, and my home is now 26 years old, which means it has all the joys of midlife crisis and all the joys of contractor-grade things that don't work anymore.

[26 : 59] So I've been slowly replacing these things. The most recent one was a portion of fence that I share with the neighbor behind me. And I didn't realize it, but this neighbor was propping up the fence from his side.

He pulled out the props so he could show me, and you can just shake the fence, which is not good.

So we agreed we were going to replace the fence, and we just split the cost, right?

So he paid half, I paid half. We got a whole new fence. But here's the thing. It's not just enough for me to get a new fence because I know that this fence has incredibly dark days ahead of it.

The fence is going to face snow. In fact, it already has. Baptism by fire. The fence is going to face rain. It's going to face all kinds of wind.

It's going to face the sun, the Colorado sun, baking down on it. And so what am I going to do if I want the fence to stand strong, right? I want this fence to last for 30 years.

[27 : 58] I do not want—fences are not cheap, I discovered. I do not want to be replacing this fence again anytime soon. Wood, by the way, is not cheap right now. So I want it to stand strong. Well, I didn't really know what I was doing.

I went to Home Depot, quickly discovered I was in over my head. And so I found someone to help me. I was thinking I was going to paint this fence. He pointed me in a very different direction. And we ended up putting Olympic Water Guide wood sealer on it.

Much cheaper than paint. So I saved a ton of money. I would have spent like hundreds of dollars in paint and whatnot. It's like a \$15 bottle of wood sealant. What does that do? It absorbs into the wood, right?

It becomes a part of the wood. It seals the wood. It protects the wood. When the wind blows, when the rain comes, when it snows here in Colorado, even when it's supposed to be sunny, I know that the fence can stand strong.

I can't change the circumstances around the fence, right? I'm not going to make it stop raining. I'm not going to make it stop snowing. I'm not going to stop the wind from blowing.

[29 : 08] What I can do is I can make sure my fence will stand strong when the dark days come. Brothers and sisters, the same is true for us.

We cannot always change the circumstances around us. We know there are challenges and dark days ahead of us. Prayer is what prepares us and changes us to stay strong.

We are like Daniel. Prayer is something that soaks into us and it changes us. No matter what comes, it is Daniel's prayer life that allows him to stand strong.

It is what God uses in our lives to prepare us to stand strong. People talk all the time about, you know, what are we going to do to prepare for what's coming? What are we going to do to prepare for life in this world?

Well, there's a simple answer. We pray. We develop a rich and robust prayer life. You want to stand firm in the winds of this world?

[30 : 12] You want the rain to just beat up and roll off? Pray. Pray. Pray. That is God's sealant for us in this world. It is what he uses to strengthen and protect us.

And of course, it should not surprise us that the same is true of our Lord Jesus. Even as a perfect man living on this earth, he had to stay connected to his Father in prayer.

We find out in Mark chapter 1 that he would go off by himself to pray. We find out that like Daniel, he didn't just pray by himself. He prayed with others. Luke chapter 6, he prayed by himself.

But Luke chapter 9, he takes Peter and John and James up with him to the mountain to pray. So Jesus doesn't just pray by himself. He prays with others. Remember, the night before Jesus is betrayed, and the night of his betrayal, Jesus is preparing to face suffering.

And so he spends the time in prayer to God. Remember, he asks that God would take this away. He says this in Matthew chapter 26.

[31 : 24] After going a little farther, he fell on his face and prayed, saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. Jesus' circumstances did not change.

And he prayed in preparation for what was to come. And so, brothers and sisters, as goes our Savior, so also goes us. We pray as well.

We pray because we know that it changes the world. And we pray because we know that it changes us. And if we're people that feel the weight of that, remember what Jesus tells us in Matthew chapter 17.

That faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains. And so I want you to think about that in our prayers. If you feel the weight of this, if you're feeling guilty or shamed or overwhelmed, as the prayer of where you want to be and be going in your life, the ways you need to grow in your prayer life, I want you to remember this.

God honors mustard seed prayers. It's mustard seeds. Faith of that size can move a mountain. And so it's okay to pray in this way.

[32 : 31] You could simply pray like this. You could say, Lord, I don't want to pray. And I know prayer changes things, so I want you to come and change me so that I would want to pray. I don't know how to pray, but I know that you've changed things through prayer, so I'm coming now to ask you that you would teach me and help me.

Because God is the one ultimately who comes and helps and sustains us. It is him who strengthens us, not ourselves.

When my handyman came to help me with this, he had one of those sprayers that you use for Roundup, and he filled that up with the water sealant and just sprayed it on, right? Now, it wasn't his power.

It wasn't my power. What would have happened if he had filled the sprayer up with Kool-Aid? Would that have helped my fence in any way? No, brothers and sisters, the power is not in us.

It is in the one we pray to. It is God who seals us. It is his power that's at work. We have access to resources that come to us in Jesus Christ through prayer.

[33 : 37] And so we have great confidence. We know that when Jesus prayed that prayer, that the cup would pass from him, he was separated from God so that we would not be separated from God.

He took the punishment for us and was isolated from God on the cross so that we could have communion with God, so that we could have relationships, so that we could pray to him.

And so prayer is our communion to God. Jesus was separated from him so that we would not be. We have that access, and so it's not us earning or proving something by our prayers, but coming and having access to the power and the resources all of which God has given to us through his Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

And so, brothers and sisters, why do we pray? We pray because prayer changes the world. And we pray because prayer changes us.

And we know all of this is true, not because of our work or our effort, but because of our Lord and our Savior, Jesus Christ. And so we're going to pray to him now. Our Father in heaven, we thank you that we have access to you, and we can pray to you even in this moment.

[34 : 49] We ask that you would give us mustard seed faith. You'd give us mustard seed prayers, that even just as we're able as feeble and weak people, we'd be able to cry out to you, and we ask for your help, that you would make us people who pray, that we would be able to experience your power and your preparation in the same way that Daniel did.

We thank you that we don't earn these things or deserve them, but instead we have great confidence because we ask for them in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.