

Daniel 9:1-19 Colossians 1:9-12 (readings on p.4)

Last week our focus was on praying for ourselves because we really need God, this week the focus shifts to praying for others because *they* really need God. Praying for others is known as *intercession*. It means pleading on someone else's behalf.

It is not easy to pray for others – at times it feels like hard work – so we are only likely to do it if we are highly motivated.

We are more likely to pray for those whom we love and like.

We are also more likely to pray for others if the situation is desperate; if people's only hope is prayer.

Moses was one of the great intercessors of the Bible – constantly praying to God on behalf of his people. One of the most famous examples is in *Exodus 17* where Moses intercedes for Joshua and the Israelites, after the Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. ... *stood on top of the hill with the staff of God in his hands with Aaron and Hur ... As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning.* ¹² *When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up ... so that his hands remained steady till sunset.* ¹³ *So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.* Intercession is hard work, it can be tiring work and the only reason Moses went through all that exhausting time of prayer from dawn to dusk is because it was essential; it was literally a matter of life and death. Israel would be massacred by the Amalekites unless God intervened. So Moses went to any lengths to ensure he was able to keep on praying: *the stone to sit on, Aaron and Hur holding up his arms*

One of the reasons we don't pray as much as we might for others - or with as much determination and faithfulness as we might is because we don't see it as a matter of life and death. But make no mistake: **We fight with spiritually deadly forces and powers**

Paul in *Ephesians 6*: ¹² *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

After talking about the need to put on the full armour of God Paul says:

¹⁸ *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for **all the Lord's people.*** ¹⁹ *Pray also for me,*

this means **Prayer is essential for our church**

*When we look at Paul's letters we realise that he constantly prayed for every single church that he had planted. e.g.: **Romans 1** ⁹ *God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you* ¹⁰ *in my prayers at all times;**

Ephesians 1 ¹⁶ *I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.*

Colossians 1 ⁹ *since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you.*

We continually ask God...

Thessalonians 1 ⁹ *We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers.*

Paul's assurance of pray usually comes at the beginning, sometimes further on in the letter:

Colossians 1:9-12 gives us an example of the sort of things Paul prayed for (*see reading on p.4*)

He prays for *the knowledge of God's will ... that they might live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ... that they may have great endurance and patience,*

But please note that it is **God alone** who will fill them with the knowledge

the **Spirit** that gives understanding and **God** who strengthens with all power according to his glorious might to enable them to endure and be patient – any spiritual growth is entirely dependent on God, which is why we need to pray.

Think also of how Jesus prayed for his church in John 17:

1. that they will be steeped in God's word and faithful to it
2. that God's truth will bear fruit in their lives (*sanctified in the truth*)

3. that they be one – brought to complete unity

4. protected from the evil one

Paul sums up what it means to pray like Jesus for fellow Christians Galatians 4

¹⁹ *My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,*

It is also essential that we pray for those who don't know Jesus -

This is the main meaning of *the priesthood of all believers* It's not primarily about church governance and who should or should not be ordained but the fact that if you are a believer – a follower of Jesus – then you are part of *Christ's* royal priesthood whose main role is to proclaim the word of God and to intercede for all people everywhere: *1 Timothy 2* ¹ *I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people –*

When we pray for **our families and friends** we tend to pray for their health, emotional well-being, relationships, career; but the most important thing of all for those who do not yet trust in Jesus, is that they come to do so.

For it is only in Jesus that they can find eternal life – not just their destiny after this earthly life, but life in all its fullness here and now. We prefer not to think about this but this is so important and we need to **listen to what Jesus himself says:**

John 3 ³⁶ *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.*

John 6 ⁴⁷ *Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life.* ⁴⁸ *I am the bread of life...* ⁵³ *Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.*

John 14 ⁶ *'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

Moreover, a person can only come to believe in Jesus as a result of the grace of God:

John 6:44 *'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them,*

v.65: ⁶⁵ He went on to say, 'This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.'

This is why we need to pray for those who don't believe in Jesus because as with Israel and the Amalekites, it is a matter of life and death. And as with the Amalekites we live in a society where powerful spiritual forces are ranged against us and our loved ones who are determined to try and prevent them from finding real life in Christ – but praise God He is more powerful and He's on our side – but we need like Moses to show him how serious we are when we pray.

It's the same when we pray for our nation

viz Paul for the nation of Israel: what does he pray for? Romans 10 ¹

Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved... a few verses later, he clarifies what he means by being saved: v. ⁹ if you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved...

When we look at the mess our country is in today – not just Brexit, but morally and spiritually – it is very tempting to pray not out of love, but out of anger or at the very least, a sense of superiority:

"Heavenly Father we pray for all those wretched people who have rejected or ignore you"!

But we need to learn from Daniel: (*see reading on p.4*)

Daniel was renowned for his righteousness and faithfulness to God; his determination to trust and obey God, his praying 3 times a day and yet when he prays for his nation Israel who have fallen under the judgement of God because of their refusal to obey Him, he includes himself as part of sinful Israel as he pours out his heart to God: ⁴ *I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: ⁵ we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. ⁶ We have not listened to your servants the prophets, ⁷ ...our unfaithfulness to you ¹⁰ we have not obeyed the Lord our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets*

Daniel identifies with those for whom he is praying. This is the nature of true intercession, standing alongside and in the place of those for whom you are praying. Daniel was not guilty of all the sins of his people, indeed he was a shining exception – but he loves his people, he identifies with them, he is one of them and so prays as one of them.

Wonderfully this is *how Jesus prays for us*.

Both Paul in *Romans 8* and the writer to the *Hebrews* tell us Jesus is always *interceding* for us – praying before God our Father, as one who has so identified with us on the cross that he took all our sin on his righteous and innocent shoulders. This is how we should pray for our non-Christian family, friends, neighbours, our community our nation – not in a patronising or condemning way – *those wicked sinners*, but as beloved fellow members of *our* family, *our* friendship group, *our* neighbourhood, *our* village, *our* nation of which we are part and a representative.

Daniel recognises that the complete disaster that has come upon his nation, the destruction of the temple, of the city of Jerusalem, people being carried into exile, the scorn which his people now endure are all a result of the righteous anger and wrath of God. ¹¹ *Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you.*

Daniel knows that his people will continue under God's judgement and there is no hope for them unless God intervenes with forgiveness and mercy and so he prays: ¹⁸ *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.* ¹⁹ *Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act!*

Similarly Jesus calls us to pray not because we are righteous but because of God's great mercy and that we can only come in the grace and forgiveness of Christ because in that grace He has clothed us in *His* righteousness. This is what it means to pray in Jesus' name.

Finally we need always to remember that Jesus is the chief intercessor – indeed Paul reminds us that He is the *only* mediator between God and man, so we can only come into God's presence to pray and intercede, because Jesus has invited us in with him to join in with his prayer and intercession.

Remembering that we are praying *alongside* Jesus is also what is meant by praying in Jesus' name and this means the only effective prayer is going to be prayer that echoes His prayers. This is why Jesus says in John 15 ⁷ *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*

And 3 times in *John 14-16* He says: *“Whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.*

Richard Foster who has written a wonderful book simply titled “Prayer” says: *“How do we know what Christ would say and do? Well, how does a couple who have been married many loving years know what each thinks and wants and feels? This is how we pray in Jesus' name.”*(p.208)

Prayer is not just a matter of life and death: it's much more important than that. For it is vital for the eternal destiny of those whom we love, for our church, for our nation & for the world. *viz Samuel to Israel Sam 12: 23* *As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you.*

The two readings are on the next page.

Daniel 9 ¹In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom – ²in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. ³So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.

⁴I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed:

‘Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, ⁵we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. ⁶We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land.

⁷‘Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame – the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you. ⁸We and our kings, our princes and our ancestors are covered with shame, Lord, because we have sinned against you. ⁹The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him; ¹⁰we have not obeyed the Lord our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets. ¹¹All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you.

‘Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you. ¹²You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing on us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem. ¹³Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come on us, yet we have not sought the favour of the Lord our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth. ¹⁴The Lord did not hesitate to bring the disaster on us, for the Lord our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him.

¹⁵‘Now, Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day, we have sinned, we have done wrong. ¹⁶Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. Our sins and the iniquities of our ancestors have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us.

¹⁷‘Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favour on your desolate sanctuary. ¹⁸Give 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. ¹⁹Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.’

Colossians 1 ⁹For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, ¹⁰so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, ¹²and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.