

Delay Not

Daniel 9:20-27

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Good morning. If we haven't met, my name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here, and it is great to be with you. If you are a guest or visitor, we're glad that you would join us this morning, and we're continuing or we're resuming our sermon series in the book of Daniel, and so we're going to be in Daniel 9 this morning. So if you have a Bible, you can turn to Daniel 9. If you don't have a Bible, there are Bibles in the chairs in front of you, or you can follow along on the screens. We'll project it in just a moment. But as you're turning there, it's important for us to maybe take a moment and remind us where we are in the book of Daniel, since we took a week off last week, right? Appropriately, last week was Easter, so we took a break from Daniel and looked at a resurrection passage, and so maybe we're forgetting where we are. But remember, the book of Daniel is this story of God's people living in exile.

So God's people, because of their sin, their rebellion, have been sent into exile, and they're living in Babylonian captivity. And we've seen that as Daniel and his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, have been living in this foreign land, that they neither separated from the land, nor did they assimilate to it. And we talked about how this is important for us, because the New Testament tells us that we too are exiles, that our ultimate allegiance, our ultimate citizenship, isn't to the United States, it's not to some other foreign nation, but our ultimate citizenship is in heaven. And so that means that as believers, as we live in this world, we are living as exiles. And so we too, like Daniel, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, are not to assimilate to the world around us, nor are we to separate from it, but we are to live faithfully in the midst of it. Now, that was the first half of Daniel, right? That was the first few chapters.

But the last few weeks, we've been in the second half of Daniel, and the second half of Daniel is the weird and the strange parts of Daniel, right? I think that's the technical term, the bizarre, because that's what we've seen. We've seen all sorts of visions, visions of rams and of goats. We've seen visions of statues and bronze heads and all these sorts of things, right? And we've been going along and through it and seeing how the Lord is interpreting these things to Daniel. Now, two weeks ago, in the first half of chapter 9, we actually had a break from the visions. As Tobias opened the first half of chapter 9 to us, we heard Daniel's prayer, that he's seen these various visions, and in the midst of these things, he took up the scroll from the prophet Jeremiah. And he was reading from the prophet Jeremiah, and he saw that Jeremiah prophesied that the exile would last 70 years. And so Daniel entered into prayer, and his prayer was marked by confessing his sin as well as the sins of the people and asking forgiveness and calling God to pay attention and for God to act. And one of the things he ended his prayer with last two weeks ago, excuse me, was a prayer asking God to delay not, do not delay. And it's not hard to imagine that Daniel would pray this, because he would have desire for God to act with immediacy, delay not.

Now, when things get delayed, they can frustrate us, right? Delays irk us. They annoy us because we think that things should be immediate. Many of you know that I cycle, that I road bike, that that is my chief form of exercise. I know for some of you it is as well. But I've only been doing it for about seven or so years. And so after having some leg pain, I decided I would give up running forever, you know, and I do not miss it. But I would give up running, and I would take up cycling. And so I bought a used bike, and I started riding it. And after a

very short period of time, I realized this is something that I could see myself doing. And I enjoyed it, and I had fun going up and down the mountains of Roanoke and over the hills and all that sort of thing. But I need a new bike if I was going to pursue this. Okay? So I decided I was going to upgrade my bike, a bike that's a little bit lighter, a little bit faster, with better brakes and better handling. And so I saved some money, and I headed over to the Trek store, and I put down a deposit, and I said I would like a new bike. And they said, "no problem. It will be ready in a couple months." That was the fall of 2019. And you know what happened shortly after the fall of 2019. Right? The whole world shut down. And so they called me and said, "hey, there's going to be a delay." And I thought, no problem. Right? No big deal. A delay? Because, you know, surely there's still factories all over the world that are still making things, and I don't even have to go into the store to pick up my bike. You know, we can still socially distance, and I can get my bike in the parking lot. Not a big deal. But a few months turned into many months. Six months. Twelve months. Over a year. I kept getting phone call after phone call. It's going to be delayed. It's going to be delayed. Because there was a global bike shortage. Like, I was sitting there thinking, "I understand a run on toilet paper, but you are telling me, you're telling me across the world that many people are taking up cycling that I can't get my bike?" And so frustration. Annoyance. Right? Disappointment. They all started to build. I hated it. Because I'm not a very patient person by nature. And so when months turned into six, into 12, I wondered, "will I ever get a call that the delay is over, that my bike has arrived?" And you know this impatience. You know this disappointment. You know with the regular, the insignificant, the mundane things of life, like getting a bike or a purchase or that waiter who doesn't move quick enough at the dinner. We all feel it.

And we feel with the Lord sometimes, don't we? Because we offer up prayers, and it feels sometimes like God is delayed in his response. From our perspective, doesn't it feel that way? Have you heard me? Are you listening? Delay not. That's what Daniel prayed in verse 19. "Delay not for your own sake, oh my God, because your city and your people are called by your name." "Delay not." That's what he prayed right before our passage. And so let's pick up our reading in verse 20. Daniel writes,

"While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the LORD my God for the holy hill of my God, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, "O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved. Therefore consider the word and understand the vision.

"Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. And for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on

the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.” (ESV)

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, we ask that you would not delay, but that you would open our eyes this morning, that you would be with us and near to us, that by your Spirit you would direct our ways, and that you would help us to behold the glory in your word. Give us understanding, we pray. We pray all this in Christ's name. Amen.

So, Daniel prayed, “do not delay.” And God, through the angel Gabriel, didn't, right? God came immediately through the angel Gabriel. You almost get the sense that Gabriel was interrupting Daniel's prayer, don't you? In verse 20, we're told, “while I was speaking, while I was praying, while I was confessing.” In verse 21, “while I was speaking in prayer,” and then Gabriel appears. It's almost like Gabriel's entering in and he's saying, “Daniel, Daniel, you can stop your praying. You can be quiet for a little bit because I've got a word from the Lord. I am coming with an answer.” And what is the answer?

God's Answer: Love

Well, the first part of God's answer to Daniel's prayer is love. That's what we see in verses 22 through 23. “O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. At the beginning of your pleas for mercy, a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved.” Now, that word love there, it's a Hebrew word that in this, in the form that it's found, only appears nine times in the Old Testament. And every time this word appears in the Old Testament, it's speaking of things that are desired, things that are delighted in, things that are precious. And that's what God's saying about Daniel. He's saying, “I hear your prayer because you are greatly loved, because you are precious in my sight.” Now, I imagine many of you are probably thinking, well, of course God would say that about Daniel, right? I mean, what have we seen of Daniel? He's the man who doesn't waver. He didn't assimilate to the Babylonian world. He was immovable and faithful. When he was called to enter into idolatry, he resisted. He has been faithful, so of course God would love him. But me? But us? I mean, we're those who have failed and stumbled and sinned. We hear Daniel's prayer and that God loves him, but we wonder, is the same true of us? And of course, the message of the Bible is yes to Daniel, but yes to you.

Yes, Daniel was faithful under Nebuchadnezzar, and he never assimilated, though the pressure was high. But when he confessed, do you remember what he was confessing? Not just the sins of those people, not just the sins of Israel, but he was confessing his sins. Now, we don't know what those sins were. We're not given that sort of specificity in his prayer. We don't know what they were, but Daniel knew what they were, and God knew what they were. God knew that Daniel had fallen short. God knew that Daniel, too, had sinned. And God's love isn't dependent upon Daniel's sinlessness. No, God loved Daniel because God loves his people. And that's actually what the New Testament tells us. In the book of John, chapter 15, Jesus says to his disciples, “as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.” Did you hear that? Like, how amazing that is? As the Father loves Jesus, that's how Jesus loves his people.

That's how he loves us. And in that same chapter, Jesus says, “greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends.” That is beautiful. You see, God doesn't love just Daniel. God's love is for all his people, even for you, even for

me. That's how the answer to Daniel's prayer begins. It reminds him that he is loved. Now, that's not the only answer that God gives Daniel. Because coming out of this first part of his answer, this part of love, God shows his love through giving a second portion of an answer, and that is the restoration that is to come. That God is restoring according to his timing. And that's what we're going to see in verses 24 through the end of this passage.

Now, let me just say, before we get into verse 24, I know that some of you, as soon as I start reading it, you're going to want to run to timing and to dating and all these sorts of things. I understand the impulse. We will get there. Just hold on. Okay? But put aside for a moment the 70 weeks. Okay? We're going to get there. But I want you to listen to the rest of verse 24 and not get sidetracked by the 70 weeks. So, listen to what Gabriel says to Daniel. "70 weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a holy place." Okay? So, do you see what comes after the 70 weeks? There are six things. Did you see them? Six things. One, God's going to finish transgressions. Two, the end of sin. Three, atoning for iniquity. Four, an everlasting righteousness. Five, God is sealing the vision and the prophet. And six, he is anointing a holy place, or that could mean also a holy one, the way that the Hebrew is. Okay? So, I want you to think about this.

Remember what Daniel is praying about, what he was asking for. Daniel is wanting the restoration of Jerusalem. And Jerusalem is going to be restored. That's what I think actually verse 25 is talking about. It's going to be restored and rebuilt. And in fact, we know historically that that takes place because Cyrus, who was a king, a foreign king, he actually issued an edict that sent the people of God back to Jerusalem, back to their land. And in the book of Ezra and Nehemiah, we see them rebuilding the city. So, we know it's going to take place. And that's what Daniel wants. That's what Daniel's asking for. But as good as that would be for the people of God, the restoration of the city of Jerusalem, did you see God is answering with something better? It's something better. Right? The transgressions will be finished. Sin will be brought to an end. Iniquity will be atoned for. Righteousness will be forever. There will be a sealing of the vision and the prophet. That's God saying, "it is sure. I'm putting my stamp on this promise. It will come about. It will happen. The holy place or the holy one will be anointed."

You see, what God is declaring is, "Daniel, as good as your request might be to see the restoration of the holy city, I'm going to give you something even better." That God is declaring to Daniel that the sin of the people, the transgressions that they have made, that led them into exile, that transgression, that sin cannot thwart who God is and what he is doing. He is going to bring about something greater than Daniel can even imagine. I mean, it all began in chapter 9 with Daniel reading from the scroll of Jeremiah, reading the prophet. And now he's hearing from the angel Gabriel, he's hearing God's commitment to the promised new covenant that is spoken of in Jeremiah. That sin and iniquity, they will not rule. That righteousness instead will reign forever. That's the promise that God is making to Daniel. That restoration is coming, but a better restoration than even the restoration of Jerusalem.

It's a better restoration than Daniel can even imagine. That is the promise God gives to Daniel, and it's the promise he makes to us. Because we know that atonement for iniquity, the triumph over sin, it ultimately comes not through the restoration of Jerusalem, but it comes through the work of Jesus. Because he's the one who takes the sins of his people on himself. He's the one who on the cross was cut off and laid bare. That's what I think verse 26 is pointing to. Do you see what it says? "An anointed one shall be cut off and shall have

nothing.” I think that's pointing to Jesus and his work on the cross. Now, as we're moving a little bit deeper into these verses, we're starting to dip our toes into very debated waters. I feel like I say that every week in Daniel. I don't know if it's true or not, but it just feels like Daniel might be the most debated book in the whole Bible. Maybe. I don't know. Who knows? Maybe Revelation and Genesis and, you know, maybe 12 other books. But regardless, this is very, very debated.

I want to tell you, like over the past two weeks, as I've been preparing for this sermon and this message, I've consulted at least 11 different resources, commentaries, lectures, articles, and I couldn't find two of them that agreed 100% with all the nuance that's going on in this passage. Like, a lot of them agreed on some of the big picture, some of the big blocks, but no one agreed 100%. Now, I'm acknowledging that from the outset, because some of you know who the anointed one is, who the prince is, the 70 weeks, the breaking out of 62 weeks, the one week, etc. They're all debated. So, take a deep breath. I'm going to solve it for us right now. I promise. No, but seriously, the fact that this is debated should lead us to have a humility as we approach this text, okay? It should cause us to come to it very humbly. Now, we should always come to the Bible humbly, but even when we're entering into murky waters, we should even more so.

So, that's one thing I want to say, but the second thing I want to acknowledge is that because these are all debated, I can't go through every single argument for every point, okay? I'm sorry if that disappoints you, but if you want to discuss it further, I would love to get together with you and talk about it. I think that would be a very enjoyable conversation, I promise. And so, let's get lunch, let's get a drink, let's talk about these things. But for now, I'm just going to describe how I read this passage for y'all, okay? I'm not going to go into all the different debates. I'm just going to tell you how I understand it. So, the 70 weeks, it literally means 77s, okay? In the Hebrew, it's 77s, but it's translated 70 weeks. So, it's basically 490 years is what we're looking at. And what I see these 77s, or these 70 weeks, pointing to is a prolonged period of discipline or punishment. So, we know in chapter 9, verse 1, that the punishment that was declared by Jeremiah was supposed to last 70 years but that's actually starting to extend. They're coming to the end of it, and it looks like they're not going to return from exile anytime soon. And so, God comes through Gabriel, and he says, “I'm actually extending this period of time basically because of the people's ongoing sin and lack of repentance.” So, now the extension of the exilic time period is going to be roughly 490 years.

Now, I think y'all understand this if you've been around the church for some time. When the Bible talks about years and prophecies like this, like, if it takes place at like 485th year, it doesn't mean they got it wrong, okay? Like, it's generally speaking. So, 490 years. And I think that in the midst of this, as I already mentioned, verse 25 is pointing to the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the return from exile. Now, other passages in the Old Testament, specifically Ezra chapter 9, tells us that the ultimate return doesn't take place simply because the people have moved to Jerusalem, that actually they're waiting for a greater return from exile. And I think that the greater return from exile is tied to the anointed one or prince in verse 25. And that Jesus is that anointed one or prince. The anointed one who's going to be cut off in verse 26. Now, if you are familiar with the debates, you know that that is complicated. My view is complicated by the fact that the people of the prince are the ones who destroy the city. So, you might be going, well, how can the people who follow Jesus are people of the prince going to now destroy Jerusalem? And this is how it's going to take place, or how it has already taken place, actually, what I think, is that these are the rebellious people. So, these are

the rebellious Jews who, because of their rebellion, actually led to the destruction of the temple in AD 70.

So, some people, there are those who think that the anointed one or the prince here is referring to a foreign king. And sometimes anointed, God does anoint a foreign king to bring discipline or punishment upon his people, but I actually think this is speaking of Jesus. Okay? He is the anointed one, and his people are going to respond in rebellion, and that leads to the destruction of the temple. We're good so far, right? I know this is like clearing everything up. So, thus, in verse 27, this continues to point to Jesus as the one who's going to make a strong covenant and shall put an to sacrifice and offering. So, what I'm getting at is that I do not believe that this is ultimately pointing to the end time, to a future that we are waiting for. Okay? Now, I think that there are elements that won't be fulfilled until that moment comes, until Jesus returns, but I think that the beginning of this fulfillment takes place with the return from exile, with Jesus coming, with his being cut off on the cross, and with the destruction of the temple in AD 70, which, by the way, is roughly about 490 years from the edict of Cyrus until that point. Roughly. I also think that what that entails is that it means that we are not actually looking for the physical restoration of the Jerusalem temple any longer.

So, we are not looking for to a time in the future when the Jerusalem temple is to be restored and when the sacrificial system is to be reconstituted. There are veins of thought that think that. I do not think that that's what we're looking for, because we know that Jesus is the new temple that has been formed, that we are being formed into that temple, and that Hebrews tells us that Jesus has done away with sacrifices once and for all, for all time. So, we don't look for them to be reconstituted. Okay, sorry. That was really fast, right? So, instead, what I think that this is pointing us to is a partial fulfillment that has already taken place, and it's fulfilling Jesus. That's what I think this is driving towards. Now, I know that for some of y'all, that didn't even come close to answering all the questions you have, because you're sitting there going, "what about desolations and wars and all that stuff," and there's answers to those questions too, but, you know, let's get lunch, go drink, we'll talk about. So, there's definitely more that we could be discussing. There are more details. I know some of you would like more of that, and I know some of you are wondering also, there are others of you who are just going, "so what?" Like, "why does this matter?"

God's Answer: Restoration According to His Timing

And let me just say, like, details and specifics, they're actually very important, and we don't want to miss the forest because we're so focused on the trees. That we need to see the bigger picture, and I actually think that when we see the big picture of Daniel 9, it answers that so what question for us. Because when we take it all in, and we see what God is doing, and the way that God is answering Daniel's prayer, and implicitly answering the prayer that is beneath many of our prayers, specifically when we ask for help, when we ask for God's care, when we ask for his healing, when we ask for those things, what we're hearing from Daniel 9 is that God does hear us, that God will restore his people, that God doesn't delay. You see, that's what Daniel 9 is ultimately telling us, that he does hear, and he loves, and he is restoring, and he's doing it in his timing. He has already begun this. We actually heard in our assurance of pardon, didn't we? That at just the right time, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born of Mary, right? That just at the right time. It must have felt like God was delaying, right? Hundreds of years, thousands of years, but just at the right time, God sent forth his son. That just at the right time, at the appointed time, the anointed one came, and he was cut off for the sins of his people, and the anointed one, he instituted the new covenant,

and made atonement for iniquity, and just at the right time, the one who came is going to come again, and when he does, we will experience in fullness that everlasting righteousness that is promised.

You see, God has made that promise, and he has sealed it as sure, and he has declared it in love over his people, and so we still wait, and we still ask him not to delay, and we still pray, and as we pray, we confess our sins, and we trust in Christ, and we ask Jesus not to delay, and we call out, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly, and the promise that we have is that he will. He will, that just as he came once before, at just the right time, at just the right time, he will come again, and in his coming, he will restore all things. That is the promise of Daniel 9. For all of the details, for all of the trees, for all of the weeds, that is what Daniel 9 is driving us towards, that the restoration that is promised will come through the work of Christ. He has begun it, and he is coming again. Amen. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have revealed to us the promises that you have made to your people, and though, Father, we know that sometimes your word can be difficult to understand, that it can be difficult to weed through the various nuances of your truth, we are thankful that you reveal to us what we need to know, and so we pray, Father, that you would open our eyes, that you would fix our gaze on Jesus, that we would look forward to that day when he will return again, and we will see him, and behold him, and he will restore all things. He will restore heaven and earth, and he will restore us to resurrected bodies, and we will dwell with him in everlasting righteousness forever. So, I pray, Father, that that is the promise we would hold to, and we ask, Lord Jesus, come quickly, come quickly and make all things new, and we pray all this in the name of Christ, and God's people said together, amen.