

A Fast Prayer
Daniel 9:1-19

You don't have to see much of the news to know our nation is in a mess.
Rising healthcare costs
Declining education
Political corruption
Rampant Crime
Abortion
Redefinition of marriage
Rioting
Blatant hatred
Murder
Unemployment
Immigration concerns

This nation is a mess politically, morally, and spiritually.

I have said it before and I'll say it again: if our nation presumably is comprised of over 70% of its people who claim to be Christian, why don't we see more of a positive impact on our culture? Or maybe the better question is: why aren't we making a greater impact on our culture?

Let me share a few quotes from the newest book written by Pastor Tony Evans. In his book *Kingdom Citizens*, Dr. Evans writes first: "Kingdom citizens recognize that personal conversion should also affect culture since Christ claims authority over heaven and earth and His followers are to disciple the nations."

He continues by saying "there can be no social revitalization without appropriate theological application."

"We cannot fix our communities, neighborhoods, families, crime, injustice, entertainment, or even our nation anthropologically unless there is first the proper theological understanding of the relationship of God to culture. And, more importantly, we must

understand the relationship of God to His own people within that culture as His kingdom representatives – His kingdom citizens. *A kingdom citizen is a visible, verbal follower of Jesus Christ who consistently applies the principles of heaven to the concerns of the culture.*"

"When a culture departs from God, its sociology (the study of social relationships, beliefs and values) must, by necessity, deteriorate. The deterioration we are facing in our nation today is primarily related to the absence of God and the resultant absence of a thoroughly biblical worldview. We do not have a kingdom-minded foundation."

IN 2006 then Senator Obama is quoted as saying "Whatever we once were we are no longer a Christian nation, at least not just, we are a Jewish nation, a Muslim nation, a Buddhist nation, a Hindu nation, and a nation of non-believers."

We have summarily taken God out of schools and for that matter government. We have abandoned prayer. We have abandoned God's Word. We aren't there yet but we are fast becoming a secular state. In some cities the litmus test for public office is whether or not you are a Christian. If so, you aren't eligible to run citing the separation of church and state interpretation of the Constitution.

Any attempt to fix all the social ills in our society by creating more programs and policies or by enacting new laws and enforcing ones already in existence or by dumping more money into programs, even by electing or appointing the right people into political or judicial positions will only and ultimately fail. They are merely the symptom of a greater problem. The greater problem is with the foundation. The foundation this great nation was built on is being systematically destroyed. Until we fix the foundation, the problems won't get resolved.

It isn't a head issue it's a heart issue. Saying you're a Christian isn't the same as being a Christian.

Jesus illustrated this with a parable of two men who used the same building materials, but built on entirely different foundations. One built his house on a rock, a firm foundation. The other built his house on sand. They had the same materials, but different foundations and then a storm whipped up. The same storm hit both homes. One collapsed while the other stood firm all because of the type of foundation.

The Psalmist has rightly stated – “Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain.” (Psalms 127:1)

The Message: “If GOD doesn't build the house, the builders only build shacks. If GOD doesn't guard the city, the night watchman might as well nap.”

I'm reminded here of the children's story of the three little pigs who built their homes using straw, sticks, and bricks. Only one stood the winds of the big bad wolf. A society without God has no foundation.

You don't have to go very far in Scripture to see the proof of this. Consider a few examples.

In Genesis 11 we have the account of the tower of Babel. Built sometime after the flood, it was an attempt to usurp the command of God to disperse throughout the world and populate it. It wasn't just a tower they built, but a religion that left God out. It didn't take them very long after the flood to forget about God and exclude Him from their daily lives. God didn't destroy them, but He did confuse their common language forcing them to find others who spoke alike and so move to populate the world.

In Genesis 19 we have the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. God was absent there except for Lot and he was no positive influence on the culture.

Moses instructed the Israelites that after they crossed into the Promised Land half the tribes were

to stand on Mt. Gerizim to recite the blessings of God on the nation for faithful obedience while the other half stood on Mt. Ebal to recite the curses from God for disobedience.

Deuteronomy 10:12-13

Deuteronomy 11:16-17

(Deuteronomy 27-28)

They crossed the river; they conquered the land and in one generation fell away from and forgot God, that is until it got so bad they cried out to Him for deliverance. Scripture says they did what was right in their own eyes. Does that sound familiar today in our own nation, a nation founded on the principles of God's Word? How far have we strayed?

In Judges 4:1 we read that because of their blatant disregard for God's commands He sold them into the hands of the king of Canaan.

Romans 1:18-23

Four times in the verses that follow we read that God gave them over, sold them if you will to their own sinful desires. Dr. Tony Evans describes this as the passive wrath of God. It means that instead of God actively pouring out His wrath on them for forgetting Him, disobeying Him, He let them destroy themselves by their own foolish, sinful actions.

I believe that's where we are at today, God giving the nation over to its own sin. The sanctity of life no longer matters. Marriage defined as one man and one woman no longer matters. God's design for gender distinction no longer matters. We are being forced to capitulate and compromise beliefs or else we risk losing a business or a job, being fined, even jailed for holding onto what they deem to be medieval practices.

Now I want you to notice something important in the text. It didn't say they had no belief in God, it said they believed in God. They were still engaging in religious activity. They just changed their minds

about what that meant in respect to the culture. That is very evident today in some denominations today that are changing their doctrine to fit the culture. Oh they believe in God but are far from following what His Word teaches. Heaven help us.
Can I get a witness?

Daniel understood this. He saw his nation in shambles, not just physically from the destruction of the invading Babylonians, but morally and spiritually. Because of their disobedience to God's commands they were dispersed throughout the nations by King Nebuchadnezzar, defeated by their enemy. Daniel could have looked at their plight and chosen to do nothing and remain unsympathetic to their plight. After all he too had been taken captive but he made the best of the situation and got himself a cushy position as prime minister under two different kingdoms. He had it made with a pretty nice retirement package, but he chose to get involved because he loved his homeland and his fellow countrymen.

John Pierce told me last week that living away from the US all those years while in Paraguay he didn't think much about what was happening back here. But that has changed since returning.

As Christians we can have a similar mindset. We can conclude that this world isn't our home as we await the splendor of the new kingdom that is ours in heaven and not care that the nation is going down the proverbial drain. Why should we care?

I think we should care because we are kingdom citizens. We have a vested interest in it. It is our home until we're taken from it. From the very first settlers to those who signed the Declaration of Independence, this nation was built by men who came for religious freedom to worship God in a way that wasn't dictated by government. 29 of the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence held seminary or Bible College degrees. All but two were God fearing men. Historian David Barton

writes "Even Thomas Paine (certainly the least religious of the Founders) openly acknowledged God and announced his belief in his personal accountability to God, and he also directly advocated teaching creationism in the public school classroom."

These men weren't only the founders of our nation, a number of them founded Bible Societies. Our Biblical heritage is fast eroding unless we stand in the gap and intercede on behalf of this nation. It's time we Christians stood up and let our voice be heard. As important as casting a vote is, we must rise up and take back the territory we have given to those who wish to silence us. It is time we push back the erroneous notion of a supposed constitutional claim of separation of church and state. It is time we ventured out beyond the safety of our church walls into the uncomfortable arena of the world to live out our faith boldly, without shame and without hesitation.

It is time to claim the words of Psalm 33:12
"Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord."

This election is more than just about policies or immigration reform or healthcare or any other social issue. It is about stemming the tide of those who wish to erode the religious freedoms we currently hold by a slender thread. When you vote don't just look at a candidate to see if their policies align with yours, consider which candidate will preserve our religious liberties. That includes the appointment of judges to the federal court system.

The next president will most likely appoint 4 new justices to the Supreme Court and approximately 1/3 of the federal judges.

When Moses was instructed by his father-in-law, Jethro to appoint judges, he said they should fear God and be trustworthy. We need to pray the same way for those selected to these positions.

There is a lot at stake in this election. So for the remainder of our time I want to focus on Daniel's prayer from the book that bears his name looking specifically at chapter 9. It is this prayer that I would like for us to adopt in some way as we pray for our nation and the upcoming election, but also beyond the election. I don't want our prayers to be asking God for wisdom in voting for the right candidate, but in praying that our nation will turn to God in repentance. It is about elected officials seeking God, fearing God. It is about praying that people from the great cities of our nation to the smallest towns, people who live on the coasts or in the plains, people throughout this land to repent. Pray for revival to sweep over us as it did in the Great Awakening. David didn't pray for the destruction of their captors, but for a renewed heart for God.

The Jesus movement of the late 60's and early 70's was a counter cultural revolution that sprang up from the decay of blatant immorality that swept through the land during the hippie movement, a movement that wanted peace not war, love not hate. They were anti-establishment, largely fueled by the raucous Woodstock festival in upstate New York. People were looking for answers to a lot of things and thought they would find it in drugs and free love and living off the grid. The Jesus movement rose up out of the ash heap by Jesus People who weren't turned on by the temporary high of drugs and sex but by getting high on Jesus.

From the Jesus Movement Andre' Crouch sang
*Jesus is the answer for the world today,
Above Him there's no other Jesus is the way.*

Sure they dressed in bell bottom pants and wore long hair, but they were not ashamed to speak the name Jesus.

Within the Jesus Movement there rose up a new genre of Christian music. They weren't content singing the old hymns of the church but wanted

their own identifiable music. Instead of piano, organ and other sacred instruments, they chose guitars, keyboards, and drums. In effect they were trying to redeem the crude and vulgar rock music of the hippies by making their own Jesus music. One such artist was Barry McGuire. Prior to his salvation his signature song was *Eve of Destruction*. It was a song against war and violence and killing going on in the world. After his salvation he added some lyrics pointing to the only hope for America and ends with II Chronicles 7:14.

*Don't blame God for the sins of America,
America has fallen from the ways of the Lord.*

Those words pinpoint the problem. We have fallen from the ways of the Lord.

Daniel saw it and instead of choosing to ignore it because he was thousands of miles away, he chose to do something about it. We can't bury our head in the sand and think things will improve and neither should we just blithely pray for the Lord to return as a way of getting us out of this mess. We need to take a page out of Daniel's book and pray.

For the backdrop to Daniel's response in chapter 9 we need to look at the end of chapter 8. Daniel had a vision and the vision was terrible. It was about some events that would occur in the future. So horrible was the scene we read in verse 27 that he was exhausted and was sick for several days, it bothered him that much and the verse concludes by saying it was beyond his understanding. Now I've had some nightmares but they never visibly shook me to the core for several days. When we come to chapter 9 we see what he did in response to the vision.

He didn't wring his hands in despair.

He didn't begin putting his affairs in order.

He didn't pack his bags and book a flight out of town.

We find that Daniel had a habitual practice.

I. DANIEL HAD A HABITUAL PRACTICE – vs. 1-3a

Daniel was a smart guy. We find in chapter 1 that he was 10 times smarter than the wise guys in Babylon. So he did what came natural, what was habitual – he studied to find answers to the vision. He didn't go to the royal library for answers. He didn't look for answers at any of the social programs or policies that had been enacted. He didn't consult the news or seek out his peers. Notice first that Daniel meditated on God's Word.

A. Daniel Meditated on God's Word – vs. 1-2

When Daniel was taken captive back in chapter one under the Babylonian empire he was probably a teen. Right away notice something about his character. He wasn't about to compromise his convictions. He understood that standing up to the king could make him about 10 inches shorter, but grounded in and obedient to the Word of God he chose to live out his faith even if it meant his death.

Scholars estimate that by the time we reach chapter 9 Daniel is somewhere in his 80's. He has lived by God's commands and found answers to perplexing questions by studying God's Word. That's where he goes to find answers to this vision.

Folks that is always a good place to go whenever we face some challenge we don't understand. It gives us strength, comfort, even wisdom to help us discern God's will. Take time to be in God's Word.

Daniel tells us he found the answer in the book of Jeremiah. He learned that 70 years would lapse before Israel would be able to return to the land. From when Jerusalem was destroyed, Daniel figured the 70 years were drawing to a close.

Daniel didn't understand the vision so he went to the Old Testament writings and began a search. Notice again the faith he had in God's Word. "I

understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord." He believed what the Bible said.

Don't just look at a candidate's view on taxes, or immigration or the economy or any other kinds of social issues. More importantly what does the candidate believe about the definition of marriage, abortion, religious freedom. Even the framework of many of their policies can be run through the grid of Scripture. You will hear some candidates state they believe in the freedom of worship. That sounds pretty good and we might tend to agree with that until you understand what it means and it doesn't mean what you think it means because that's not what the constitution or the founders intended. We are given the right to freedom of religion. There is a big difference. Freedom of religion means that I can practice my faith anywhere. It's also protected under the freedom of speech. If I want to pray in public, say at a restaurant before I eat, I have that right. If I want to read my Bible during break at work or on a park bench or even during school during free time, I have that right.

On the other hand, freedom of worship means that I have a right to worship, but only behind closed doors in a church service or in my home. It means I can't live it out in the public sector, it has to remain private. Which do you want? The next appointees to Congress or to the Supreme Court may very well hear cases that will infringe on the freedom of religion.

Search the Scriptures. Daniel had the habit of meditating on them.

B. Daniel Met God in Prayer – v. 3a

In our discussion Wednesday night in prayer meeting on the faithfulness of God, it was noted that those individuals in Scripture who were experiencing some difficulty in their life and were in some way delivered had one thing in common – they all sought the Lord – they prayed.

When Daniel was faced with death because the king was furious that none of the wise men could tell him his dream and then interpret it, he prayed.

When he heard the king was deceived into signing a law that would result in Daniel being thrown to the lions because he disobeyed the king's edict, he went to his home where it says he knelt three times a day so that he could pray.

Troubled by this vision and now understanding its meaning, Daniel prayed. Prayer was a habit.

Prayer for us should be a habit, not just during an election cycle, but at all times. Not just when we're in trouble, but at all times. And yes, we do need to be praying earnestly about this election.

Daniel had two important habits we should note and practice ourselves:

He meditated on God's Word.

He met with God in prayer.

Daniel not only had a habitual practice, we also note in our text that he had a humble posture.

II. DANIEL HAD A HUMBLE POSTURE –

v. 3b

A. He Fell Prostrate – Daniel 8:15-17, 27

Being prostrate demonstrates humility before the one you are bowing. It is saying that you are subservient to that person. Now I want to say that the position isn't the issue here. You can kneel, stand, pray with your eyes open or closed (preferably open if you're driving or walking).

When Solomon prayed while dedicating the newly constructed Temple, he knelt with his hands raised.

When the tax collector went to the Temple to pray he also knelt but had his head bowed.

It doesn't matter the position or the place. What

matters is the posture of the heart. Is your heart humble before God? A heart that is not humble is a heart that brashly presumes upon God not making requests but making demands of Him. That person is in the habit of praying his will, not God's. The humble heart prays for God's will to be done.

Why has America lost its way? It's because we no longer have a conviction about God. We are no longer humble before Him. Many have replaced God with themselves or they have made the government god. Or to others He has become a God of convenience. When we need Him we take Him off the shelf and when out of the crisis we put Him back. 71% say they are Christian whatever that means. Perhaps it means they are willing to go to church once in a while, willing to pray once in a while, willing to read the Bible once in a while, willing to sing a few hymns once in a while, willing to give once in a will, but it's not done out of conviction about God only out of convenience for God or so they can check off a box.

Daniel's heart was broken before God and his posture was a demonstration of a humble heart. He fell prostrate.

Then we see that he fasted penitently.

B. He Fasted Penitently – v. 3b

In the next chapter we read that he fasted for 21 days. In the Hebrew it means to *cover the mouth*. I am calling for a fast for our nation beginning this Wednesday which is 21 days through Election Day. If you are able I'm asking you to fast part or all of the time. There are basically three kinds of fasting. There is an absolute fast when the person abstains from every form of food and liquid. There is a normal fast when only water is consumed. There is a partial fast in which only certain foods are restricted. This is the fast I am recommending.

Some fasts were private others were corporate when

the whole nation participated. That was on the Day of Atonement.

A number of people in both the Old and New Testaments fasted. They fasted for various lengths of times but essentially for the same reason and that reason was to draw near to God. The primary focus of a fast is spiritual in nature.

Some of you are going to do the 21 day partial fast. You may not be able to participate by fasting for health reasons. That's okay. What I'm really asking us to do is pray and to use Daniel's prayer here as a model for what we pray for as we seek God. It is a time set apart to petition God that first He do a great spiritual work in our own lives and then in our nation. It is a prayer for national revival a revival begins with me, a revival that begins with you.

As Daniel prayed he fasted and he put on sack cloth and ashes, symbols of a broken and contrite heart. Fasting is not a way of somehow earning merit with God. It's a way of acknowledging our need of Him.

Spend time in confession of your own sin asking God to reveal them and then when He does show what they are, be broken by them and repent of them, be willing to turn away from them. That's what repentance is. Take the following verses and use them in your prayer time.

Psalm 51:1-2 "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your unfailing love; according to Your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin."

Psalm 51:10 "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

Psalm 51:16-17 "You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise."

Psalm 139:23-24 "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

If we want God to hear us about the moral and spiritual state of our nation, we need to be serious about our own sin first. A fast is a good way to focus on your relationship with God.

Daniel had a habitual practice with a humble posture.

The third thing we see in this passage is that Daniel had a heartfelt petition.

III. DANIEL HAD A HEARTFELT PETITION – v. 4-16

As you take time throughout the next three weeks praying before the election use this prayer as a prayer for our nation. Notice that Daniel included himself. Even though he walked with God and obeyed God, he considered himself just as much a part of the problem as those who were disobedient. 41 times in these verses it's inclusive – "we", "I", "Our" not "they" or "them" or "those".

In verse 4 we notice the personal relationship he has with God. From that relationship we notice the different ways he addressed God in these verses.

A. Daniel Confessed God's Character Traits

It's always a good practice when praying to acknowledge and identify the character or attributes of God.

In verse 4 Daniel spoke of how great and awesome God is. Then he spoke about God's faithfulness by saying He keeps His covenant. He never goes back on His word.

In verses 7 and 14 he says that God is righteous in everything He does, which means that He is just or right in His actions including that He was right to

punish Israel through this captivity. Nothing God does can be brought into question because of His holy character.

In verse 9 God is merciful and forgiving.

Then in verse 15 Daniel speaks of God's power, that He has the ability to act and restore the nation.

In all of it we see His sovereignty - that He's in control of it all. In this election, regardless of who is nominated as president it should be comforting to know that God is still in control and He is the only one, not the president or Congress, who is the solution, the only Savior for what is truly wrong in America.

It is always a good practice to confess the character traits of God when we pray. In that way we are acknowledging that He is God and we're not. It's a way of humbling ourselves before Him.

When we call out to God, remembering His character traits, it's acknowledging that He's the only one who can help us, He's the only one who can forgive our sin as individuals and as a nation, He's the only one who in mercy can change the course we are on and forgive our transgressions. Daniel confessed God's character traits. So should we.

Daniel also confessed Israel's continuous transgressions.

B. Daniel Confessed Israel's Continuous Transgressions - vs. 5-16

He repeatedly identifies the different ways they had sinned. From top to bottom, from the greatest to the least in the land, from king to slave they were all guilty of disobedience.

They had ignored His laws and commands.
They had ignored His prophets.
They were guilty. They had sinned.

They hadn't heeded the warnings or obeyed the covenant.

They hadn't learned from the punishment the nation experienced in earlier generations.

But this is more than just an acknowledgment of past and present transgressions, it was a time of repentance. Daniel was confessing the sins of the nation and calling on God's great mercy to forgive and to restore them to a right relationship with God by once again obeying His commands having turned from their sin. His was a longing for the nation to once again return to righteousness. His was a heartfelt petition, one we would do well to pray earnestly on behalf of our nation.

Daniel had a habitual practice

Daniel had a humble posture

Daniel had a heartfelt petition

Daniel had a hopeful purpose

IV. DANIEL HAD A HOPEFUL PURPOSE – vs. 17-19

Daniel was hopeful because of God's character. He appealed to God's reputation.

A. Daniel Had Hope for God's Sake

B. Daniel Had Hope for God's Sanctuary

C. Daniel Had Hope in God's Salvation

Daniel didn't want God's name maligned or dishonored.

John MacArthur takes this passage and applies it to the church in this way as we pray "O God, revive Your church because Your church bears Your name. O Lord, don't allow the church to fall in to disrepute, don't allow Your name to be besmirched by those who would tear it down."

Verse 18 holds the key to our prayer. We don't request these things, we can't request these things, as a matter of fact we don't deserve any of these things because of any merit of our own, or for any righteousness we think we have. We only make

these petitions because You, God, are merciful and forgiving. It's all about who God is. So don't delay in answering because we bear Your name.

Let's take this prayer and use it to pray for our nation that we might repent calling on a merciful, forgiving, powerful, holy, sovereign God to restore us.

I want you to notice v. 20 in closing that while Daniel was still praying God sent an answer. May that be our experience as we petition God for another great awakening among the people of this nation.