**February 23, 2020 Daniel 9:3-10**

***Lenten Postcards - Repentance***

**Scripture: *Daniel 9:3-10 NRSV***

*(3)Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. (4)I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, "Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments, (5)we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances. (6)We 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)"Righteousness is on your side, O Lord, but open shame, as at this day, falls on us, the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. (8)Open shame, O LORD, falls on us, our kings, our officials, and our ancestors, because we have sinned against you. (9)To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him, (10)and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God by following his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.*

**Notes:**

1. Jeremiah writes strong ***warnings*** to the people of God.
   1. Judah is ***trapped*** between two prominent empires.
   2. The Babylonian empire ***levels*** Jerusalem.
   3. Many are rounded up and ***taken*** to Babylon.
2. Daniel’s eyes have been ***opened*** by the Lord.
   1. Though in captivity, Daniel lives a ***righteous*** life.
   2. Daniel and his friends refuse to eat the meat offered to idols, and ***thrive*** ***physically***.
   3. God’s faithfulness ***protects*** Daniel in the lion’s den.
3. Daniel’s prayer of repentance is a plea on behalf of all.
   1. God is ***beyond*** all other gods.
   2. Daniel views sin as something ***societal***;
   3. Daniel takes ***responsibility*** for this sin.
   4. This prayer is dependent upon the ***grace*** and ***love*** of God.
4. We need to ***repent***.
   1. repent on behalf of our own ***sins*** and the ***sins*** of others.
   2. repent of our ***complicity*** in sin.
   3. repent of the ***societal*** ***sins*** around us.
   4. Daniel continually points to the ***standard*** of God
5. We are dependent on the ***love*** and ***grace*** of God.
   1. Repentance is at the heart of ***fasting*** and ***prayer***.
   2. Pray we may ***know*** God more and ***grow*** more like God.
   3. Pray on behalf of the ***broken*** ***world***.
   4. Confess the ways sin has come into our ***hearts*** and ***lives***.
   5. Fall heavily upon the ***grace*** and ***love*** of Jesus.

**Transcript:**

Have you ever had somebody apologize to you for something; but as you listen to their words you felt it was not sincere? Most of us have encountered, at one time or another, a non-apology apology. You know what I’m talking about, when someone doesn’t take responsibility for the wrong they have done, but chooses instead to shift the blame. For example, “I’m sorry that you got so upset the other day.” Or, “I’m sorry that you can’t take a joke.” While these might be extreme examples, most of us have probably experienced some version of them. Maybe some of us have even extended them.

Apologizing well is so difficult that a Google search will uncover dozens of articles and videos instructing people how to apologize. Most of these require several steps: first, saying “I’m sorry” or “I apologize” ; followed by an admission of what you did wrong; Then there is guidance on making amends; how do you make things right? Finally, a genuine apology should include a commitment or a promise not to do again whatever the wrongful act was.

Many of us are uncomfortable apologizing. We feel awkward admitting we were wrong, and even giving a hasty non-apology apology makes us uncomfortable. Lent can be a difficult season for those of us who aren’t at ease apologizing. The season is all about our confession of guilt and the ways we can do better. But the season of Lent takes things a bit deeper than apologizing it takes us to the heart of repentance.

Repentance is very closely related to a true apology. It can even include some of the same qualities or steps, but repentance goes even deeper. Repentance is true confession and a change of heart a 180-degree turn to a different way of doing things. True repentance never shifts blame or shirks responsibility. Instead, one who truly repents is one who humbly submits oneself to the grace and love of God.

In our text we see a beautiful example of true repentance and we find it laid bare by the prophet Daniel. Daniel, is not repenting on his own behalf, he is repenting on behalf of the entire nation of Israel. He is repenting for big and weighty things; like societal sin, and the ways the children of Israel have been participating in idolatry. Daniel is an example for us, not just how to humble ourselves before the Lord with a fervent turning to a new way but also on how to bring others to the Lord in our prayers for repentance as well.

Daniel 9:3-10 NRSV (3)Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. (4)I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, "Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments, (5)we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances. (6)We 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)"Righteousness is on your side, O Lord, but open shame, as at this day, falls on us, the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. (8)Open shame, O LORD, falls on us, our kings, our officials, and our ancestors, because we have sinned against you. (9)To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him, (10)and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God by following his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

Daniel responds to the words of Jeremiah. The text is a response to Daniel reading the words of the prophet Jeremiah. The books of Jeremiah and Lamentations are both credited to the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah writes strong warnings to the people of God, about what will happen if they do not change their ways and turn from idolatry. He warns of the desolation of Jerusalem. He warns of the scattering and capture of people. He tells them, with great weeping, what will come. Yet the people do not listen.

Lamentations responds to the despair of the temple in Jerusalem and burning of the city. Judah is trapped between two prominent empires; the Egyptians and the Babylonians. They side with Egypt, and the Babylonians destroy them. In 587 BCE the Babylonian empire levels Jerusalem. The entire city is burned. Many of the young and strong Jews are rounded up and brought back to Babylon. Daniel is part of this group, as are Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, more commonly known as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The people feel abandoned by God, as they scatter,as they run for safety or are captured.

While it seems that many still do not understand the warnings of Jeremiah, Daniel’s eyes have been opened by the Lord as he reads the words. Daniel realizes how the sin of the people led to the destruction of Jerusalem and this is what leads Daniel to this prayer of repentance.

Though living in captivity, Daniel lives a righteous life. We find the famous story of Daniel in the lion’s den in chapter 6. While the rest of the children of Israel continue to commit idolatry even in captivity, Daniel stands firm in his faith. Daniel lives such an exceptional life that others begin to take notice and become jealous. Daniel and his friends refuse to eat the meat offered to idols, and thrive physically. They are also shown to have great wisdom and insight. Daniel spends his time in exile, living life to the best of his ability while continuing to honor God. The creation of the law to only pray to the king comes about as a plot to ruin Daniel by those who are jealous of him. Unfazed by the new law, Daniel continues to pray to God three times a day. God’s faithfulness protects Daniel in the lion’s den. Instead of punishment, Daniel continues to prosper. Despite rampant idolatry all around him, Daniel continues to seek God and do what is right, even if it cost him his life.

Daniel’s prayer of repentance is an earnest plea to God on behalf of everyone. It seems out of place for a prayer of repentance from someone seemingly so blameless. He acknowledges first and foremost the greatness of God. In a land riddled with idolatry, he is cementing once again his acknowledgement of the one true God. This acknowledgment is key to what it means to be a Jew: the first of the Ten Commandments is to have no other Gods but Yahweh. The Shema is another commandment and reminder to the people to remember God, and to love God.

Daniel is declaring that God is beyond all other gods, and marking clearly that this is not idol worship. He views sin as not just a personal act but as something societal as well. He continually uses “we” instead of “I” as he prays. *We* have sinned. *We* have done wrong. *We* have not listened to the words of your prophets. The sin that has been committed has ultimately been toward God. Daniel contrasts the righteousness and greatness of God with the sinfulness of the people. The people have not acted justly, or rightly. The people have acted selfishly. Daniel takes responsibility for the consequences of this sin. This is a true apology, where Daniel declares that they are deserving of exile because of their sin. Daniel does not make excuses for the people.

This prayer of repentance is a searching of the heart, and is dependent upon the grace and love of God. Daniel never makes excuses for behavior. Daniel never shifts the blame to God. Instead, Daniel continually admits fault and pleads for the grace, mercy, and love of God. Daniel acknowledges that they do not deserve forgiveness, but he pleads that God will remember them and restore them, not out of obligation but out of love and grace.

We need to repent. It can be easy for us to look at ourselves as righteous like Daniel, but we still have a need in this season to repent. Like Daniel, we repent on behalf of our own sins as well as the sins of others. We do not live in a vacuum. What we do in community impacts others. We see sin in our world, in the ways we treat one another, the way we treat the earth, and even how we treat ourselves. We may need to repent of our complicity in sin. While we may be able to say we didn’t personally or actively commit certain sins, we can often point to times and places where we have silently looked on or enabled acts of injustice.

This might be something as seemingly mindless as where we purchase our clothing from; and it might be more complex, like the ways we choose to look out for ourselves instead of asking, “What is best for my neighbor?” or, “How can I love God and my neighbor in the best ways?” We might repent of the societal sins around us. We often live with the consequences of the sins of others. As a part of a society, we can repent of the sins occurring in society. Some examples may be a culture of violence, a lack of stewardship of the earth, an attitude of greed, or selfishness. It’s often easy for us to make excuses or shift the blame. But true repentance, like Daniel’s, requires accepting responsibility. There are many examples of times and ways that we choose to blame others instead of confessing our own sin. There is a humble acknowledgment of the greatness of God and the frailty of humanity to live up to that greatness.

While we might appear to be good in comparison to others, Daniel continually points to the standard of God, not out of shame but out of contrition and humility. When we truly compare ourselves to God we are not even close to His righteousness. Ultimately we are dependent on the love and grace of God. None of us is righteous on our own. The grace and love of God transform us into holy people. The grace and love of God help us to transform our lives. The grace and love of God are enough for all of us. When we come to God, God answers. God cares about us, even when we walk away. God is always calling us back.

As we prepare to enter the season of Lent this coming Wednesday, Ash Wednesday. We must begin to look within our own selves. The season of Lent is robed in repentance. Repentance is at the heart of fasting and prayer. And we pray for ourselves, that we might come to know God more and that we might grow to look more like God.

However, we also must be in pray on behalf of the broken world around us— a world not so far removed from Daniel’s world; a world filled with violence and debauchery; a world where good people, Christian people are persecuted; a world where the good people seem to barely survive and the immoral do very well. While people may not be bowing down before the statue of a king, they still bow to many things that are not God. They bow to greed, to money, to success. They bow to violence and political parties. They bow to the pleasures that are available in this world; They value who they are; by what they have and where they live; And they put their hope in things that are not of God.

You are called to love the Lord your God with all you heart, mind and strength. Are you giving to God what he is asking of you? Are you putting your relationship with Him first in your life? Are you working to tell others what He has done for you? Are you being the salt and light we are called to be to a dark and tasteless world?

There are all kinds of excuses, “I do not know who they are”; or “They won’t listen to me … they want nothing to do with me”; or “They are content in their misery.” But the “they” is often a “we” because, despite our protests, excuses, and denials, we are a community who also needs to confess and repent together. We need to confess the ways sin has wormed its way into our hearts and lives; the ways the world has taken precedence over our Christian lifestyle; the ways we fail to be all that God is calling us to be. We must fall heavily upon the grace and love of our Lord, Jesus Christ and we must trust, as Daniel did, that God will hear us, that God will forgive us, and that God will heal us with God’s unending love and grace.