

# TIPPING THE BALANCE

by M. Basilea Schlink



Natural disasters, unprecedented in force, are occurring with growing frequency. Despite these visible signs of divine judgment, there is no limit to man's hatred towards God and towards his fellow man. We are living in an era when everything seems to be heading towards ruin, and Satan is on the rampage, conquering one stronghold after the other. But God, who loves us, does not want us to sink in fear and suffering. His Word shows us in what way His help avails for us: "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you" (Psalm 50:15 RSV).

At such a time as this our Lord Jesus Christ longs to find sacrificial souls who will stand against the destructive forces of evil.

Where do we turn in these days of trouble? We can find an answer in the book of Daniel. **Daniel was a man of prayer who set his face towards the Lord during great affliction.** Chapter 9 reveals the nature of God and shows us how we can reach His heart with our prayers and receive His help during a time of crisis.

Daniel's starting point is prayer and supplications with sackcloth and ashes. The phrase "sackcloth and ashes" signifies deep contrition and repentance for sins. Daniel

faces up to his own sins and confesses them. Here the secret of answered prayer is revealed. Daniel accepts the truth about himself and his people. Acknowledging that "our" sins are the cause of the calamity which has befallen them, he prays: "We have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from your precepts and your judgments... O Lord, to us belongs shame of face...because we have sinned against you" (Daniel 9:5-8 RAV).

*Call upon me in the day of trouble;  
I will deliver you. Psalm 50:15 RSV*

Such a courageous and honest confession, such a humble admission of personal and national guilt, reaches the heart of God. We too have sinned, done wrong and failed to live according to the commandments of God. Like Daniel, we cannot but declare that God is just and righteous in everything He has now allowed us to experience.

We need to accept God's verdict upon our personal lives and admit: "I have not humbled myself in the dust before God and man, as Daniel did. I have not humbled myself beneath the sins of others in the awareness that I am just as great a sinner, failing in other respects."

Let us hear the Lord's summons today: "**More sacrificial souls are needed.**"

Such souls would help to save our country, even though it is ripe for judgment, and God would be able to hear our prayers, just as He did in Daniel's case.

What a responsibility has been placed on our shoulders at a time like this!

We can make a difference and tip the balance. Daniel, by praying with a priestly attitude and humbling himself beneath his sins, arrives at a moving conclusion: God's mercy is even greater than His righteousness. Thus Daniel can pray, "To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness" (Daniel 9:9 RAV). What a consolation! To be sure, in his prayer Daniel repeatedly humbles himself before the holy God: "The Lord our God is righteous in all the works which he does, though we have not obeyed his voice... We have sinned, we have done wickedly!" (Daniel 9:14-15 RAV). It would seem that further calamities are inevitable. But Daniel is not filled with resig-

nation. He knows what the heart of God is like. He has a personal relationship with Him. He knows that God is love and that He suffers immeasurably when people, especially those who call themselves believers, no longer take the commandments of God seriously or consider them binding for their lives, when they even sever themselves from Him and reject Him, deliberately choosing sin and thus Satan.

### ***To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness. Daniel 9:9 RAV***

Daniel knows that such paths lead to ruin, and how this grieves God, who in His love wants us to be happy. Because Daniel sees himself as a weak and sinful being, his prayer climaxes in the joy of finding refuge in the merciful heart of the Father.

Against the backdrop of sin, apostasy, disobedience, and of God's righteousness, which really obliges Him to send judgment, it is as if the sunshine of God's grace suddenly comes out again. Now the forgiveness and abundant mercy of the Father shine forth, making Daniel bold and giving him the confidence that God's mercy will triumph over judgment.

And so he calls upon the Lord, saying, **"To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness."**

This assurance strengthens Daniel's faith and helps him to reckon firmly with God's help in the time of great affliction. Yes, we call down God's help by trusting in His mercy.

How many of us have a true concept of God our Father, from whom every fatherhood, in heaven or on earth, takes its name (Ephesians 3:15 NJB)? The heart of God rejoices when we turn to Him and grieves when

we do not. It is hard for Him to punish us. When we have to suffer the consequences of our sinning, He is so full of pity that He speaks gently to us as He did to His people Israel while disciplining them: "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him" (Jeremiah 31:20 RSV).

When we are in distress, God cannot but help us, for His heart overflows with love and mercy. However, there is a hindrance that keeps us from experiencing God's help. This is rebellion against His will and inward resistance to suffering. When we rebel instead of humbling ourselves like Daniel and admitting that we

are receiving what our actions deserve, we prevent God from coming to our aid. We keep Him from fulfilling the promise He has so wonderfully fulfilled for others: "I will rejoice in doing them good" (Jeremiah 32:41 RSV). God can manifest His goodness only when He finds the right conditions in us: a humble, trusting heart that believes in His fatherly love.

In answer to his prayer Daniel received the reply, "You are greatly beloved" (Daniel 9:23 RAV), and the confirmation that his prayer was heard. God, who also loves us and the nations, suffers because of our sins. He does not desire our ruin, He desires our deliverance. Let us turn to Him in prayer like Daniel "with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes," for we have a God who answers prayer.

**"O my God, incline your ear and hear; open your eyes and see our desolations, and our land which as a Christian country is called by your name; for we do not present our supplications before you because of our righteous deeds, but because of your great mercies"** (based on Daniel 9:18 RAV).

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by M. Basilea Schlink



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