



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Physical and Spiritual Healing (James 5:13-20)

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We have come to the end of the book of James, a letter of practical simplicity, but also a depth of meaning that transcends the centuries. The relevance of the truths in this little epistle are as astounding today as when they were first read by its recipients. For those in the political arena, the words of James take on a particular importance, for the principles found here, if applied effectively, render one in office as a wise decision-maker, understanding his nature as well as that of his colleagues, constituents and God. May we all, in whatever season of life or vocation, grow in living the way James presents it.

As we near the end of the book, James finishes with teaching. No greetings or salutations as we find in other New Testament letters, but an ending that swells to a crescendo of encouragement.

This week's text is all about healing. It's an interesting way for James to finish his epistle but follows one of his main themes of suffering and how to deal with it. It's an abrupt end but contains important teaching about prayer, trust in God and accountability believers have to one another.

James 5:13-20 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. ¹⁹ My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰ let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

I. CHOOSING PRAYER (5:13-18)

As someone who has had some major physical struggles this past year, I read these verses with new understanding than I did before. When your strength, comfort and mobility are taken away and pain is a constant reality, prayer takes on a great significance. Times of suffering, physical or otherwise, are natural seasons of intense prayer and we share our needs with others as well so they can also pray for healing. I know some of you prayed for me and I'm grateful. God heard you and answered.

This isn't to say that we pray only when things go wrong, but this passage encourages the child of God to look to Him in times of difficulty. James has addressed suffering throughout the letter, so it is a fitting end for him to refer again to how to handle the hard times.

The alternative is to stubbornly ignore the fact that God is in control and choose other means in which to trust for our healing. We can look to doctors and medicine alone or the comfort of loved ones alone or depend solely on our own body to restore itself with time and rest. But if we leave out God, the Great Physician, we have not only neglected the Designer of our infirmity, but rejected the lessons that can be learned through such pain.

Verse fifteen says the prayer of faith will heal the sick. Does that always happen? We know that God is loving and allows suffering in the lives of His children, but He also knows better than we do what will bring Him the most glory. Death is a reality we all face and sometimes God's way of healing is through taking a saint home to be with Him. Either way, He is glorified by the life lived by the believer and our prayers should seek that same goal of displaying His goodness to all who are impacted by pain.

James is fond of giving illustrations from other places in the Bible as we have seen elsewhere in this epistle. Here he mentions Elijah, an Old Testament prophet who gives us a great example of one who prayed in faith and God answered. What is so uplifting about James' treatment of this story is that he reminds us all that Elijah was just human, like we are. He had the same sinful nature, the same tendency to take matters into his own hands, the same pull to worry how things will turn out. It helps me to know that the power of Elijah's example lies not so much in his extraordinary abilities, but in the God of heaven who worked on his behalf. We have access to the same power.

PRAYER IS THE LINK BETWEEN GOD'S INEXHAUSTIBLE RESOURCES AND PEOPLE'S NEED . . . GOD IS THE SOURCE OF POWER, BUT WE ARE THE INSTRUMENT HE USES TO LINK THE TWO TOGETHER.

- CHARLES STANLEY -

Let times of pain be days of growth and of stretching faith. Pray believing that God can do anything, but be ready for His gracious answer to bring Him glory in a way that you might not understand in

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this life. There's no better way to approach the inevitability of suffering.

II. CONFESSING SIN (5:16A)

James not only addresses physical healing, but also healing of the spirit. The way they are presented here, it seems that the two are closely bound together. Just because one is sick does not necessarily mean there are spiritual problems, but sin may be present and should be dealt with by the sufferer. James clearly says "if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven", so we can conclude that sin may or may not be the cause of the malady. Either way, it is important to always have the attitude of humility before God and search our hearts in times of trial to make sure that a sinful action or pattern hasn't brought the trial into our lives. Consider these two passages for the source and reason for difficulty.

Hebrews 12:5-11 And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." ⁷It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

1 Corinthians 11:27-30 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.

These passages, and others, show us that God may be the one bringing about the suffering because of sin in our lives. Any response to difficulty should include an honest reevaluation of our spiritual life to confess any sin that may be present.

It's also interesting that James tells us to confess our sins to one another. This kind of accountability in the body of Christ keeps us

close to each other and responsible to check on one another's spiritual condition. We can't forgive sin, but we can forgive one another and help each other to become more and more what God has designed us to be. This requires immense amounts of trust and deep relationship, but results in a special level of assistance to become more like Christ. We can't do this in a vacuum, so let me encourage you to have trusted friends in your life who will hold you accountable and vice versa. Most of our church relationships are fairly surface and this may feel strange, but can aid us in our spiritual walk.

III. CORRECTING SINNERS (5:19, 20)

To end his letter, James chooses to expand this idea of accountability by emphasizing the need to sometimes correct one who is in sin. Remember that this is being written to followers of Christ, so at this point we're not talking about trying to warn someone who has never had a desire for Christ, but someone who is in the church but has fallen into a life of selfish rebellion against God and must be corrected. This is serious business and here is called saving someone from death.

Does that mean that one can lose their salvation? The Scriptures do not teach that one can lose his salvation, but if one is truly a believer, there will be certain qualities that will give evidence that they truly follow Christ. In fact, John pointed out that some who are a part of the church and seem to be believers in Jesus may become apostate.

1 John 2:19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

One of the evidences of following Christ is enduring hardship and continuing in the faith.

Jude 24, 25 Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Philippians 1:6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

I have enjoyed this walk through James. My prayer is that we will all grow in our knowledge of the truth and trust him for salvation.