



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Giving Ourselves to God through Prayer

MARCH 25, 2013

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Scripture Passage, James 5:13-18

¹³ Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

¹⁷ Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

Introduction

In the last lesson we considered the three practices of patience, standing firm, and persevering. A practical question is, “How do I actually pull this off?” Here, James gives us a critical tool to remain steadfast in the face of trouble—we must pray.

In chapter four we looked at the idea of seeking the Lord’s Will rather than your own. Prayer also applies to this process. Prayer applies to anything we can do or accomplish, or any predicament we may fall into. So it is not surprising in light of James’ letter that he would take up prayer at this point in his thoughts.

A Preface

This section of James has been a hotbed of many controversies and varying interpretations. Does James have physical illness in mind or is he pointing us to the spiritual and emotional exhaustion of “fighting the good fight?” Is the application of oil for a spiritual anointing, a medicinal rub, or a more general sign of God’s mercy and grace?

Does prayer guarantee healing, and if it does what kind of healing? There are more opinions than solutions to all of these points of view, but, nevertheless, we need to plunge in and discover what we may mine from these special words.

Our Study

Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray.

James has already recognized that we find ourselves in trouble of many kinds. What do we do? Pray. This is the general heading of the section. Regardless of one’s circumstance, prayers of various kinds are always appropriate. James will proceed to give us some examples.

Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.

Prayer is not limited to trials and troubles but we can praise God when we are doing well. James recommends letting yourself burst out in songs of praise. He is reminding us that prayer should not be a dull and lifeless expression of who we are or our circumstance. Prayer has an emotional component. Also, prayer can take many forms and here he says singing is a way to pray. He is not giving us an exhaustive list of ways to communicate with God, but he does remind us that communication takes many forms.

Is any one of you sick?

The word “sick” is translated with two different emphases in the Bible. For instance, in the Gospels it more often refers to physical sickness, but in the Epistles it usually means spiritual and psychological weakness.

*That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in **weaknesses**, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am **weak**, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:10).*

The general discussion of James seems to fit the notion of weakness and discouragement that has resulted from trials and persecution. It would be somewhat unexpected for James to suddenly bring up physical

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: MONDAYS, 5:00 PM, ROOM 1425, LIGHT DINNER FOLLOWING STUDY

STAFF: MONDAYS, 12:00 NOON, CHAPEL, 2ND FLOOR LB

North Carolina

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illness as his only subject when this does not serve the particular context. But, we recognize that opinions abound regarding any interpretation.

He should call the elders of the church...

Intercession is another form of prayer and here is a special type of intercession—the ministry of the church leaders. James tells us we should reach out to the spiritual leaders in our lives to pray for us and to minister to us.

Elders are required to be mature believers who have been called by God to an office of ministry. James seems to be saying that sometimes our distress is such that we need call those who have been ordained by God to minister to us. Clearly he is talking about severe times that require a healing touch.

...to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.

This has been interpreted as a spiritual anointing that works healing, or as a medicinal application of oil, or sign of God's favor and mercy. If one were to read ten different commentaries we would likely discover ten different points of view. Perhaps we should reflect on Psalm 23:5, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."

And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up.

Prayer must be offered in faith, but the question looming before us is, what does it mean to say this kind of prayer will make the sick person well? Again, "sick" in the sense of a physical malady may be too narrow of a translation. James likely has more in mind than a medical issue. One way of reading this is to recognize that when we are down, sick, or in distress, the Lord is there to bring healing and to raise us up. Keep in mind 2 Corinthians 1:

3-4, "... the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles..."

If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.

James reminds us that our sin might be the reason for our trouble. This is fitting considering the many admonitions he gives us throughout his epistle. If sin is a contributor to our difficulty, then we need to confess the sin and not allow it to remain. If we remain infirmed, we know for sure that our sins are forgiven.

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

"Healed" may refer to a cure for physical illness, but it is also used in Scripture to be healed from sin Prayer does work when offered in faith by righteous believers.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed 1 Peter 2:24).

Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

Elijah is an example to us. He was a regular person as we are. He was not perfect but in this instance he trusted God.

Some of the ways anointing with oil is found in Scripture...

- And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them (Mark 6:13).
- But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face (Matthew 6:17).
- So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it (Genesis 28:18).
- You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions (Hebrews 1:9).
- You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment (Luke 7:46).
- You shall take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him (Exodus 29:7).