

The Prayer of Faith will save the Sick

Sermon 20 in the James Series

James 5:13-15

We come now to the last two points of James letter.

The first point concerns prayer.

James talks specifically about praying for those who are sick.

James then talks about the effectual, fervent prayer of the righteous.

Both points deal with the fact that there might be sin involved.

The second point, and the one that he ends with is the related point of the brother or sister who errs from the truth.

Suffice it to say, these are controversial passages – and a host of interpretations have been given over the year.

It will likely take us 3 messages to finish.

Today, I would like to focus on “calling for the elders”.

And the prayer of faith that will save the sick.

I. Prayer and Praise 13

To everything there is a season – Ecclesiastes says this in chapter 3.

A time to weep and a time to laugh.

A time to mourn and a time to dance.

Romans 12:15

Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

Once again we see the practical wisdom of Pastor James. And as we go through this paragraph – we need to remember that James IS full of practical wisdom. As we will see – it is possible to fall into some dangerous by-paths if we are not careful as we come to his injunctions.

A. Suffering and Prayer

The suffering is to be considered serious and prolonged suffering.
The remedy is an imperative – PRAY.

For our deepest problems
For our greatest wounds

What better thing could we do – when suffering – than to pray?.

One of the purposes of suffering – is to drive us to God – and to drive us to prayer.

How many times Christians lying on a bed of affliction – in difficult circumstances and painful circumstances – realize that as they are lying flat on their backs – they are looking UP to the Lord!

Our own physical weaknesses and inabilities will naturally drive the Christian to seek the face of God. OR – if we don't – they may drive us inward and into despair and desperation.

Suffering has a context.

5:10-11

Suffering includes physical pain and weakness.

Mental anguish.

Emotional turmoil.

When we think of the prophets – we think of

Persecution

Rejection

Ridicule

Even death

Turn to Matthew 23:29-36

The ultimate proof of all of this is – they killed the Lord Jesus Christ.

THIS GENERATION – v. 36

That sets the tone and context for understanding Matthew 24.

John 1:12 -- He came unto his own – and his own received him not – BUT – to as many AS RECEIVED HIM – to them gave he the right to become the children of God even to as many as believe on his name!

This is still true!

And it was true then. The rejection was not universal. Many Jewish people and many of the Jewish priests came to believe.

They were not personally destroyed – they were SAVED – DELIVERED as God DELIVERED the Jewish system to destruction.

Here was his own earthly kinsmen – following in the wicked footsteps of their ancestors and hypocritically proclaiming themselves to be righteous.

IF WE HAD LIVED IN ISAIAH’S DAY – we would have listened to Isaiah.

IF WE HAD LIVED IN JEREMIAH’S DAY

No wonder Jesus laments – **37-39**

The prophets that spoke of his coming were rejected in their day.

Now he has come – and as he said in his parable – this is the heir – let’s kill him and take the inheritance!

Jesus loved his fellow countrymen.

Paul loved his fellow countrymen.

BUT – there is NO SALVATION without Christ.

Jerusalem stands for the nation as a whole.

And Jesus contemplates their rejection.

Who is to blame for the rejection? “ye would not”.

Your house is left to you desolate.

The destruction of the Temple.

The destruction of their entire system.

The destruction of so many lives.

v. 39 – may have a future eschatological meaning.
But it had a contemporary meaning – and still does.

When one turns to the Lord – the veil is removed.

When one sees Jesus as THE CHRIST – **Mushia** – the Messiah

And Christ is calling himself the Messiah.

Turn back a couple pages to Matthew 21:9

Just a few days earlier this was the cry of the crowd.

You know the story well.

READ

-- This was the final straw for the religious leaders.

-- They knew exactly what Jesus was proclaiming and what the crowd meant by what they were chanting.

A principle that we have tried to instill – when a verse is quoted from the OT – don't just look at the verse – look at the surrounding context.

Starting in Psalm 113 through Psalm 118 – we have what is called THE HALLEL. Jesus was quoting from 118:28 – near at the very end of the Hallel.

These were well known verses to every Jewish person.

The Hallel was sung during Jewish feasts during the inter-testamental period. The period between the end of the OT and the coming of Christ.

Psalm 113-118 is almost certainly what Jesus and the disciples sang in the upper room and as they went out of the upper room – and to see this passage and not see Christ is to miss the entire message.

No wonder Jesus lamented.

“Ye search the Scriptures because in them ye think ye have eternal life – and they are they that testify of me.”

They had the Scriptures – they could see THE CHRIST of the Scriptures with their physical eyes – but were spiritually blind!

READ – v. 28

It starts “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” and then **“We bless you from the HOUSE of the Lord.”**

Contrast that with the words of Christ.

-- BEHOLD – your HOUSE is left to you desolate --

It would be a profitable study to work our way through the Hallel – you may want to do that on your own – maybe one day we will do it in sermons. It is full of rich allusions to the coming of Christ.

B. Cheerfulness and Psalms (praise).

We have dealt with music before.

Music is a universal language – and almost all human beings employ music or enjoy music in one way or another.

Concerts – secular concerts – have a powerful emotional effect on us that can often last for days.

Our purpose is not to produce a powerful EMOTIONAL effect. The purpose of music – in regards to God – is the same as the purpose of prayer.

Distress – supplications.

Joy – praise.

Col. 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in **psalms** and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

To everything there is a time.

Pastor James gives us practical and appropriate counsel – once again.

II. The Prayer of Faith 14-15

You look at this passage and the immediate response is to say **WOW**.

Let me also say – we believe this and we practice this – and I hope you will see **HOW** when it is understood properly.

A. Literal Interpretation

The person is sick – we should understand that this is a serious illness.

It is universally admitted that this is even possibly life-threatening.

The elders are called

-- How can they know if they are not called?

-- It is the responsibility of the sick one **TO CALL**.

-- Obviously – not on the phone in James day – someone else would have to send the message.

-- Today a phone call would be fine -- and since the elders go to him or her – we can see how serious the illness is.

The elders pray over the person

Now the person himself should pray.

v. 13 – SUFFERING/ PRAY

But this is the prayer of the elders.

They anoint him or her WITH OIL in the Name of the Lord

The oil is the controversial part with many interpretations and we will deal with some of them as we come to the full exposition.

We are just reading what it says right now.

The prayer of faith – by whom? Whose faith.

Jesus said to some, “Your faith has made you whole.”
But we know it was always JESUS POWER that made them whole.

A strict reading shows the prayer of faith is the prayer of the elders – not the sick one – he is being PRAYED FOR.

Will raise him up.

No qualifiers are given.
It reads literally like an iron-clad guarantee – if only the elders can believe in faith.

Please note – in our strict reading – it is THE PRAYER that God uses to raise him up – it doesn’t say THE OIL.

But the oil is in there!
We will deal with that – but it says the prayer of faith.

If he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

He or she MAY be sick because of sin.
Is that possible – on a human level it is.
On a spiritual level it is.

Paul to the Corinthians regarding their misuse of the Lord’s Supper – for this cause many are sick and weak among you, and many sleep.

B. The Necessary Qualifications

Let’s go through the passage again – this time giving qualifications where necessary. This is the simplest way I can think of to deal with this difficult passage – there really isn’t anything like it in the rest of Scripture, yet the Roman Catholic church has built one of their 7 sacraments – Extreme Unction -- from a misuse of this passage.

The person is sick – we should understand that this is a serious illness.

It is admitted by all – from the very word used -- that this is serious, and probably even life-threatening.

Weak – the tense presently sick – could be spiritual weakness – a few take it that way, but most scholars would say that is stretching the word -- as it used here and other places -- beyond its normal bounds.

In modern times – in America -- think of being so sick you have to go to the hospital. A luxury that they did not have and many still do not have in this world.

The elders are called

The person calls the elders – through the means of another. They are obviously too sick to go themselves.

So a person in a coma could have their loved one call for them.

The point is the elders need to be informed.

Are these elders NECESSSARILY pastors.

-- The Catholic church says these are “priests”.

-- Calvin argues they could be respected Christians – not necessarily ordained ministers.

The elders pray over the person

-- Is the plural absolutely necessary?

Probably not – but it would be the normal condition in a church in such a serious situation.

Jessica Moreno recently passed away.

Pierre-Luc went to visit her.

Eric Polden went to do what he could.

Jeff Garland went to do what he could.
Other ladies went also.

The Mountain Church as a congregation prayed.
We as a congregation prayed.

I believe the necessary qualifications of this passage were met. She didn't die because of a violation of this passage.

We have a PRAYER LIST where we remember the prayer needs of one another in the congregation.

We have our own personal prayer lists – where we pray for loved ones that may not be known to the rest of the congregation – and at times we ask our brethren to join in prayer for them – even though they do not know them personally and cannot go to them privately.

Remember the person himself should pray – if possible.
v. 13 – SUFFERING/ PRAY

But this is the prayer of the others for the Christian (**among you**).

They anoint him or her WITH OIL in the Name of the Lord

-- This is where the Catholic Church gets Extreme Unction.
In their perverse interpretation:
It's only for the dying.
It wipes away their sins – both venial and mortal.

Luther, Calvin and the Reformers attacked this with a vengeance seeing it as destructive to all of Scripture – and not recognizing 7 sacraments – but only two – which we often call ordinances – Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

There are more than 2 means of grace.

There are only 2 sacraments or ordinances (established and ordained by God in perpetuity during this entire NT age until the Lord returns).

Time fails us to properly deal with this today.

Would we anoint with oil – if it was requested?

We have – and we would.

Do we think it is absolutely necessary?

As pastor – myself or Pastor Jeff try to visit you when you are in the hospital.

We pray for you – so many of you know that because you have been a part of that.

We will talk about the oil, if it is necessary, and if it is used how, when and why next time.

Do be aware – SUPERSTITION and THE WRONG FOCUS can easily work its way into this. It has and still does.

The prayer of faith will raise him up.

Not the oil.

Not a ritual.

Simple, humble, trusting, believing faith.

Well, if the person doesn't get well, there wasn't enough faith.

It is the faith of the faithful who are praying.

It needs to be predicated with – IF THE LORD WILLS.

James doesn't say that.

Yes, he does, if we understand him correctly.

4:13-16

Do you really want to turn the humble, believing prayer of faith into a mechanical formula and ritual?

But no qualifiers are given – it's a guarantee.

That's not rare for James.
He loves to speak in absolutes – it is his style.

But the qualifies are built in – by context – by Biblical context – and by reason. Obviously – no one is going to live forever no matter how much faith is exercised.

What is the right way to pray for a sick individual?
Lord, raise him up.
Lord, help him in his time of distress.
Lord, make him well.

Why would you pray for him to remain sick?
– and if the Lord doesn't – if He is pleased to do otherwise – **BLESSED BE THE NAME OF THE LORD**
we still trust in the Name of the Lord!

You should pray for the best outcome as we can see it – but then always have the humble attitude – not my will but thine be done.

We are out of time to deal any further today.
We will deal with part 2 next time.
May God seal His truth to our hearts!

PRAY

HYMN 94 – or 579

Benediction: 5:13-15