

Prayers of Faith (Part 1 of # 20)

James 5: 13-18

As we continue in our study of James, drawing near the conclusion of the book, we come to a familiar passage centered on prayer. As I read this passage again I was reminded that James lived among people just as we do. It was a different time and society was much different, but the difficulties and struggles of life were much the same. Every generation has been forced to deal with adversity. All have faced circumstances and afflictions that were beyond their ability to control. None have lived without the need for prayer.

As we consider the world in which we live, we would have to admit much has changed since the time of James. Most would agree that we have made significant advancements, and in many cases I would agree. The day to day tasks of life are much easier today, but we are not beyond the need for prayer. Even with all the advancements made, many continue to deal with problems that are beyond human ability. We all know those who stand in need of prayer. The list in our bulletin is full each week. When names are removed, they are replaced by others who need to be prayed for.

I am certainly thankful for the privilege of prayer. It is the means by which we make our requests and supplications known to God. There is power in prayer. When forced to deal with situations we can't handle, we can go to God with the assurance that He is able and that He will work things out according to His will.

Our text this evening has brought comfort and hope to many down through the ages. If one doubted the power and effectiveness of prayer, an honest reading of this passage should put such doubts to rest. I want to take a few moments this evening to consider the [aspects](#) of prayer James speaks of in this text. I trust we will be reminded of the power of prayer, as well as the need for prayer. I want to preach on the thought: [Prayers of Faith](#).

I. The Instruction in Prayer (13-15) – Here James offers detailed instruction regarding prayer. He addresses several circumstances when prayer is necessary and how we should approach them. First we discover:

A. Prayers in Affliction (13a) – [Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray](#). James begins with a common situation many had dealt with, those who were afflicted. He speaks of those who were suffering, particularly from outside sources. This literally has the idea of “*suffering evil blows from the outside world.*” No doubt the reader knew many who were afflicted, just as we do today. We find that we are to pray in such situations. When we face affliction or suffering, we are to appeal to God for strength and help. We cannot overcome alone, but God can bring victory!

- I will admit our troubles are light compared to many around the world, but we all face trouble and difficulty in this life. We are often tempted to get angry, bitter, and stressed. We are encouraged to pray rather than falling apart. Seek God and trust Him to deliver you.

B. Prayers of Adoration (13b) – *Is any merry? Let him sing psalms.* These were living in the same environment as the others, and yet they were merry. This has to do with “*being of a good mind and attitude; dealing with the joy one possesses within.*” In a world prone to adversity and pain, there were those who had risen above. Through the help of the Lord they had overcome their adversity and experienced joy. In such instances we are encouraged to sing unto the Lord.

- I would never want to take anything away from open worship of our Lord. He is worthy of our praise. We have many opportunities to praise the Lord openly for His goodness in our lives, but I feel as if James continues to deal with the attitude of prayer here also. He encourages the reader to offer praise and adoration through prayer for the joy they feel within. In fact, I believe we should offer praise every time we pray. We may not always feel like worship, but even in the worst of circumstances, we have much to praise God for. If I lost my health, home, and even the basic necessities of life, I would still be saved and on my way to heaven. I have much to praise Christ for each time I pray, regardless of outside circumstances!

- It is also interesting to note the prayers in affliction and prayers of adoration are addressed in the same verse, within the same thought. Through that we find affirmation that it is possible to praise the Lord even in the midst of trials. Outside circumstances do not control or dictate inner joy and peace. It is possible to praise the Lord through a joyful heart, even when situations in life are at their worst.

C. Prayers of Intercession (14-15) – James turns his attention to prayers that are offered on behalf of others, intercessory prayers. I am thankful to be part of the local church. I appreciate those on whom I can depend to pray for me in times of need. You maybe haven’t experienced it yet, but there will come a time in your life when you need others to pray for you. Let’s look a bit closer at these prayers of intercession. I want to examine the aspects James speaks of so that we will have a better understanding of this type of prayer. Notice:

1. The Appeal (14a) – *Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church.* No doubt James dealt with many who were sick in body, facing all manner of physical ailments. This is the sickness dealt with here. It has the idea of “*being without strength, weak in body.*”

- Those who are sick in body are encouraged to call for the elders of the church, the leadership of the local body of believers. There are many benefits to being associated with the local church, actively involved, and this is one of those benefits. A godly congregation will lift up others in prayer. We all need each other's prayers.

- I also notice that James places the burden for such intercessory prayer upon the sick, the one who stands in need of prayer. (Now I am aware that prayer is always beneficial if prayed in faith. There are times when physical ailments become so bad that people are unable to make personal requests, but the basis here is that the sick genuinely desires the prayers of God's people.) As I consider this aspect of intercessory prayer, I see a measure of faith exhibited. The one who is sick has shown faith in the Lord, in prayer, and even in the church. Faith is essential in prayer and intercessory prayers are not exempt from faith.

2. The Anointing (14b) – *Is any sick among you? 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:* After the elders have been summoned in faith, they are exhorted to pray over the sick, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. Now, don't let that make you uncomfortable. This is not charismatic; it is biblical. I was raised around this and have even participated in this type of prayer many times. However, we must understand what this verse teaches.

- First of all let's consider the anointing with oil. This is where many get confused and concerned. In the New Testament there were two types of anointing. There was a sacred anointing of the Holy Spirit. *Luke 4:18 – The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.* *2 Cor.1:21 – Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God.* There was also an anointing that only spoke of a physical act, literally the applying of oil or ointment to the body. *John 12:3 – Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.* Here the anointing of Jesus by Mary was spiritual in that it was an act of worship, but there was no spiritual power in the ointment. This is the type of anointing to which James speaks. He refers to the physical act of applying oil, for physical comfort, to one who is sick. This was common in that day.

- I want to emphasize there is nothing supernatural in the oil itself. It was done as a means to comfort the physical body. I have, and will continue to anoint with oil, but I have no faith in the power of the oil. We need to understand where the power lies. Healing is obtained through God alone. The sick are encouraged to call for the elders of the church, offering prayers of faith to Almighty God, in intercession to Him for healing. Faith is the key; it isn't the power of oil to bring about supernatural healing. We should pray for others, knowing God responds to faith!

3. The Authority (15a) – And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.

James confirms the authority in healing. He says nothing of any power in the oil, but he does emphasize the prayer of faith and the power of the Lord. As I said, God responds to faith. The oil didn't motivate God to provide healing; He moved because of faith. Many times in Scripture we hear Jesus proclaim, "Thy faith hath made the whole." Matt.9:2 – And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. In this instance, the faith of those who carried the palsied man was honored. God recognizes faith, but we must never forget that He provides the healing.

- I want to emphasize the need of faith in regard to all involved. The sick, making the appeal, needs to exercise faith in the Lord. Those praying for the sick must pray in faith. In fact, if you are asked to participate in an intercessory prayer such as this, and you lack faith, I would encourage you to stay away. Some may think that is harsh, but I am convinced that faith is essential if we are to receive the blessing of God.

4. The Acquittal (15b) – And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

James reveals that sickness did not always result from sin, but if that were the case, and healing had been sought by faith, the sins that resulted in the sickness would also be forgiven. We know that sin can and does have consequences in our lives. Paul warned the Corinthians, and all believers, against partaking of the Lord's Supper with sin in their hearts. Many had done so and were sick because of it; some had even died. God views the purity of our hearts seriously, but we cannot assume that sickness or adversity are always the result of sin.

- I will admit this verse is difficult to fully understand. I think it would be presumptuous to assume that healing and forgiveness always go hand in hand. No doubt God has spared the wicked through healing. He has also chosen to withhold healing from godly saints. We will never fully comprehend the sovereign acts of God. However, we cannot overlook the association of healing and forgiveness. Many times when Jesus healed people, rather than speaking of healing, He would declare their sins had been forgiven and admonish them to sin no more.

- It appears there is an act of repentance associated with particular appeals for healing. The sick understood the power of God. They prayed in faith for healing, and called for the elders to pray as well. One will not come to this place, with sin in their life, without the Holy Spirit revealing their sin and bringing conviction. Surely if we are desperately seeking God for physical healing and He reveals the need for repentance, we would respond in repentance. God is faithful to forgive sin if we are willing to confess our sin and forsake it.

Conclusion: I had hoped to finish this passage this evening, but there was too much to discuss in our allotted time. Hopefully we will conclude our study on Prayers of Faith next week. I trust that we have been enlightened and challenged regarding prayer. There is power in prayer. We need to engage in prayer continually before the Lord. We ought to always be in an attitude of prayer.

I hope we realize the benefit of prayer. We have the privilege of interceding on behalf of others. That is comforting, and it is also challenging. We must live our lives in a way that pleases God. We must be familiar with prayer. We will be ineffective to pray for our needs or the needs of others if we have unconfessed sin in our lives.

We must realize that God alone can heal. He alone can provide forgiveness. Let us walk with Him daily so that we can come before Him in assurance that He will hear when we pray. Are there needs in your life that you need to seek the Lord about? Do you know Christ as your personal Savior? Physical needs are many, and at times they are urgent, but the greatest need anyone has is a right relationship with Christ!