

**9-24-23**

**Sermon: Seeing the Power of Prayer**

**Scripture: James 5:13-20, CTW: Ps 37:1-9**

**Hymns: 629, 631, 632**

**Theme:** James wants his people to see how valuable prayer really is. To see clearly how indispensable it is. It's not just a time to log in a few moments and move on to the next task. It's an expression of our love and our dependence upon the God who heals us. It's the very essence of life as a Christian.

### **I. Introduction: What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!**

What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,  
all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

As you think of all the potential things that might come your way in life, what are you most focused on? Do you face every new day with joy and anticipation and hope, or dread and anxiety?

What's on your mind as you review how your life is going? What is in your thoughts, what is in your prayers?

Today we are going to be talking about the final thought in the book of James -- the greatest resource that we can offer in that area is to remind you of the **power** and the **wisdom** of being a person of prayer.

Martin Luther said, "As it is the business of tailors to make clothes and of cobblers to mend shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray." What is prayer all about?

### **II. Prayer Is First and Foremost An Expression Of Our Love And Trust In God**

**A. So often we can reduce prayer to a task or a duty that we perform for God.** Prayer is supposed to be an expression of our love for God -- an expression of our devotion for God.

The most natural part of a love relationship is demonstrated by just wanting to spend time together and talk with one another. You want to talk with the one you love.

Is prayer about that for you? Are you just so in love with God that you can't help but talk to him all the time?

When something great happens to you or something tragic happens to you during the course of your day, who do you call? You call the person you love, right?

Whenever there is good news or bad news, the first person you want to tell is the person you are in love with. Today we look at what James teaches us about prayer.

### **B. Pray For Yourself: When You Are Suffering**

Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. **(James 5:13)**.

Depending on the translation you are using, the word "trouble" might be translated as "suffering," it might be translated as "afflicted." (that's how the KJV translates it).

This is the only place in the entire N.T. where this word for "trouble" is used. The question that needs to be asked here is this: What kind of trouble is he talking about? The key to the interpretation of any passage is always the context.

Think about the context in which this passage is written: When we started this book, we learned that James is writing this letter to an assembly of Jews.

James is the half-brother our Lord, and he is the pastor of a church in Jerusalem. So he's writing to those in his flock, but he is also writing to a broader group - those who were scattered abroad.

Those who have been scattered out of Palestine, out of Jerusalem by the persecutions of Acts 7 and 8, we call that the dispersion, or the diaspora.

James's audience is facing pressure from the outside and pressure on the inside (facing their own temptations). They are being tested in every way.

James has been teaching them how to endure -- how to persevere -- how to move forward despite the stress and persecutions and the troubles they are facing.

Now what he is doing here is returning to that same all-encompassing theme one more time. "Is anyone of you in trouble?" "Is anyone of you suffering?" Then pray.

James wants to remind us that we don't rely on earthly resources when we face troubles. Don't rely on earthly wisdom -- Go to God. Don't rely on human tradition -- Go to God. And for goodness sake, don't rely on your own ideas -- Go to God & Pray.

James' great concern is that his people's spiritual vision has been affected by their troubles. Instead of seeing everything that God has resourced his children with, they have begun to focus on their problems.

**C. When you fix your focus on your problems instead of focusing on Jesus -- your vision is distorted.** You don't see life as it truly is with Christ.

The Bible says we need to focus on the reality of how long and wide and high and how deep His love is and to know that this **love** that he has given us **surpasses knowledge** and is filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Christ is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to his power that is at work within us. What James is trying to do is get his readers to see life as it really is with Christ.

If you do this, you're going to face your troubles and trials and pressures and uncertainties with confident faith. You're going to be infused with power and God's wisdom and counsel.

### **III. Pray When You Experience Success**

**A. Notice that James gives the same prescription when you are on the other side of the spectrum. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise.**

Some translations use the word cheerful instead of happy. It means "anyone who is well in spirit" Anyone who has a happy, cheerful attitude.

What he is addressing is the orientation of the heart. If you're in deep spiritual pain, and your soul is broken, pray. Keep your heart focused heavenward. If your soul is rejoicing, and your heart is filled with joy - give praise. Be prayerful!

**B. Call Leaders to Pray Over You - When You Face Sickness.**

James continues: Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. **(James 5:14)**.

This same word used here for the sick is also used for the weaknesses that come in human flesh as a result of the difficulties of life.

It is a term that has to do with spiritual weakness. This is sickness of the heart.

**C. Call For Leaders of the Church to Pray For You When You Feel Weak.**

If you're spiritually weak, you want to go to someone who is spiritually strong. So who would you go to? **Verse 14:** "Let him call for the elders of the church."

Go to the elders of the church. Why? Because they're the spiritual strength that you need. Go to the elders of the church, they're the overseers - the spiritually strong.

Go to the spiritually strong, those who are victorious, those who are patiently enduring. Draw on their strength.

What I want you to understand is that the real emphasis here for James is on a heart that is sick -- not on a physical body. James' intended purpose is to lead his people **in renewed spiritual vision and spiritual resource.**

God doesn't always heal the physical body. It's not always his plan to heal the physical, **but it is always his plan** to heal the spiritual. That's the context and that's the real goal here.

The oil James mentions is a reminder -- it is not magical in itself. It possesses no real healing capabilities -- therefore it has to be understood to represent something else. The oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, who is the divine agent in healing.

Throughout the Bible, oil is a symbol of the soothing, empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit. James says that it is the prayer of faith that heals, not the oil. He is really defining the ministry of spiritual leaders in the church -- they are to have a ministry of comfort, encouragement, and restoration.

#### **D. The People Call for the Leaders to Come**

When you are overburdened, overwhelmed, wounded, brokenhearted (physically & spiritually), the leaders are called to respond and pray. John Wesley taught this for his Class Leaders!

This is really a verse that tells how the church is supposed to work. A ministry of praying over the soldiers in the Lord's army that have been taking hits from the enemy.

Leaders are called to come and pray for the wounded, broken, pained, weak, weary, exhausted soldiers who were out there fighting the battle.

They come alongside, get on their knees and pray with the spiritual strength that they have on behalf of that dear person. And in compassion reach out to strengthen, stimulate, bind up the broken heart and even minister to the wounds.

Somehow we've lost that. Somehow leadership in a local church means listening and responding to the complaints of the people or putting together vision statements or making decisions and attending endless meetings and working through all the power plays. That's not the ministry of leadership James describes!

And the prayer offered in faith will make them well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. **(James 5:15).**

James says that the prayer offered in faith by those godly people, will restore the one who is weary and has lost heart. Spiritual restoration...spiritual strength. The Lord will raise them up. He will restore the weary.

### **E. Pray For Each Other When Sin Infects Your Spiritual Health**

Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. **(James 5:16).**

That's the church as it's meant to be. Church is a place where we come, dropping our egos at the door before we come in, recognizing our total complete dependence on the grace of Christ for all of us. And we fight for one another...

#### **IV Conclusion: Now here's the great question of this passage:**

##### **A. Do you believe that your prayers are powerful?**

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. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

James gives an illustration using Elijah. And everybody knew about him. Elijah was a man with passions, with a nature like ours, just like we are.

He suffered like we suffered. You can go back and read **1 Kings 17:11** and find out he was hungry. You can read **1 Kings 19:3** and find out he was afraid. You can read **1 Kings 19:4** and you can find out he was tired from battle. He was just a man. He had strong points and weak points in his life.

James says he prayed that it might not rain. And you know what? It didn't rain for three and a half years. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

Here is what James wants us to understand: **Elijah prayed to the exact same God we pray to.** The problem is really that a lot of us don't buy into that. -- **but that's what the Scriptures teach!** It's just a matter of what you really believe and how much you actually pray -- how often you come before the God of Elijah.

Do you really believe your prayers are powerful? What's your attitude when you approach the throne of grace?

**B. James wants his people to see how valuable prayer really is.** To see clearly how indispensable it is. It's not just a time to log in a few moments and move on to the next task. It's an expression of our love and our dependence upon the God who heals us. It's the very essence of life as a Christian! **Amen? Let us pray...**