

NOON BIBLE STUDY: JAMES 5 (PT 2)

JAMES 5:13-20

JAMES 5:13-14 - PRACTICE OF PRAYER & PRAISE

PRAYER IN ITS MOST BASIC FORM IS TALKING TO GOD LIKE YOU WOULD TALK TO A FRIEND OR LOVED ONE. IT INVOLVES SPEAKING (WHETHER OUT LOUD OR SILENTLY), SHARING YOUR HEART, BEING HONEST, AND EVEN LISTENING. THROUGH PRAYER WE ASK FOR HELP, TALK ABOUT WHAT IS GOING ON IN OUR LIVES AND WORLD, ASK FOR HELP FOR OTHERS AND SITUATIONS, THANK AND SPEAK WELL OF GOD AND LISTEN FOR GOD TO SPEAK BACK.

WITH THAT BEING SAID, JAMES IS REMINDING US THAT PRAYER IS VERY IMPORTANT. PRAYER IS VERY POWERFUL. YET, PRAYER IS OFTEN FOOLISHLY NEGLECTED IN OUR LIVES AND IN THE LIVES OF THE CHURCH OF GOD. JAMES LAYS OUT A VERY SIMPLE PATTERN FOR CHRISTIANS TO FOLLOW.

- ARE SUFFERING? → PRAY (V. 13)
- ARE YOU CHEERFUL? → PRAISE GOD (V. 13)
- ARE YOU SICK? → PRAY, AND EVEN INVOLVE OTHER CHRISTIANS, SPECIFICALLY CHURCH LEADERS IN THIS PRAYER. (V. 14)

WHAT IS YOUR COURSE OF ACTION IN THESE AND OTHER MOMENTS? WHEN YOU ARE IN A TRIAL, DO YOU PRAY? OR DO YOU COMPLAIN, OR GO MENTALLY/EMOTIONALLY NUMB, OR PERHAPS YOU TALK ABOUT YOUR STRUGGLES WITH OTHER BELIEVERS, AND GET GOOD ADVICE AND COUNSEL? WHILE THERE MAY BE UNDERSTANDABLE REASONS OR EVEN SPIRITUAL MERIT TO SOME OF THESE ACTIONS, SCRIPTURE SAYS WE SHOULD PRAY.

WHEN YOU ARE CHEERFUL, DO YOU PRAISE GOD FOR THAT JOY? OR DO WE FORGET GOD WHEN THINGS ARE GOOD. A GOOD EXAMPLE OF THIS IS THE PRAYER TEAM AT OUR LOCAL CHURCH. WE GET MANY PRAYER REQUESTS, BUT NOT AS MANY UPDATES AND PRAISE REPORTS. EVEN WHEN SOMEONE WHO IS SICK IS HEALED, IT IS EASY TO JUST RETURN TO BUSINESS AS USUAL. OUR "GENIE IN A BOTTLE" GOD GRANTED OUR WISH AND NOW WE'RE BACK TO LIVING A LIFE INDEPENDENT OF HIM. SCRIPTURE TELLS US WE SHOULD PRAISE GOD!

IN MANY WAYS, THESE TWO SITUATIONS (SUFFERING AND CHEERFULNESS) ARE THE TWO ENDS OF THE SPECTRUMS IN LIFE - AND BOTH CAN BE A TIME WHEN WE ARE SPIRITUALLY TRIED. WHEN WE'RE IN TRIAL WE CAN CHOOSE THINGS OTHER THAN GOD AND WHEN IN TIMES OF "CHEER" WE CAN FORGET GOD.

"JAMES IS FULLY AWARE OF ALL THIS,...FOR THROUGHOUT HIS LETTER (WE SEE) THE THEME OF TRIAL, ALONGSIDE WARNINGS AGAINST ALLOWING THE HEART TO STRAY AFTER RICHES, INDICATE HIS ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE FULL RUN OF LIFE, AND HIS CONCERN TO (FOR US TO BE ALERT) AGAINST ITS VARIED ASSAULTS. HIS INSISTENCE, NEVERTHELESS, IS THAT NONE OF THESE THINGS SHOULD MOVE US. NEITHER SUFFERING OR EASE SHOULD FINE US WITHOUT A SUITABLE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE IN PRAYER AND SONG." ("THE BIBLE SPEAKS TODAY: THE MESSAGE OF JAMES", J.A. MOTYER, PAGE 187-8)

Q - WHY DO YOU THINK PRAYER IS COMMONLY NEGLECTED IN OUR LIVES/CHURCHES?

Q - WHY DO YOU THINK WE ARE AT TIMES NEGLIGENT TO PRAISE GOD WHEN WE ARE CHEERFUL?

ANointING WITH OIL:

"SOME THINK THAT **ANointING WITH OIL** WAS MEDICINAL OR SACRAMENTAL (AS IN ROMAN CATHOLIC EXTREME UNCTION AT DEATH), BUT IT IS BEST SEEN AS A SYMBOL REPRESENTING THE HEALING POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO COME UPON THE SICK PERSON (CF. THE USE OF "ANointING" FOR SYMBOLIC CONSECRATION TO GOD'S USE AND SERVICE, BOTH IN THE OT [EX. 28:41] AND IN THE NT [LUKE 4:18; ACTS 4:27; 10:38; 2 COR. 1:21; HEB. 1:9]). "**IN THE NAME OF THE LORD**" MEANS IT IS GOD, NOT THE OIL, THAT HEALS. (ESV STUDY BIBLE, JAMES 5:14).

IT WAS LIKELY A SYMBOLIC ACTION TO HIGHLIGHT THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE NEED AND THE CONSECRATION OF THE PERSON OR SITUATION TO THE LORD. TO CALL THIS "ANointING WITH OIL" SYMBOLIC DOES NOT DOWNPLAY ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR OUR GOD IS A GOD OF SYMBOLS (THINK: BREAD AND WINE, PASSOVER LAMBS, AND BAPTISM)

JAMES 5:15-16 - EFFECTS OF PRAYER

PRAYER IS NOT JUST A DEAD DEVOTIONAL PRACTICE OF RELIGIOUS PEOPLE. IT IS THE CENTERPIECE OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LIVING GOD! JAMES REMINDS US OF THE EFFECTS AND RESULTS OF PRAYER.

SOME HAVE POINTED OUT THAT THE PHRASE "PRAYER OFFERED IN FAITH" COULD MEAN THE FAITH/PRAYER OF THE ELDERS OR THE FAITH/PRAYER OF THE ONE WHO IS SICK. IT SEEMS THAT EITHER COULD BE VALID - THE POINT IS THAT OUR PRAYER IN SUCH SITUATIONS (IT SEEMS LIKE THIS IS MORE THAN JUST A BOO-BOO THAT NEEDS A BAND-AID OR A HEADACHE THAT NEEDS ADVIL) SHOULD BE PRAYERS ROOTED IN A BELIEVE IN THE GOD WHO CAN/DOES RESPOND TO PRAYER. WE SHOULD NOT PRAY (NOR CALL FOR THE CHURCH ELDERS TO PRAY) OUT OF A RELIGIOUS SUPERSTITION OR VAIN PRACTICE. WHEN PRAYER IS PRAYED "IN FAITH" THERE IS GREAT POWER THAT FLOWS. VERSES 15-16 MENTIONS RESTORATION, BEING RAISED UP, BEING FORGIVEN AND BEING HEALED. THAT IS NO SMALL QUARTET OF PRAYER RESULTS.

IT IS EASY TO BECOME JADED TO THE POWER OF PRAYER WITH MANY PRAYERS SEEMINGLY UNANSWERED OR RESULTS OTHER THAN WHAT WE HOPED COME TO PASS. HOWEVER, WE MUST NOT LOSE OUR FAITH IN OUR PRAYERS, AND ULTIMATELY IN OUR GOD. CONSIDER TODAY IF YOU ARE JUST GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS IN YOUR PRAYERS OR REALLY BELIEVE GOD HEARS YOU, GOD LOVES YOU AND GOD RESPONDS!

JAMES 5:16B (NLT) - THE EARNEST PRAYER OF A RIGHTEOUS PERSON HAS GREAT POWER AND PRODUCES WONDERFUL RESULTS.

JOHN PIPER MAKES SOME PROFOUND AND ENCOURAGING POINTS ABOUT PRAYER:

"WE PRAY BECAUSE IT IS SIMPLY A STAGGERINGLY AWESOME PRIVILEGE. THINK OF IT. GOD RUNS THIS WORLD WITH INFINITE WISDOM. YOU AND I NEVER INFORM HIM OF ANYTHING HE DOESN'T ALREADY KNOW. WE NEVER ADD TO HIS WISDOM ABOUT WHAT HE SHOULD DO NEXT. HE DOESN'T NEED OUR PRAYERS TO KNOW WHAT HE SHOULD DO. THIS IS AS BASIC AS IT GETS. HE IS GOD. "'WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO HAS BEEN HIS COUNSELOR?' 'OR WHO HAS GIVEN A GIFT TO HIM THAT HE MIGHT BE REPAID?' FOR FROM HIM AND THROUGH HIM AND TO HIM ARE ALL THINGS. TO HIM BE GLORY FOREVER. AMEN" (ROMANS 11:34—36).

NEVERTHELESS, GOD HAS ORDAINED TO MAKE OUR PRAYERS REAL CAUSES OF REAL EVENTS. REAL CAUSES. THE WORDS OF JAMES 4:2 "YOU DO NOT HAVE BECAUSE YOU DO NOT ASK," DO NOT MEAN, "YOU WOULD HAVE HAD ANYWAY, EVEN IF YOU DIDN'T PRAY, SINCE GOD HAD A PLAN AND YOUR PRAYERS DON'T MATTER." "YOU DO NOT HAVE BECAUSE YOU DO NOT ASK" MEANS PRAYER CAUSES THINGS TO HAPPEN

THAT DO NOT HAPPEN IF THE PRAYERS DON'T HAPPEN. THIS IS BREATHTAKING. AND IF YOU NEGLECT THIS PRIVILEGE — YOUR PARTICIPATION IN GOD'S MOVING THE WORLD — YOU ARE ACTING VERY FOOLISHLY. WE PRAY BECAUSE IT IS A STAGGERINGLY AWESOME PRIVILEGE. (SOURCE: DESIRINGGOD.ORG/MESSAGES/PRAY-LIKE-THIS-HALLOWED-BE-YOUR-NAME)

"THIS IS BREATHTAKING. IF YOU DO NOT AVAIL YOURSELF OF THE PRIVILEGE OF BRINGING TO PASS EVENTS IN THE UNIVERSE THAT WOULD NOT TAKE PLACE IF YOU DIDN'T PRAY, YOU ARE ACTING LIKE A COLOSSAL FOOL, AREN'T YOU? I AM JUST THINKING LOGICALLY HERE. IF YOU ARE OFFERED THE PRIVILEGE OF ENGAGING WITH GOD IN SUCH A WAY THAT YOUR REQUEST COULD BRING INTO BEING THINGS THAT WOULD NOT OTHERWISE COME INTO BEING, NOT TO AVAIL YOURSELF OF THAT PRIVILEGE IS FOLLY OF THE HIGHEST OR LOWEST ORDER. THAT IS WHY WE PRAY, BECAUSE BECKONING US INTO OUR SHARE IN THE RUNNING OF THE UNIVERSE." (SOURCE: DESIRINGGOD.ORG/INTERVIEWS/FOUR-MOTIVATIONS-TO-PRAY)

JAMES 5:17-18 - ELIJAH'S PRAYER

JAMES CONTINUES HIS ADMONITION OF PRAYER BY GIVING A REAL LIFE AND HISTORICAL EXAMPLE OF THE "EFFECTIVE PRAYER OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN ACCOMPLISHING MUCH..." IN THE LIFE OF ELIJAH. DURING THE REIGN OF KING AHAB (AND HIS QUEEN JEZEBEL) RECORDED IN 1 KINGS 17-18, IT WAS THE PRAYERS OF ELIJAH THAT SHUT UP AND THEN OPENED AGAIN THE HEAVENS. THE NLT USES THE PHRASE "ELIJAH WAS AS HUMAN AS WE ARE..." THOUGH IT MIGHT BE HARD TO ACCEPT, KNOWING HOW GREAT ELIJAH WAS...THIS IS THE TRUTH OF SCRIPTURE.

JAMES MAKES SOME PRETTY IMPORTANT POINTS ABOUT PRAYER IN THESE CLOSING VERSES.

- NO MATTER WHAT YOU ARE GOING THROUGH, PRAY AND PRAISE. THESE SHOULD BE OUR AUTOMATIC AND HABITUAL RESPONSES. (JAMES 5:13-14)
- BELIEVE THAT THERE IS POWER IN PRAYER BECAUSE THE ONE WE PRAY TO IS POWERFUL. BELIEVING THIS AND PRAYING IN LIGHT OF THIS IS THE DOOR TO HEALING, RESTORATION, FORGIVENESS AND MORE. (JAMES 5:15-16)
- THERE WAS NOTHING UNIQUE OR SPECIAL IN ELIJAH (OR OTHER GREAT HEROES OF THE FAITH FOR THAT MATTER) OTHER THAN THEY HAD A PASSIONATE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND PRAYER FERVENTLY. (JAMES 5:17-18).

SO...CHILD OF GOD, AND FOLLOWER OF CHRIST..., **PRAY.**

JAMES 5:19-20 - FINAL WORKS

JAMES FINISHES HIS LETTER BUT SLIGHTLY DEPARTING FROM THE PRAYER THEME AND RETURNING TO A THEME HE HAS HIGHLIGHTED ELSEWHERE, AND ONE THAT IS VERY NEAR TO THE HEART OF GOD: LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS. IN THIS CASE, JAMES SPEAKS OF THE LOVE THAT IS NEEDED IN THE HEARTS OF GOD'S PEOPLE TO CARE FOR THE "PRODIGALS" AMONG US WHO ARE WALKING AWAY, OR WHO HAVE WALKED AWAY FROM THEIR HEAVENLY FATHER.

JAMES DOESN'T SPEAK OF THE DANGER AWAITING THESE INDIVIDUALS IF THEY DON'T TURN BACK, NOR DOES HE USE THESE VERSES TO SPEAK OF GOD'S LOVE FOR THEM. INSTEAD, HE APPEALS TO THE "OLDER BROTHERS" AMONG US TO HAVE A HEART FOR OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS WHO MAY BE FAR FROM HOME. HE TELLS US WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO US IF AND WHEN WE REACH OUT TO THOSE WHO HAVE TURNED THEIR BACKS. HE APPEALS TO US TO FIGHT FOR EACH OTHER.

IT MAKES SENSE TO OPEN AND CLOSE A LETTER WITH IMPORTANT OR PROFOUND POINTS. IT IS LIKELY THE FIRST WORD AND THE LAST WORD THAT WILL RESONATE IN THE HEARTS OF THOSE RECEIVING THE LETTER. AS WE HAVE MENTIONED THROUGHOUT OUR STUDY OF JAMES, HE IS WRITING TO

A NEW CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, SCATTERED IN VARIOUS AREAS, WHO ARE LEARNING TO NAVIGATE THIS NEW LIFE THEY HAVE FOUND IN CHRIST. THEY ARE RELYING ON THE ORAL TRADITIONS OF WHAT JESUS HAD TAUGHT AND THE APOSTLES HAD PRESERVED AND NOW THEY ARE RECEIVING A WRITTEN LETTER FROM THE HALF-BROTHER OF JESUS AND THE LEADER OF THIS YOUNG CHURCH.

JAMES IS PERHAPS MINDFUL OF WHAT THE GREAT THREATS AGAINST THE CHURCH WILL BE. THIS IS WHY HE LEADS WITH A 101 CLASS ON OVERCOMING TEMPTATION AND ENDURING TRIALS IN CHAPTER 1. HE WILL CONTINUE IN CHAPTER 2 AND TALK ABOUT THE EVILS OF FAVORITISM AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS "FAITH" AFFECTING OUR LIVES (AKA "WORKS") IF IT IS TRUE FAITH AT ALL. HE'LL REMIND US IN CHAPTER 3-4 ABOUT THE POWER OF OUR WORDS AND CALL US IN CHAPTER 4 AND 5 TO SPEAK AND ACT DIFFERENT THAN EVERYONE ELSE. THIS NEW LIFE IS ONE LIVED IN LIGHT OF THE COMING KINGDOM OF GOD. ETERNITY SHOULD INFLUENCE US IN EVERY WAY - HOW WE SPEAK, HOW WE THINK, HOW WE BUDGET, HOW WE PLAN. AND SO WE OUGHT TO PRAY, AS BROTHER JAMES HAS JUST REMINDED US. SO MANY GREAT AND INSPIRING AND CONVICTING TRUTHS...

AND YET, JAMES ENDS HIS LETTER WITH A CALL FOR THIS YOUNG CHURCH TO FIGHT FOR EACH OTHER. WHY NOT END WITH "TO GOD BE THE GLORY!" OR "GRACE AND PEACE FROM GOD AND CHRIST!" OR "HONOR AND PRAISE TO GOD IN ALL OF THE CHURCHES, AMEN!" OR "THIS IS WHAT YOU NEED TO DO TO SURVIVE..." HE COULD SAY THOSE THINGS, CERTAINLY HE BELIEVED IN AND HOPED FOR THOSE THINGS. BUT JAMES KNOWS THAT IF THE CHURCH OF GOD, BOTH IN THE FIRST CENTURY, AND JUST AS NEEDED IN THE 21ST CENTURY, DOES NOT LOVE ONE ANOTHER AND FIGHT FOR ONE ANOTHER AND PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER AND SERVE ONE ANOTHER, WE'RE DONE FOR. IN TRUTH, THIS FINAL CALL TO BROTHERLY LOVE IS JAMES CRYING OUT: *"THIS IS WHAT YOU NEED TO DO TO SURVIVE!"*

WE CAN HAVE THE RIGHT THEOLOGY, WHICH WE MUST HAVE, WE CAN HAVE THE RIGHT OUTREACH PLAN, WHICH WE SHOULD HAVE, WE CAN HAVE THE RIGHT PRACTICES AT OUR MEETINGS AND GATHERINGS, WHICH WE OUGHT TO HAVE...BUT WITHOUT A COMMITMENT OF THE BODY OF CHRIST TO ITSELF, WE WILL FALL AND FALTER.

THE EARLY CHURCH WOULD EVENTUALLY GROW AND AS IT GREW, THE RARITY AND UNIQUENESS OF THE CHURCH FADED. ONCE "EVERYONE IS A CHRISTIAN" WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL? THIS LED TO FIGHTING, QUARRELS, DIVISION AND UN-CHRIST-LIKE BEHAVIOR AND THE TARNISHING OF THE WITNESS THE CHURCH HAD WHICH THE LORD SAID WOULD BE OUR BADGE:

JOHN 13:34-35 - SO NOW I AM GIVING YOU A NEW COMMANDMENT: LOVE EACH OTHER. JUST AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, YOU SHOULD LOVE EACH OTHER. 35 YOUR LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER WILL PROVE TO THE WORLD THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES."

AND SO JAMES ECHOS JESUS ONE FINAL TIME WITH HIS FINAL WORDS. WE HAVE GOT TO MAKE A COMMITMENT TO EACH OTHER IF WE'RE GOING TO BE EFFECTIVE FOR THE MASTER'S USE. WE ARE EACH A PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER THAN OURSELVES.

SO AS WE CONCLUDE OUR STUDY OF JAMES, LET'S ENDEAVOR TO GET THE MANY PRACTICAL THINGS HE HAS TAUGHT US RIGHT...BUT ABOVE ALL, MAY WE GET BUSY LOVING GOD AND OTHERS...NO MATTER WHAT IT TAKES.

CHURCH TRADITION TEACHES THAT JAMES WAS KILLED SOON AFTER HE WROTE AND SENT THIS LETTER. SOME REPORTS SAY HE WAS STONED WHILE OTHERS SAY HE WAS THROWN DOWN FROM THE TOP OF THE TEMPLE. EITHER WAY, JAMES DIED AS A MARTYR AND THE SAINTS OF THAT DAY MOURNED. YET, HIS STORY AND HIS WRITINGS LIVE ON BECAUSE THE PEOPLE WHO RECEIVED IT AND READ IT MADE IT THEIR OWN. THEY DIDN'T JUST HAVE "FAITH" BUT THEIR FAITH IN WHAT JAMES WROTE WAS LIVED OUT IN ACTION. SURE, THEY MADE MISTAKES, BUT THEY COMMITTED IN THEIR DAY TO BE A GENERATION OF CHRIST FOLLOWERS.

AND NOW AS WE CLOSE THAT SAME BOOK FROM JAMES, "A BOND SERVANT OF GOD AND OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST" (JAMES 1:1), THEY HAND OVER THAT OPPORTUNITY TO US.