

## James 5:13-20

### The Prayer of Faith

#### INTRODUCTION:

Today is our last sermon in the book of James. I want to conclude this series where I began in my first sermon, with a quote from Leo Tolstoy: *"Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself."*

Throughout this series, we have talked about the ways Christians are tempted to change the world in false, ungodly, and worldly ways, and we have contrasted them with the ways that James tells us how we are to change the world.

Like the early Christians James wrote to, we can seek to change the world by being lured and enticed by the anger within our hearts about the unrighteousness of the world. This anger can lead to sin, zealotry, political factions, disorder, anarchy, violence, and ultimately death.

Another worldly and sinful response to cultural degradation is compromise. We may make accommodations in doctrine, practice, and speech to gain a comfortable place at the table of the cultural elite.

#### PRAYER AND PRAISE IN SUFFERING AND CHEERFULNESS

But James concludes his letter by giving us one last nugget of wisdom about how we are to change the world. He says: **"Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray."**

The immediate kind of suffering James is referring to is persecution. But it is broad enough to include suffering of any kind. He encourages us to respond to our suffering with prayer. If we do not prioritize prayer, we are acting in unbelief and become more anxious, fearful, and less confident in what God is doing in and through our suffering.

Prayerlessness in times of suffering leads to doubt. And that tracks, because prayerlessness is faithlessness. If you are suffering in any way, spiritually, emotionally, physically, mentally, then you ought to pray.

James then says, **"Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms."**

Singing Psalms is a ministry of love that the cheerful provide by encouraging and lifting the spirits of our brothers and sisters who are suffering.

How many of you have been in a bad mood, upset, sad, tired, depressed, and came to a Psalm Sing? You came here not feeling great, but you left cheerful. Those who already were cheerful provide a service of love by encouraging and lifting the spirits of our brothers and sisters who are suffering, by singing Psalms. The song of the cheerful is medicine to the downcast soul who is suffering.

How can you not be encouraged and made happy when you hear Psalm 134.

*Behold bless the Lord all you servants of the Lord,*

*who by night stand in the house of the Lord.  
Lift up your hands, in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord.  
The Lord who made heaven and earth, bless you from Zion.*

Now, besides just the simple joy that comes from singing psalms together, there is the truth of the Psalms that should greatly encourage us, especially in a time when we are suffering.

If our hearts are grieved by the advancement of the wicked, sing Psalm 2. The wicked attempt to overthrow the Messiah and to undo the binding chains of His law. But God responds in laughter and mocking because He has set up His Son as King of the world and He will receive the nations as his inheritance, and He is going to destroy all His enemies. Praise the Lord.

Singing Psalms is not divorced from praying. Singing is another way of praying. In fact, St. Augustine said, “*He who sings, prays twice.*” So Sing and Pray the Psalms.

## **PRAYING FOR THE SICK AND THE POWER OF ANOINTING**

When else should we pray? When we are sick. James says: <sup>14</sup> **Is anyone among you sick? 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. <sup>15</sup> And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.**

The sickness that James speaks of here should be understood in the immediate context as injured, weak, or wounded as a result of physical persecution.

This same word for sick is used in 2 Cor. 12:10 when Paul says, *“For the sake of Christ I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*

“The word is intentionally broad to provide the church with a pattern of ministering to all those in its community who are weak and sick and troubled by darkness and depression, and even intense spiritual doubt.”

This means, People of God, that you should call for the elders to come and pray for you and anoint you with oil, not just when you are sick on your bed, but even when you are filled with doubt, and experiencing turmoil of soul; When you are feeling great guilt for your sin, and when you are feeling the weight of the hostile world bearing down your weary soul. In other words, when you are poor in spirit.

What is the purpose of anointing with oil? Jesus is the Anointed One – which is what Messiah and Christ mean. When you are sick, suffering, and experiencing weakness from sin, sickness, and suffering in the world, you are participating in Christ’s anointing.

Christ was anointed for his death, burial, and resurrection.

Receiving anointing with oil in our sickness and weakness, consecrates you to the vocation of suffering with Christ, with the hope of our own resurrection from the dead.

Thus James says: <sup>15</sup> **And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up.** Do not understand this in the health and wealth false gospel sense. God has counted you worthy to suffer with Christ. So the anointing with oil is not just meant to heal you of your sickness physically, but rather, it is meant to signify and seal unto you the reality of your holy vocation as a Christian in which you have been called to suffer and die and rise again in Jesus Christ.

The oil signifies the Spirit, who strengthened Jesus to go to His cross and gave him the hope of the resurrection that awaited Him on the other side.

Thus the salvation of the sick is accomplished by the prayer of faith, which can refer to actual healing of a sickness. But more likely it is referring to the greater salvation that believers are promised – that we would indeed be raised up – resurrected after we die – because we have been united to Christ by His Spirit. By Christ's stripes, we are healed. The King James Bible sometimes translates the word 'salvation' as 'saving health.'

How comforting is it to know that your suffering, pain, and weakness are not the end of your faith? This light momentary affliction is producing in you an eternal weight of glory, so long as you look beyond the temporary nature of the suffering and

sickness and weakness, and you look to the eternal hope of resurrection on the other side.

## THE POWER AND PURPOSE OF CONFESSION AND PRAYER

**And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.**

**<sup>16</sup> Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.**

“Why does James promise healing from sickness and forgiveness of sins? Because sickness, especially life-threatening sickness, almost always tempts us, especially those of us with tender consciences, to fabricate a connection in our minds between our physical suffering and our own sin.

Forgiveness of sin is offered to the sick as an assurance that your suffering is part of God’s providence and goodwill in your life, not as a penalty for something you have done.”

So it is a great blessing to God’s people, who are poor and lowly, sick and suffering, to receive the assurance of pardon, the declaration that your sins are forgiven, as you are suffering with Jesus and perhaps may be ready to die.

Last rites are a great comfort to the dying, helping to shepherd the souls of God’s people through the journey of death with the joy of the forgiveness of sins, and the hope of resurrection.

## A CALL TO PRAY AND ACT FOR OUR NATION AND THE LOST

James says, **"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."**

The "righteous man" James refers to isn't an exceptional person. Though he uses Elijah as an example, he's not comparing different kinds of righteousness. "Righteous" here refers to any of God's faithful people, and James emphasizes the power of fervent prayer from any of them. Elijah, after all, was *"a man with a nature like ours."*

The statement, "the prayer of the righteous avails much," essentially means that prayer works. This is something we need to remember. Like the people James addressed, we often try to accomplish God's will through carnal, worldly means.

We see wickedness and respond with fights and arguments. We see the Church decline and think debate will solve it. We see cultural elites degrade society and respond with cursing and bitterness. We engage in controversies and stir up strife, all while neglecting prayer.

If you want to talk about how bad things are, I encourage you, take it to God in prayer. Want to see a nation repent? Pray earnestly. Do you want your enemies to stop persecuting you, pray for them.

Nothing will change if we trust in the flesh instead of God. The simple fact is, most of us aren't praying as we should. We aren't on our knees before the Father, crying out as though He is the one with whom we have to deal, whether it is our sickness, or pain, our suffering, or our cultural downslide. God has brought us to this point in history, and He has shown us the way forward.

In 2 Chronicles 7:13-14, God says to Solomon:

**"When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."**

This is exactly what Elijah did. He prayed earnestly that it wouldn't rain, and for three and a half years, it didn't. Then he prayed again, and the rains returned. Elijah prayed for God's covenant curses to fall, and God answered. And Elijah prayed that God's covenant curses would be lifted, and they were.

It seems quite obvious that someone's been fervently praying for God's judgment on the USA, because we're certainly experiencing it. Consider these covenant curses:

- The fruit of the womb is cursed; we aren't reproducing (Deut. 28:18).
- Our bread is poisoned (Deut. 28:17).



- We're defeated before our enemies; we haven't won a war since WWII (Deut. 28:25).
- Madness, blindness, and confusion of mind plague us (Deut. 28:28).
- We are oppressed and robbed by our own government (Deut. 28:29).
- Children oppress us, and women rule over us (Isa. 3:12).
- Panic and wasting disease abound (Lev. 26:16; Deut. 28:22).
- Men and women despise their families (Deut. 28:54-56).
- Our sanctuaries are desolate (Lev. 26:31).
- Foreign nations consume our labor and rise above us (Deut. 28:33, 43-44).
- We will be driven mad by what we see (Deut. 28:34).

Elijah prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth bore fruit. Do you want to see the harvest of righteousness? It must first be sown in peace and watered with prayer. We must seek God's face as though the souls of our children and grandchildren and all the lost depend on it—because they do. Only when we turn from all our sins, and seek God's face in prayer will God then hear us, heal our land, and lift His curse. We are not going to vote our way out of this problem.

**“If My people who are called by My name humble themselves, pray, and seek My face, I will hear from heaven, forgive their sins, and heal their land.”**

James concludes with a call to evangelism: **“Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone turns him back, know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”** (James 5:19-20).

In the early Church, many were tempted to abandon Christ and return to the old Mosaic Covenant. Hebrews was written to address this very problem. James’ message applies directly to those tempted to turn away from Christ, to turn to zealotry, or to compromise.

Often, we’re willing to pray for the lost but hesitant to pursue them, to share the gospel, or to confront their sin. Prayer is vital to bring a person back from wandering, but when action is needed, James tells us to get to work.

So, there’s a time for prayer and there’s a time for action—and our actions should be soaked in prayer. The incentive James offers is clear: if we turn a sinner back, we save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

This should remind us of the urgency of evangelism. Eternal souls are at stake, and heaven rejoices more over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine who need no repentance.

**CONCLUSION:**

In conclusion, Pray. If you are suffering, weak, or afraid—pray. If you are cheerful, sing psalms, and pray twice, once for you, and once for the sad. If you are sick or facing death, full of doubt and anxiety call for the elders to pray and anoint you with oil. Confess your sins to one another, and pray for forgiveness. Pray for God's judgment and His blessing. Repent, pray, and seek His face—and He will heal our land.

And finally pray for the lost— but also go after them and bring them back. In doing so, you will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

This is how James encourages us to change the world. Amen.