

Prayer of the Saints
James 5:13-20

Philippians 4:4-9 Mark 11:22-26
Matthew 7:7-14

Today we are going to be looking at the last half of this chapter here in the book of James. This has been an interesting journey through this book and I think going through it after going through Galatians has been a very interesting journey. It has been easy to make ties, and draw parallel lines between the 2 books essentially marrying the idea of Paul Gospel of free Grace, and James instruction of true faith. Neither of which are mutually exclusive but rather as we said when we started our study here in James they are just different sides of the same coin. You can not have one without the other, and both work together to make in us a people saved by grace, and changed by that grace to become more and more people of grace, people of love, joy, peace, and understanding just as our Father in heaven.

We seem to see a majority of 2 extremes which is a misunderstanding of Paul's teaching of free Grace, and a misunderstanding of James teaching of being justified by our works. On one hand you see the churches that have very little resemblance of the churches of scripture, and are more social hubs for people to go to, to be encouraged or to feel better about themselves, they have an large emphasis on forgiveness and faith, without being ground in the word, and without substance. I think this group largely misinterprets Paul's teaching, and the teaching of the new testament. They focus on God's grace so much that they can go to the extreme and say what you do does not matter because God loves you.

Babylon Bee which is a Christian Satire site had an article this week entitled, Progressive Pastor spends entire sermon apologizing for what the bible says. The opening statement was a quote from this supposed pastor who said " I just want to start out by saying I'm so sorry for the unfortunate choice of words used in these passages of scripture. Sadly this is the mentality that we see in churches today people explaining away, or apologizing for controversial, or hard things in scripture.

On the other hand we have the law keepers, those who are more rigid in their christian walk. Who put forth a list of rules to follow, they claim that are derived from scripture itself, and traditions of the church. This group looks at the book of James and see it has an faith based largely on our works. The things that we do to become justified. There is not much emphasis on God's grace, sure, its taught but it is quickly followed by now that God has showed you grace and mercy you must do this, and this and this.

Both of these views miss the entire point of the teaching of both Paul and James. They would look at Galatians, and the book of James and see 2 entirely different gospels which is why I think people have such a hard time with these books. But I for one have enjoyed our study here, it has brought a vibrancy to these books, balancing between them and seeing them as the same instead of 2 completely different gospels as some believe.

As I go through and read different books of the bible I see echos of these 2 books we have gone through now and it really is beautiful and amazing to see how God has woven his word together, spanning thousands of years and so many different people at different times through inspiration writing letters, poetry, songs, and instruction that we have here today which all points to Christ, his work, and his grace toward his people. Christ is the golden cord that binds the entire scripture together, The bible isn't all about the act of believing in God, it isn't about being a good person, it is about Christ, his love, and his sacrifice for us, who are undeserving sinners, yet Christ has made us deserving heirs. None of it

is exclusive, it all works together, grace, faith, works...you can not have just 1 or 2 of these, if any are true, then you will have all 3 because it isn't our faith, it isn't our works, it is God's grace, the faith he gives, and the works we are compelled to do because of our changed hearts and love toward our father.

If only more people could grasp this, that Christianity isn't your morality, your conservative lifestyle, or even your belief, true Christianity is something that changes who you are from the inside out, not the outside in.

We have gone over James instruction and as I have said multiple times now this book puts forth the practical side of what your Christian walk should look like. It isn't that acting like a christian will make you a christian, the saying.. fake it till you make it, won't work here. Your good morals, and christian appearance isn't the cause which effects in salvation, Rather all of those things are the effect of the cause which is Christ in us.

Which brings us to our passage today, the last half of the last chapter of the book of James. James has been talking to those who as he said, are people of true faith, not fakers, not people who have deceived themselves and here in this passage today he is instructing people of faith to be a people of prayer.

He warned us in the first chapter that we should pray for wisdom, but to pray with faith believing and to not be double minded, doubting that God will answer our prayer. And here he is telling those of us of faith, to pray and it is through prayer that God has chosen to bless us. The God through whom all good things come tells us to pray, to ask, to seek, and to make our desires, and petitions known before him.

James starts off here by saying that if anyone is suffering that what we should do is pray. Prayer should be our first response to any suffering, or trials, we are seek God's wisdom, and comfort that only he can provide. Last week we talked of Paul and his prayer that the Lord would remove the thorn in his flesh. It is not wrong to ask God to remove whatever is causing suffering in our lives and to seek deliverance, but as with all things it comes with the caveat that if we are delivered it is God's will that he does so. in the instance of Paul here God in his wisdom did not remove Paul's thorn in the flesh because ultimately it was for his good.

Just as we said last week about patients, and peace during times of suffering, so the same thing goes with prayer. Just because you ask God for deliverance does not mean that he will grant it in the way that you desire. Sometimes instead of deliverance from our suffering, he grants us the strength to endure it.

Just as we see in the case of Paul here, God didn't grant him deliverance but he granted him the strength to endure. We read it last week, but I want read it again here, Turn with me to 2nd Corinthians chapter 12. starting in verse 7-11. God's answer to Paul's prayer is that his Grace is sufficient for him, God did not remove this thorn for Paul for it ultimately was for his good, Paul said that it kept him humble, it kept him weak and made him focus and rely on God for his strength when he was weak.

We see David saying the same thing as he suffered I will just read it quickly here, Psalm 119:67. Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep your word. You are good, and do good; Teach me your statutes. The proud have forged a lie against me, but I will keep your precepts with my whole heart. Their heart Is as fat as grease, but I delight in your law, IT is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn your statutes.

Further down verse 75 he says, I know, o Lord, that your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me. Let I pray, your merciful kindness be for my comfort According to your word to your servant. David understood that his affliction was actually for his gain, it worked in him to grow in faith and trust in God. Even though he was pleading for deliverance, and strength to endure he understood that his affliction taught him things, increased his faith and reliance upon God.

But prayer is not just one sided, it isn't just for us to seek deliverance and strength while we are being persecuted or suffering, we are also to pray for those who are the cause of our affliction and suffering. Turn with me to Luke chapter 6, starting verse 27. We are not to answer affliction with affliction, Christ is instructing here that we should pray for those who afflict us, and to be merciful and kind toward all, even those who seek our destruction. The account of Stephan being stoned comes to mind. While they were killing Stephan he did not shout out curses toward them, but rather pleaded to God saying Lord, do not charge them with this sin. Paul was a witness to this, and you know this had to have an impact on his life later after his conversion.

We do not know how God will work, what he will do. We should be asking God to work in the lives of those who are persecuting or afflicting us. Prayer isn't just for our gain, prayer isn't just something that we use to ask for things for ourselves. We also pray for others, not just those close to us but for our enemies, and for those who hate us.

James also instructs us to pray for those who are sick. He says to call the elders and have them pray over he who is sick. Now this passage I think can be quite controversial because James mentions anointing the sick person with oil and to pray over him. Some take this to mean that the act of anointing with oil gives power to the prayer. That it Makes it more effective.

The anointing of oil is used many times in scripture, but there is only 2 examples of it used in miraculous healing, here in James and the other we see in Mark chapter 6, when Christ sent out his disciples two by two and gave them the power over evil spirits, in verse 12 says, So they went out and preached that people should repent, and they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them. .

There is another example of oil being used for the sick or injured In Luke, in the parable of the good Samaritan, It says that he bandaged the mans wounds, and poured oil and wine on them. The use of oil in healing was a medicinal practice of the Jews, and was never mentioned in scripture to be practiced among the gentiles. James' letter here was to the Jewish Christians who had left Jerusalem, and was also written during the time of the apostles who were given miraculous power to heal the sick and cast out demons. My own personal view here, is that the anointing of oil here in James is more of a cultural practice then a command to do so.

James says in the following verse that the prayer of faith will save the sick. It is not the oil, but rather it is the prayer of the faithful. I think we can apply much of the same today with our own medical practices. We have many procedures, and medication to aid the sick, such as the anointing of medicinal oil was to the Jews. but really it is not those things that saves and restores the sick, it is ultimately God who determines the outcome. That being said I don't think that the oil mentioned here has any sort of special power, any more then our own medicine that we use today. I know there are some who practice this, and I don't have a problem with that if they so choose to as long as they realize the oil is just that,

oil..and it is God who heals and answers the prayers of the faithful regardless if they use oil, or the laying on of hands or not.

Another thing of note about sickness here in James is that Our sickness is not always caused by sin. There seems to be an idea that some hold that if we are afflicted with a life altering or life threatening illness that it must be some punishment for a sin that we committed. While this may actually be the case, for some sinful behaviors can have life altering, or life threatening effects it is not always the case. James verse 15 here says IF the sick has committed sins, he will be forgiven. This implies that sickness is not always from sin but as we see in 1 Corinthians, sickness very well can be used as a chastisement for our sins. In Corinthians we see a warning concerning the Lords supper. Chapter 12:27 says,

Therefor whoever eats this bread, or drinks this cup of the lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the lord. Let each man examine himself for he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself not discerning the Lord's body and for this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. Here it isn't just sickness, it can even be unto death!

Either way, whether it is a sickness brought on by sin, or not the answer is still the same. Seek God, seek forgiveness, and seek strength and deliverance from him. James says in verse 16, that we are to confess our trespasses to one another and to pray for one another that we may be healed. Paul tells us in Galatians to bare one another's burdens, I think this goes along with what James is saying here. We are to be in prayer for each other, and being watchful over each other that none will be ensnared by sin.

James tell us at the end of this book that if anyone wanders from the truth and someone turns them back know that he who has turned a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death. This is instruction that we should be ever watchful, and ever praying for our brothers and sisters.

So in closing, James is telling us that We are to be a people of prayer, seeking God's will, seeking wisdom, seeking strength and comfort, praying for each other, praying for our enemies, As James says, that we are to pray in faith with doubt, and that The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.