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**A0801 – January 6, 2008 – Jas 5:16-158 – The Restorative Power  
Of Prayer**

**James 5:13-18** Κακοπαθεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν; Προσευχέσθω. Εὐθυμεῖ τις; Ψαλλέτω. <sup>14</sup>Ἀσθενεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν; Προσκαλεσάσθω τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους τῆς ἐκκλησίας, καὶ προσευξάσθωσαν ἐπ’ αὐτόν, ἀλείψαντες αὐτόν ἐλαίῳ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου · <sup>15</sup>καὶ ἡ εὐχὴ τῆς πίστεως σώσει τὸν κάμνοντα, καὶ ἐγερεῖ αὐτόν ὁ κύριος · κἂν ἁμαρτίας ᾗ πεποιηκώς, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ. <sup>16</sup>Ἐξομολογεῖσθε ἀλλήλοις τὰ παραπτώματα, καὶ εὐχεσθε ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων, ὅπως ἰαθῆτε. Πολὺ ἰσχύει δέησις δικαίου ἐνεργουμένη. <sup>17</sup>Ἡλίας ἄνθρωπος ἦν ὁμοιοπαθὴς ἡμῖν, καὶ προσευχῆ προσηύξατο τοῦ μὴ βρέξαι · καὶ οὐκ ἔβρεξεν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔνιαυτοὺς τρεῖς καὶ μῆνας ἕξ. <sup>18</sup>Καὶ πάλιν προσηύξατο, καὶ ὁ οὐρανὸς ὑετὸν ἔδωκεν, καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐβλάστησεν τὸν καρπὸν αὐτῆς.

**James 5:13-18** Is anyone among you suffering? Pray. Is anyone encouraged? Sing praise. <sup>14</sup>Is anyone among you weak? Call the mature of the assembly, and pray over him, having rubbed him with oil in the name of the Lord; <sup>15</sup>and the prayer of faith will restore the fatigued and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup>Confess to one another the transgressions, and pray for one another, in order that you might be restored. Great prayer of a righteous man is power working. <sup>17</sup>Elijah was a man like us, and he prayed prayer not to rain; and it did not rain upon the earth for three years and six months. <sup>18</sup>And again he prayed, and heaven gave rain and the earth produced her fruit.

**James 5:13-18** Is anyone among you suffering? *Then* he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. <sup>14</sup>Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; <sup>15</sup>and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

<sup>16</sup>Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. <sup>17</sup>Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. <sup>18</sup>Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

Let's review this difficult passage. Verse 13, **Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.** Problem: suffering. Solution: prayer. Present active imperative. Pray for one another. This is a command. Our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who we know and associate with need our prayer in adverse situations. God sends us these trials to mature us. **Is anyone cheerful?** Rather, encouraged. **Is anyone encouraged** in the midst of a trial. Proper response: **sing praises**, one of the goals of trials, that we realize God is in control and has a purpose and works all things for the good for those who love God. When we realize this we should *psalleteo*, worship God in songs that contain deep doctrinal content such as the Psalms of the Old Testament. Verse 14, **Is anyone among you sick?** Poor translation of *astheneo*. It has nothing to do with physical sickness. The primary meaning is "weak" and contextually it's spiritual weakness. Therefore, the issue is, "Is anyone among you under heavy trial and being crushed by the trial such that he has fallen into a state of spiritual weakness and is about to give out?" If so then **he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him.** He is to not to call those with the gift of healing. There were believers with the gift of healing but the context is not physical *sickness* but spiritual *weakness* so the spiritually strong are needed, namely the **elders**, *the presbuteros*, at this time in the early church no formal office had been formed so we're talking about the men who are spiritually mature who had years of doctrinal training and doctrinal application under their belt. They have learned to use the faith-rest drill effectively through trials and so are those who have learned to trust the Lord. They would be equivalent of those who would qualify for the office of elder. The main point here is that when someone has a spiritual problem he calls the spiritually mature in to help. Their function is **to pray over him.** The weak believer in this situation is no position to pray because he's weak spiritually, he's a double-souled believer, he's fragmented his soul so he's unable to trust the Lord. He's a doubter and doubter's do not have their prayers answered. Thus the **elders** are needed. But before they pray for him

they are to **anoint him with oil**. Again, this has nothing to do with physical healing. This is not a symbol of the Holy Spirit or oil used for medicinal purposes. This is the secular and mundane word for **anoint**, *aleipho*. If it were being used for physical healing or for the Holy Spirit James would have used *chrrio*. But here he uses the mundane word, *aleipho*. In Israel the climate was very dry and daily application of oil was needed to hydrate the skin. There were three grades of oil, this was probably a lower grade **oil**. Applying oil to the body was a normal part of bodily maintenance to keep up your appearance. When the Pharisees would fast they wouldn't anoint themselves with oil because they wanted everyone to see how spiritual they were. Jesus condemned this activity and said that when you fast you should keep your appearance and anoint yourself with oil. So, this is just the mundane usage here of keeping up your daily appearance. The modern parallel is putting lotion on, taking care of your appearance. But when a person goes into spiritual depression they don't take care of their appearance; they lock themselves away from society, sleep in, don't take showers, don't take care of themselves. So, in the modern world the elders would go over, get them out of bed, clean them up, help restore them to normal appearance and then pray over them. Verse 15, **and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick**. And the word "sick" is different from the one used in verse 14. This is *kamno* and the centuries older meaning was "sick" but by the time of Christ it meant "weary, exhausted, fatigued". I translate it "fatigued". The believer has become fatigued under the pressure of the trial. He's not enduring the trial. He's wearing out. So, the elders come in and offer a **prayer in faith**. This prayer guarantees the weary believer **will be restored**. So, this is the case of a believer under trial who begins to fail and be crushed by the trial and goes into spiritual depression. The solution is for him to call the elders, they will get him up and pray for him. This brings us to where we left off last week.

The word **restore** is a very interesting word, you all know this word, it's the word *sozo*, which we normally translate "save" but can also be translated "rescue" "deliver" or even "heal". The base meaning is "to deliver". A person can be delivered physically or spiritually. Context determines usage. All five uses in James refer to spiritual deliverance which may lead to physical deliverance (cf 1:21; 2:14; 4:12; 5:15; 5:20). That is, all five uses start with a spiritual problem that if prolonged may cause physical problems, even premature physical death. I'm not saying this individual does not have any

physical ailments but that the root problem is spiritual and any physical problems are fruits of that. It's always that way in James, the spiritual problem is the root and the physical problem is a fruit. To correct the physical problem the spiritual problem must first be solved. That's why the elders were called in to pray for the Lord to restore the spiritual well-being of this believer rather than the physical healers. He has a spiritual problem. If physical maladies are a result of the spiritual problem then when the spiritual problem is solved the physical maladies will also be solved. But this text is one of many that shows you can't treat all physical infirmities as having physical causes. Some physical problems have spiritual causes. In fact, all physical maladies in the indirect sense all have spiritual causes since they are a result of Adam's sin. But here the direct cause is personal sin. Confer similar passages like Ps 38:3 where David says, "There is no health in my bones because of my sin." Evidently unconfessed sin in our lives can result in physical maladies. But not all physical problems have spiritual causes. Cf John 9:2-3 where Jesus' disciples asked, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" Jesus answered, "*It was* neither *that* this man sinned, nor his parents; but *it was* so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

But here the elders are called in because the primary problem is spiritual weakness and is most likely caused by personal sin. He is **weak** and **fatigued** and needs the elders to pray for him so he can be restored spiritually. If physical maladies are there as a result of the spiritual problems then when the spiritual problems are fixed the physical maladies will also be fixed. Remove the cause and the effects also go away. However, this does not erase all consequences of physical maladies. They take a toll on the body and may leave enduring and recurring problems. But, if the elders come in and pray the prayer of faith this person **will** be rescued from their spiritual weakness **and the Lord will raise him up**. That's the Greek word *egeiro*, which means "restore" "to make erect". What it's saying is the Lord will restore his spiritual posture. One of the things related to this person getting back on their feet, spiritually speaking, is confession of sin. Probably in the elders discussion with this spiritually ill patient inquiry will be made into sinful thoughts or behavior which will need to be confessed according to 1 John 1:9 **and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him**. This is vertical family fellowship. Fellowship between the Lord and this believer has been broken. So 1 John 1:9 is in order, "If we confess our sins He is

faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” We first confess our sins to God since we sin against Him. And God promises to forgive us our sins when we confess to him. This is a 3<sup>rd</sup> class condition which means in all likelihood **he has committed sins** and indicates this is the root of his problem. And in all likelihood he has committed a multitude of sins because when we get out of fellowship and remain out of fellowship you gradually go into spiritual depression and compound carnality where you’re so far out of it you can’t trust the Lord. So, this person is way out in the tules and that’s why the elders are there to pray for him. So, when he confesses his sins then he **will be forgiven**, that is, he will be restored to fellowship so he can walk in the light.

Verse 16, **Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.** Again we have to work with the word **healed** because it carries physical connotations but obviously the issue is spiritual because it’s talking about “confessing sins” and “praying for one another”. The Greek word is *iaomai* and it means “to deliver from a variety of ills or conditions that lie beyond physical maladies, *restore, heal.*” So, the issue is being restored from spiritual weakness, given a renewed energy to endure the trial at hand. The word **confess** is *exomologeomai* and it means “to admit”. This is horizontal family fellowship; confessing your sins to fellow believers. This is not talking about publicly confessing your sins and having a big boo-hoo session. Contextually this is talking about the spiritually weak person confessing his sins to the elders. The elder is the righteous man whose prayer can accomplish much. But nowhere in Scripture is public confession of sin commanded or condoned. Several years ago I saw hundreds of believers standing up and publicly confessing their sins of the microphone, crying, passing the mic to someone else and then go through the whole thing again. That’s not what this verse is talking about. Most of these people didn’t even know one another and what it leads to is a big gossip fest afterwards. “Well did you hear what that one girl did?” No, you don’t do that. As a general rule the Bible teaches this about horizontal confession, man-to-man; “*We must never confess sin beyond the circle of that sin’s influence.* Private sin requires private confession; public sin requires public confession. It is wrong for Christians to “hang dirty wash in public,” for such “confessing” might do more harm than the original sin.”<sup>i</sup> But here it is even narrower than the general teaching of Scripture. This is a very confined situation where a spiritually

weak believer confesses his sins to the elders who would then pray for him and he would be restored but it's still true that we should all pray for one another.

In verse 16b we turn to the prayer of the elder. Prayer is simply "talking to God". Prayer is properly addressed "to the Father" "in the name of the Son" and offered in "the power of the Spirit." Scripture commonly promises that God will answer prayer when believers meet certain conditions. Here these conditions are summed up by the fact he is **a righteous man**. It is **The effective prayer of a righteous man that can accomplish much**. The elder is **a righteous man**, meaning his life "accords with God's standards of conduct", he is living a godly life and thus, it is his prayer that **can accomplish much**. The phrase **righteous man** does not mean righteous by justification but righteous by sanctification. His behavior conforms to the standard of Scripture. Believers who live righteous lives can expect to see great results via prayer. But if you're not living a godly life you can pray as hard and much as you want and you will not get an answer. The sentence is a wonderful one to memorize but very difficult to render from the Greek as most commentators attest. The word used here of prayer, *deesis*, is not a common word for prayer. It's used only 18 times in the NT. It refers specifically to an "urgent request of God" not just an average request of God. It's used in the popular verse, Phil 4:6, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" and also in Paul's request for his fellow Jews salvation in Rom 10:1, "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for *their* salvation." So, it's an urgent prayer in light of a sudden trial, adversity or danger. The situation in James is an urgent one; a believer has come under trial and fallen into spiritual depression. If this is not corrected v 20 says it could lead to premature physical death. So, at this point in the verse all we know is that the kind of prayer is an urgent one and it is offered by a righteous man. In the next verse Elijah is given as an example of just such a man who asked just such a prayer. So let's turn to 1 Kgs 17 to see his situation. Elijah was a 9<sup>th</sup> century prophet who lived during the idolatrous reign of King Ahab. Ahab was the king who married Jezebel the daughter of the king of the Sidonians. She and her people were worshippers of Baal. When she came to Israel she brought Baal worship with her and Ahab became a devoted worshipper. He erected all kinds of altars and idolatrous symbols leading the nation in idolatry. Verse 33 gives the commentary, "Ahab

did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him.” So, Elijah is sent to announce the cursings for violation of the Mosaic Covenant. In 17:1, we see the background of Elijah’s prayer mentioned by James, “Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.” Elijah declared a drought to discipline the nation for its idolatry. His prayer was answered. For 3 ½ years heaven did not send rain on the land of Israel. The famine was so bad Elijah had to leave the land. The discipline culminated with a contest between Elijah and the Baal prophets at the base of Mt Carmel, also known as Mukrakah. If you’re going to Israel with us this year you’ll get to stand on this mountain and look down where Elijah and the Baal prophets had their contest. The issue was, “Who is the real God of heaven? YHWH or Baal?” To find out Elijah offered a challenge. Each side would build an altar to his god and pray. The god who answered his prophet’s call with fire from heaven would be vindicated as the true god. Elijah won, Yahweh was vindicated and the Baal prophets were slaughtered.<sup>ii</sup> This is one of the greatest examples of the effectiveness of prayer when offered by a righteous man. One other thing I want you to notice. The first prayer offered by Elijah was in response to the nation’s spiritual failure not physical sickness. This is another evidence for the fact that James is referring to spiritual failure not physical sickness. If James were talking about physical sickness he could have used the prayer in the latter part of 1 Kgs 17 where Elijah healed a boy who was physically sick. But his point has to do with spiritual failure so that’s why he cited this prayer. Both passages deal with spiritual failure that needs to be corrected. Neither deals with physical sickness.

Now, hold your place in 1 Kgs and turn back to Jas 5:17. v 17 is referring to the first prayer implied in 1 Kgs 17:1. And James says, **Elijah was a man with a nature like ours**, that is, Elijah was a human being like you and I. The point is that we can accomplish the same kinds of things via prayer as Elijah did. It is not beyond the reach of any man. As long as a man is a righteous man his prayer can avail much. James says, **and he [Elijah] prayed earnestly that it would not rain**, this is a Hebraism. That is, a Hebrew phrase spoken in the Greek language. It literally says “and he prayed prayer”. He doubles the word to give emphasis. What it means is “he really prayed” or “he prayed hard” and then we get the results; **and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months**. Elijah prayed

hard for Israel's discipline because of her spiritual idolatry and the Lord answered by causing the land of Israel to become dry and unfruitful. That brings us to 1 Kgs 18:39, 3 ½ years later. Elijah has just won the contest against the Baal prophets and we get the people's repentance from idolatry in v 39, "When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God." 40Then Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; do not let one of them escape." So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there. 41Now Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of the roar of a *heavy* shower." 42So Ahab went up to eat and drink. But Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and *he crouched down on the earth and put his face between his knees.*" This is Elijah's second prayer referred to in James 5:18; **Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.** This prayer was also answered as v 45 says, there came a "heavy shower". The point is that heaven sent an answer and the answer caused the earth to bear fruit. The earth was dry and could not produce fruit. Now the earth was wet and could produce fruit. There are several parallels here with James' account of the spiritually dry man. When we are out of spiritually we are like earth without rain; dry and unfruitful. When we are restored spiritually we are like earth with rain; moist and fruitful. The Lord wants all believers to bear much fruit. But the sad fact is that some believers do not bear fruit. In such a situation the prayer of a righteous man can restore him. *The main point of parallel between Elijah and James is this; spiritual failure can be reversed by the prayer of a righteous man.* In 1 Kgs it was *national* spiritual failure. In Jas 5 it is *individual* spiritual failure. In both cases restoration requires confession by the party failing spiritually coupled with the prayer of a righteous man.

I want to draw four conclusions from all this and in doing so review the faith-rest drill. First, God sends trials to believers. God never tempts us to sin but He does challenge us to apply the faith-rest drill in times of trial. The faith-rest drill has three basic steps. *First, recall* a fragment of Scripture, a story, a promise, a verse, something, anything, but grab on to a part of Scripture because the word of God is the basis of stability, it's your base of operation. This is why you can never get too much of the word of God. So, we study the word of God, the word of God, the word of God, over and over and over and over. Sometimes you get bored because of the monotony but this is your training. And the training has to happen when your life is relatively tranquil,



when you're at peace and you can think about the word of God. When you get in a jam you're life's chaotic and your mind is busy mulling over this problem and you have to have the Scriptural texts at hand so you can recall them or else you'll fall apart. There are great promises in Scripture, Rom 8:28, "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God," 1 Pet 5:7 "Casting all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you." Those sound really good but are they really true? Will Scripture really work? Well, that's why we are constantly developing the *second* step where we connect the Scripture to your specific circumstance. Once you've grabbed the Scripture that's great, that has to happen, but believing it is another. Is God really causing this horror in my life to work together for good?" To get to that point you need to develop a rationale for trusting. You can't make yourself believe. You have to be convinced. So you develop a framework showing the interrelatedness of every detail in the Scriptural story from Genesis to Revelation. Once you have that it's like a barrier that sort of insulates you from unbelief because when you reflect on the other side you realize they don't have any answers. It's futile to try to solve your problem with a HVP gimmick. So then you're resigned to the fact that the Scriptural story is true and only God has an answer so you're able to start bridging the gap between your specific situation and a Scriptural verse or story. The connection is crucial to make because if you don't you'll never be able to see how the Scriptures apply to your situation. Once you've made the Scripture, I don't know, maybe you recall the story of Esther or the story of Joseph, something in those stories is similar to what you're facing, but whatever the connection it's crucial to make because now you can encircle the situation with the word of God. You want to get the situation under quarantine so to speak, contain it because if you don't get it contained then everything is going to spin out of control on a much greater plane. And you can't do that, you're not going to contain the situation but the word of God can do that because the God behind those promises is all powerful. Once you've made that connection and the problem is quarantined you get to the third step of the faith-rest drill. This is really the results of applying the first two steps. Step *three* is the rest; when you get inner peace and contentedness in the midst of the turmoil. This is when you can count it all joy (Js 1:2). This is when you can sing praise (Js 5:13) because you've come to the point where the word of God overwhelms your situation and your walking by faith on a daily basis. It doesn't mean you've come to understand all that's happening, all the why's, you may see some of them you may see none of them. Job didn't see any of them at the time his calamity was

happening, but you've seen enough of God to know that He knows, He's in control of it, He's limiting it to some degree, He has a purpose for what's happening and you're encouraged by that. Then you can worship God. So, that's a review of the faith-rest drill. And that connects to our first point, God sends believers trials. Second point, if we apply the faith-rest drill in times of trial we will advance toward spiritual maturity. That's one of James' main points. Be a doer of the word and not a hearer only. You can listen to all the Bible doctrine you want but if you get in a jam and you never apply the doctrine, you never use step two of the faith-rest drill and make that connection between your situation and the Scriptural story or verse you're never going to advance to spiritual maturity. But that's at least one of the reasons God sends us trials, so we will advance toward spiritual maturity. If God's whole purpose was for men to believe in Jesus Christ for eternal life then when we believed there would be no more purpose for living on this earth and He could remove us. But He doesn't typically do that. Typically He leaves us here, sends us trials so we will advance to spiritual maturity. We are born children of God but He wants us to grow into sons of God and eventually into friends of God (Jas 2:23). God has a plan of spiritual advancement for every believer and trials are a major part of that plan. However, third point, all believers do not apply faith-rest drill during trials. As a result they do not patiently endure trials and they are crushed by the trial. That's the case here in Jas 5:13-18. This is the case of a believer who has entered a trial but has not applied the faith-rest drill. He has not encircled his circumstances with Scripture. Maybe he's a hearer of the word. Maybe he's been around doctrine for years but he hasn't taken what he's learned and applied it. Maybe he just has bits and pieces of Christianity and he can't see the whole so he struggles to apply it. He needs a framework so he can see the connections. But whatever the case, he's so weak spiritually that when he comes under trial he applies HVP solutions and they don't work so he's crushed by the trial, falls into spiritual depression, weakness and fatigue. Fourth, the spiritually depressed believer can enjoy restoration through the prayer of a spiritually mature elder. The spiritually depressed believer is in no position to pray the prayer of faith. He can't trust God right now. He's spiraled into compound carnality. He's double-souled, he's fragmented his soul so he's a doubter. He knows what he needs to do, he has enough sense to know that he needs to call the elders, but he is in such a state of spiritual disarray he can't pray for God and get any answers. And one of the common teachings of Scripture is that the stronger brother is to help

the weaker brother. That's what we have here. The spiritually mature elders coming to restore the weak believer through prayer like Elijah restored the weak nation of Israel through prayer. The prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

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<sup>i</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Jas 5:14). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

<sup>ii</sup> Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row, P., & Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). *Harper's Bible dictionary*. Includes index. (1st ed.) (256). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

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