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Functioning Elders: Prayer For Resolution

We're going through a class on church leadership. We're doing this because two years ago the elders started a study of biblical eldership and one of our conclusions was that we need to do a study of biblical deaconship, which is currently underway. In light of that we knew that the congregation would need to be informed as to what, if any, changes would be made. So I have set out in this class to find the key passages and exegete them. There's no replacement to exegesis. It's something that must be done. The course is divided into four basic sections. First, the formation of the offices of elder and deacon. How and when did they form? What were the historical circumstances that led to their formation? Second, the qualifications of elders and deacons. What kind of qualities must these men have to serve in these offices. Third, the functions of elders and deacons. What spheres of service do they engage in primarily? What is the relationship between these spheres of service? What does it look like when elders and deacons function? Are there any practical examples in the NT? That's where we are at now in the course of our study and I hope that by going through these examples you get a taste for what elders and deacons do in the practical day to day management of God's household.

We have already observed that elders primarily function in the spiritual needs sphere and deacons in the physical needs sphere. These overlap of course because of who we are as human beings, but that is their emphasis. And in the spiritual needs sphere the elders have two main responsibilities: to devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. Last week was an example of ministry of the word. What does that look like? Well, it has many aspects. I showed you one in Acts 15, the Council of Jerusalem. This was the first Church Council and the purpose was to solve a doctrinal dispute. Both the apostles and elders were involved in solving the dispute

and now that the apostles have passed from the scene this is a function carried out by the elders. We learned there are certain principles that elders should follow in solving doctrinal disputes. One is it is the elders who do it, the church is not a democracy where everyone puts their two cents in and we cast a vote and that's how doctrinal differences get resolved. No, the mature men of the church, the elders, solve doctrinal differences because they are highly qualified to do so. Second, they did allow the congregation to watch them solve it. Congregational observation and we might speculate that the reasons were that it demonstrates transparency; they're not hiding anything here and it also demonstrates proper use of this book, how to solve these differences and not come away with, well, this is my opinion and that is yours. Apparently James' quotation of Amos 9 settled the dispute in the minds of the opponents to Gentile salvation by grace alone through faith alone. So that shows you it did get solved and even the Pharisees who believed accepted this argument. Third, the elders considered all the views. They got it all on the table, they weren't afraid of that because they knew they had the truth in the Scriptures. Fourth, you better rest your final case on Scripture. Peter, Paul and Barnabas presented a lot of current events, things they had recently experienced, but you better have some Scripture to validate your experience. Because if you don't have Scripture your experience doesn't count. At least they knew that better than believers today. Fifth, evidently, from the solution proffered, an elder has to be an excellent Bible student. He can't be a man who fools around with this book and misuses it. He has to be able to correctly use it, understanding how to put passages together, how the Bible coheres. And sixth, once a doctrinal dispute is solved it should be written down in a creed, a doctrinal statement, a confession or the like. The creeds have fallen on hard times; the fact is Mormonism began because Joseph Smith rejected all Christian creeds. But it is very important to write down, in a clear, concise manner, what is believed. And anytime someone comes along rejecting the creeds that person is dangerous. But let me caution you here. Once you have accepted that creeds are important to write down, make sure you do not freeze them in time. If creeds are always subject to Scripture, and they are, they are never elevated to the level of Scripture, then they must be subject to further development. If you freeze a creed in time then Satan will just end run it next week. So we have to always be on the cutting edge of the winds of doctrine so that we are able to isolate satanic attacks against the truth and update our creeds and confessions to protect against these attacks. And we have had to do this two or three times

since I have been here and every time it has come about because of some wind of doctrine that has been propagated and we decided it was heresy, so we isolated the essence of the problem and updated our doctrinal statement to protect against it.

Solving a doctrinal dispute so as to protect the flock is one function of the elders in the department of ministry of the word. Obviously there are others, studying the Scriptures, teaching the Scriptures, all this is involved in discipling believers. The emphasis of ministry of the word is not evangelism but discipleship. Elders may do some evangelism, but the Scriptures emphasize that the elders mainly engage in training other believers and it's the other believers out in the workplace, among their families and so forth that evangelize. So the church meeting becomes a place for discipleship, for training so that believers are equipped to evangelize, to defend the faith to the outside world.

But there is a second function of the elders and that is prayer. Prayer is serious business and a top priority for elders to engage in, above and beyond the average believer. Because the elders aren't supposed to be average believers, they are supposed to be the maturest believers in the church; meaning they understand doctrine and they have practical experience in putting it to work in their lives, in the lives of their families and in their community, so that they have a high reputation.

So today we want to look at an example of how elders might function in prayer. Again, this would not be exhaustive of their prayer life, but this is an inspired example of part of their prayer life that is critical for the church. So if you'll turn to the book of James. James has also fallen on hard times so far as people's understanding of it. As much as people argue about it, you'd think there would be some agreement about what James is teaching, yet it remains one of the most misunderstood and controversial books of all time. Two controversial passages exist in James, James 2 where he discusses faith and works and James 5 where he discusses anointing with oil and prayer. Another controversy is the overall approach to the book whether James is writing to a mixed group of believers and unbelievers to show them how to detect whether they are true believers or not, or whether James is writing to believers about how to handle trials in the Christian life.

We're going to be over in James 5 dealing with that controversial passage on prayer because James 5 is the elders in action, praying, but if you fail to understand the great theme of James you'll fail to understand James 5. So let's back up. The solution to these difficult passages is really quite simple. In chapter 1 James tells us that believers face trials and that they should persevere through trials by prayer, patience and perseverance. That is the theme of the book. And yet for some reason when people get to James 2 they hit grease and slide all over the place on faith and works, going into all kinds of worthless discussion totally outside of the context of trials in the Christian life. All of a sudden we're discussing whether you're really a believer or not, whether you have the right kind of faith and all the other hot air and baloney talk that has nothing to do with James 2. James 2 is talking about trials and when Christians face trials in life how do they respond? If they say this is what I believe, this is my faith, and then they don't put their faith to work, they don't live the Christian life when they face a trial then that is sin and they are going to start down a line toward spiritual illness that may cause physical ailments and eventually premature physical death. But if they say, this is what I believe, this is my faith, and then a trial comes and they put their faith to work then that pleases God and it results in life and spiritual growth. We grow through the trials that God has providentially designed for our lives. So James is about the trials Christians face and how to put our beliefs to work in working our way through the trial so that on the other end of it we have grown spiritually. It doesn't have anything to do with figuring out if you're really a believer or not, it has to do with whether you're applying what you believe or not when times are tough. And times will be tough because God has already written trials into His plan for your life.

Now one of the things you will observe throughout the book is that James has a peculiar way of writing. He does something to make sure you don't miss the point. James actually goes way out of his way to make sure you don't botch what he's saying and yet what have people done? Botch what he's saying. What he does is he gives a series of examples from the OT. So that if you're not sure what he's talking about in the theology, if you can't tell what he means by faith and works then you can't miss it by way of the example. Yet people still miss it by a mile and the reason is because they race in with their theology at 90mph and try to make James fit their theology. But James isn't interested in your theology. James is interested in his theology. And we're supposed to just listen to James and learn his theology.

So in James 2 James uses two examples of his theology. Who are they? Abraham and Rahab. Were these two people OT believers? Yes, they were. Did these two believers face trials? Yes, they did. What was Abraham's trial? Slaying Isaac. God said, take your firstborn son, Isaac, and go slit his throat on Mt Moriah. Now you want to talk about a trial. Try that one. God tells you to slit your firstborn son's throat. Well, how did Abraham handle the trial? He walked by faith; he took Isaac up there, tied him down to the altar and raised the knife to slit his throat. Is that how Abraham became a believer? No. That's a trial years after Abraham became a believer. So obviously it's an example of a believer facing a trial and being victorious by faith. What was the result of Abraham walking by faith? The Lord saved Isaac's physical life. So it's an example, the whole passage in James 2 is an example of walking by faith and if you walk by faith you'll be saved, you'll get stronger spiritually because you'll see that when you trust God, He solves your problem and if you don't walk by faith and you botch the trial then you're out of fellowship and then you're going to have a real time because you're going to go down, down, down into spiritual illness; it may work its way out into physical ailments and if it's not corrected premature physical death. Sin is a life or death issue. Then the other example is Rahab. Rahab is the second example in James 2. Just so we don't botch what he's saying and still everybody botches it. But was Rahab a believer? Yes, she was. The book of Joshua tells us that this lady had heard about YHWH, the God of Israel who separated the Red Sea. She knew about the wondrous works of YHWH. And she believed in Him even long before the Israelites camped by the Jordan River. Then did God send her a trial? Yes, He did. He sends all believers trials. What was her trial? Her city was scheduled for destruction. What is she going to do? Is she going to identify with her people, the Canaanites, or is she going to trust YHWH? Was she going to respond by faith and trust the message of the Jewish spies that if she and her family stay inside the walls of her house they're going to be saved and the rest of her people destroyed? Somewhat of a trial I'd say. And how did she respond to the trial? She walked by faith. That didn't prove she was a real believer. What it did was it proved she had learned to apply doctrine. And when the walls fell down, they all fell down except where? Her house, right where her family was. So they were saved, that is always the result of walking by faith through a trial. And that is exactly what James 2 is teaching, when you Christian face a trial what is

your response? Will you walk by faith? Or are you going to go with a gimmick.

Job is another example later in the book. Was Job a believer? Yes. Did Job face trials? That's the "under question" of the century. Of course he did. James gives example after example after example of believers who faced trials and when the big trial came they walked by faith and were victorious. So I don't see why people have a big problem with James. James is one of the easiest NT books. How should Christians handle trials and what are the consequences if you don't? So what is he talking about in James 5 with all this anointing with oil and prayer talk? He's saying, alright, I've given you examples of believers successful at facing trials, but what about a believer who fails his trial? What do you do then? Obviously not all believers face every trial by faith. Sometimes they fail to walk by faith and that's sin; whatsoever is not of faith is sin. So now you've got sin in your life, let's say you don't confess that sin and get back on track, then what happens? You sin more and you get partially blinded to truth and it's harder to confess, so let's say you don't confess again, then what? You sin more and you get more blinded to the truth, it gets harder for you to perceive spiritual truth and before long you've got a big pile of sin over here, you don't need to confess one or two sins, you've got 5,000 sins. What then? That's why James 5:14-18 was written: to show us how to solve that kind of problem and the solution is the elders praying.

So he says, verse 14, and we're going to use my translation again because sometimes I think these translation teams come up with some of the most confusing translations. So I'm going to bypass that and give you my translation that is consistent with the theme of the book, Christians facing trials. James asks; **Is anyone among you weak? He should call the elders of the church and they should pray over him in the name of the Lord, having anointed him with oil. And the prayer of faith will save the weary one and the Lord will awaken him. And if he has done sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, you should confess the sins to one another and you should pray on behalf of one another so that you may be restored. The energetic prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much.** And then look, there's an example, just so we don't botch it, James says, here's an example of an energetic prayer warrior. This is the central solution to the problem, not anointing somebody with oil, but a

powerful prayer warrior praying for them. That's the elder. And if you want to put Elijah up as a model of an elder I think that's just fine. Elijah is a model of a righteous man who has an intense prayer life and therefore when he prays God listens. The implication is God doesn't listen to all believers when they pray. There are certain believers that when they pray it gets through to the throne of grace and there are certain believer's prayers that don't! Now that right there is enough food for thought for the whole evening. The reason you never heard it is because it never gets preached! It's not popular material. But you better think about that because Peter teaches the same thing in 1 Pet 3 and so does John and so does Jesus. So if it upsets you that when some believers pray God turns a deaf, you better get over it and face the facts. But the fact is that there are some believers, when they pray, God turns His head and looks right at them and listens intently and there are others that He could care less. What's the difference? The difference is God listens to those who listen to Him. And if you don't listen to His word in this book then don't think for one second He's going to listen to you. You say what? Yeah, I'm not kidding about this. I'm dead serious, there are believers all over the world blowing a whole lot of hot air out and it doesn't get heard at the throne of grace. And James talks about some of those people in chapter 4. God could care less about believers that don't pay attention to His word. He basically says, you don't pay attention to My word, I'm not going to pay attention to yours. But then there are men like Elijah who, when they pray, God turns His head, so to speak and gives His full attention. Those are the kind of men that get prayers answered and those are the kind of men needed to solve this problem. And boy, let me tell you, it is one serious pickle this believer is in, they are in a spiritual slump like nothing else, and they need some of these Elijah type prayers. And the Elijah type men are the elders at the local church.

So principle number one is that one of the elder's functions is to solve these serious spiritual problems by prayer. That's not all they're going to do for this person but that is the heart of it because it's the principle in v 16 that is key; the energetic prayer of a righteous man gets tremendous results. Not prayers of just any old believer who's fooling around, which is 97% of the Christian population.

So, verse 14, **Is anyone among you weak?** Not "sick," that immediately misleads you into thinking about physical illness, it's not physical illness, if it

was then why not just call over someone who has the gift of healing? The gift of healing was operational in this period of time, it was highly operative because this was early on, maybe 40-44AD, so this is very early, and lots of people had the gift of healing. If they had the gift why not just go over and heal them of their physical illness. See, there's something seriously wrong with that interpretation. The Greek word is *astheneo* simply means weakness. And since the book is dealing with spiritual weakness that results from failing to walk by faith in a trial, then *astheneo* refers to spiritual weakness. So the believer here is *astheneo*, he's spiritually weak and it's a bad case, he's going down, down, down and if he doesn't get restored then eventually he's going to end up physically dead. He's just going to be so useless to God that God says that's it, I'm taking you home prematurely and bam, he kills them. So what this is about is what do you do to get this person who is in the spiritual dumps back on track? Because when you get down in the spiritual dumps you can't even confess your sins, you've got 5,000 sins piled up, and if you don't know what 5,000 sins will do to you let me explain. It will form all this gunk in your soul and you will lose the ability to understand the word of God anymore, you become a deaf, blind and dumb believer. And about the only thing you can do is call the elders for help. God leaves that line of help intact.

So observe what James says this believer should do. **He should call the elders of the church.** Now right there is another principle. If you're in the spiritual dumps He says, you must make the initiative - spiritually weak believer, you, not other people, not the elders, you. Why? Because it's simply the principle that if you don't want help and people try to give you help then it's just going to be a waste of everybody's time. Until a believer admits, I need help and he takes the initiative, then you can do everything in the world for him and it will just be one fat zero on the progress scale! And that's why James says; don't even bother with the person until they call you. Now when they do pick up the phone and make the call that means they really want help, they're ready to get out of the spiritual dumps, they've hit rock bottom. And observe that they should call the elders, plural, that's the Greek word *presbuteros* and it refers to the mature believers who hold the office of elder in the local church. Why call them? Because they're Elijah type men who get their prayers answered. I don't know about Suzy Q next door. She may not be a believer who pays much attention to the Lord. Maybe she is. But I don't know. James says call the elders. And it implies of course that the elders are

actually spiritual giants, they are the kind of men with the character Paul highlighted is necessary to Timothy and Titus. Tremendous men, men who are humble of mind and submit their minds to the word of God, they know this book. That's why they're calling the elders.

Now assuming they do call the elders what should the elders do? They should go over to their house and **pray over them in the name of the Lord**. What does that mean, **pray in the name of the Lord**? It means pray in the will of God for this person. What the elders will have to do is go on a fact finding mission, you know, talk to this person, what happened, what was the trial. Okay, you didn't trust the Lord, you took a wrong turn, then what, okay, you went over here and started this sin pattern and you have to trace the whole thing out to find out what you're going to pray for. It's not just a general prayer. Why? Because later you're going to see that James uses a special word for prayer, actually three words are used in this passage of prayer, *euche*, *proseuche* and *deesis*, it's the last one, *deesis* which means a specific prayer request, the other two are more general word for prayer; you know, help this person. But that's not what James is talking about, he's talking about a specific prayer and to pray specifically you have to have specifics of information, you want to be able to craft a prayer, tailor made for this person, like Elijah's prayer, very specific, no rain on Israel, that's specific. It wasn't a general prayer, no rain in general, that would apply to the whole world, but his prayer was specific, no rain on Israel. So they go on a fact finding mission so they can get the data they need to construct a very specific prayer request for this believer. That will be the will of God for this believer. That's what it means to **pray over him in the name of the Lord**. So the "in the dumps believer" is going to contact the elders and they're going to go over to the house and start to gather the facts so they can conduct a strategic prayer session right there on the spot.

And then it says, **having anointed him with oil**. Past tense, so it's not the first thing they do when they walk in the house, the prayer is the last thing they do actually. The first thing they do is anoint him with oil. Now, what this means is not what most 20th and 21st century believers thought it meant. They thought it meant you're going to find some holy oil and you're going to pour it over this person's head in sort of a sacred ceremony. Now I'm sure they meant well but that is the farthest thing from James' instruction and all you have to do is do a little concordance search of this word and you'll find it

was not used for sacred ceremonies. Any concordance will show you there are two words for anoint in the NT, one is *aleiphein* and the other is *chriein*. *Chriein* is almost always used of the Messiah, it's the sacred use, it's the religious, ritual use that people tend to think this is talking about. The other word, and the one used here, *aleiphein* is the profane use, the medicinal use. R. C Trench in his great work *Synonyms in the New Testament* says, "ἄλειψεν is the mundane and profane, χρίεν the sacred and religious, word. Ἀλείψεν is used indiscriminately of all actual anointings, whether with oil or ointment; while χρίεν, no doubt in its connexion with χριστός, is absolutely restricted to the anointing of the Son, by the Father, with the Holy Ghost, for the accomplishment of his great office, being wholly separated from all profane and common uses."ⁱⁱ So here it's the mundane, profane use, and it means they administer oil to this person for medicinal reasons; sometimes they'd pour it on the skin to moisturize it, other times they would drink it, it had some medicinal value. And that's what they're doing here. This believer has so destroyed themselves spiritually that they are depressed and have locked themselves away and allowed their physical health to go down hill. Or, they have actually become physically sick due to the spiritual sickness. But whatever has happened the elders will first administer whatever medications are necessary to get this person well and then they would have their strategic prayer session.

Verse 15, **And the prayer of faith will save the weary one**, save them from what? Save them from premature physical death! It starts out with failing to walk by faith through a trial, so sin is in the picture. Eventually if they don't confess the sin they get spiritually ill and this means physical illness and finally premature physical death! So he says **the prayer of faith will save the weary one**, not sick, this is *kamno* and it means "weary," he's fatigued, he's worn out spiritually. Sin takes its toll and this believer is at the end of his or her rope. So the elders pray the prayer of faith, it just means they trust the Lord will answer the prayer. Why? Because they know they are following the Lord's procedure in this book. And if God says He will do something then God will do it. So you have believers here who are mature, they have learned to trust the Lord over large areas of life. The last thing you want is some immature believer praying for you who you don't even know if they are able to trust the Lord very much. That's why I'm into strategic prayer, not the more the merrier type prayer but strategic, key people praying. I'd rather have one key man praying than 100 goofball believers.

These men trust the Lord. They pray; the prayer will save them from premature physical death. And **the Lord will** do what? **awaken him**. That is, He'll start waking him back up to spiritual truth. Because once you've sinned, sinned and sinned and you have this big pile of sin in your life then you start falling asleep spiritually, you don't understand spiritual truth anymore, you don't see why it's important and you sure can't pick this book up and read it! So the Lord will awaken you to understanding and having an interest in spiritual truth again.

And the rest of the verse, **And if**, that's a 3rd class condition, if and he probably **has done sins**, and that's I the perfect tense so it's a habitual sin pattern, he has sinned with the effect that he is sinning right up to the present moment with all these terrible effects, but the text says **he will be forgiven**, it's the idea of released, released from the bondage of this sin.

How did that happen? Verse 16, **Therefore, you should confess the sins to one another and you should pray on behalf of one another so that you may be restored**. The forgiveness occurs through confession, but it's not the sinner confessing to the Lord here, it's the sinner confessing the sins to the elder. You know, I did this and I did that, I've got this sin and that sin and it's overtaking me. Why is he confessing them to the elders? Because he can't in faith confess them to the Lord for forgiveness. He's a double minded believer. Let me show you James 1. Did you know that a believer can get so out of it that he can't genuinely confess his sins? That can and does happen. And then the only recourse is this passage, call the elders and confess to them and then they'll pray on your behalf so that you can be restored. So we've got one group of believers praying on behalf of another believer, praying in his stead because he can't pray and expect an answer. The problem this believer has in principle is found in James 1:5 "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶But he must ask in faith without any doubting," well, what's the problem with this believer? He can't ask in faith. He can't even trust that God will really forgive him if he confesses. That's a big problem because verse 7, "For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸*being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." So if you can't pray a prayer of confession trusting that the Lord will forgive you then how do you ever get out of the problem? Answer, you call the elders who can confess for you in faith. They believe God will forgive your

sin, you don't, you're a double-minded man, so forget getting answers to your prayers. The elders on the other hand, they don't have any doubts, they are mature believers, they pray in faith and God promises to **restore the one who is weary**.

Now, that said let's go to the central principle of the passage. **The energetic prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much**. I've translated that pretty interestingly; I'm trying to give you the picture that this is active prayer, it's a high energy prayer, it's an intense prayer meaning that it's well-thought through, this is not an off the cuff prayer, this is a carefully articulated prayer. I think there's a balance to prayer, on one hand there are the people that say, just pray from the heart, just open your mouth and start flapping your tongue. On the other hand are people who say, read this prayer out of this book of common prayer, this liturgy and I think both are extremes that need to be avoided. I think what the Lord is really interested in is carefully articulated prayers. I don't think He wants us to just start talking and pouring out our little carnal hearts before Him. And I don't think He wants us to mindlessly read someone else's prayer out of a prayer book as if it were ours. What I do think He wants is us to think through the specific problem at stake and then carefully craft a prayer that argues a case. I think He wants us to get up in His face and make scriptural arguments for why He ought to answer the prayer. Now that is my opinion after burying myself in this book for several years, looking at the prayers in Scripture and observing how much Scripture was in their prayers, out of that I crafted this view of prayer. Even Elijah's prayer in vv 17-18 is crafted after Scripture, he got the prayer by considering the historical situation of his nation in light of Lev 26 and Deut 28. So it's a very Scriptural prayer.

So let's look at Elijah because Elijah is put forth as the example. If Elijah had lived during the church age, Elijah would have been an elder. He was a mature man spiritually and you have to appreciate the first part of verse 17 because the tendency would be to think that Elijah was some kind of superhuman - yeah, but that was Elijah. Elijah was a prophet, Elijah had a direct link with God. But I'm just me. So James cuts that objection off right at the start, **Elijah was a man like us**, which shows you that just because a man held the office of prophet that didn't mean that his spiritual life was automatically taken care of. Oh, no, they had to learn obedience; they had to learn to pray. So Elijah did not get his prayers answered because he was a

prophet. Oh no. He got his prayers answered because he was a righteous man; he was a believer who listened to the word of God. See that principle in verse 16, that “the energetic prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much.” God listens to these kinds of men who pray this way. Now you can’t think that if you are a dirty rotten stinker of a believer God is going to listen to you. He really is not interested in what you have to say to Him until you are interested in what He has to say to you in this book. So pipe your lungs down and get your ears open. God says, you listen to me first; then I’ll listen to you. But you really have nothing to say to Me until you find out what I have to say to you, then you’ll know how to pray, what to pray for, how to pray in the will of God and all the rest of it. But until then you listen to what I have to say. And little by little as you grow you’ll offer little prayers that are according to this book and you’ll gradually learn how to pray as you grow. But that’s the way it works, so don’t think you’re going to come out with some big marvelous prayer life right off the bat. Forget it, you have to grow to learn how to pray and he who knows the Scripture best is best equipped to pray.


So let’s look at Elijah’s prayer. **Elijah was a man like us, and he prayed earnestly that it not rain, and it did not rain upon the earth for three and a half years. And again he prayed, and the heaven gave rain and the earth produced her fruit.** Now we have two prayers, one against rain and one for rain. Both got answered. The first one, against rain says **he prayed earnestly**, in the Greek it says he prayed prayer. You say prayed prayer, that’s a strange way to put it. Yeah, it’s a Hebraism. The Jews, to emphasize something would double the word, like King of kings, Lord of Lords, heaven of heavens, it means the highest or the greatest. So this is the prayer of prayers. The greatest prayer. And what is the greatest prayer? That it not rain. Now you say, that doesn’t sound like a great prayer. Well it is and here’s why: it was to turn the people around spiritually. Now that was for Israel, not for us, and I don’t have time to go into a dissertation on rain in the OT vs rain in the NT. Suffice it to say that even if the whole country of America repented it wouldn’t make a hill of beans difference in the rain gauge. That was for Israel and the principle for us today is that God rains on the just and the unjust alike. You never saw rain fall just on the godly believer’s houses did you? And further, last year we got about twice our annual rainfall, did that mean we had a high reading on the spiritual barometer last year? Baloney.ⁱⁱⁱ The point is that a godly man who prays the right prayer, the prayer in the will of God, gets answers. Finally the people of

Israel did get with it spiritually and Elijah prayed again and they got rain. And the point here is that the elders go over and pray for this person, they're the kind of men that can bend the ear of God. Why? Because they listen to Him first. Then God says, alright, I'll listen to you. They offer the prayer for this spiritual dumps believer, trusting the Lord to restore them and the Lord will absolutely do it, the Lord will answer, and this person will be restored to spiritual well-being, they'll get back on track with the Lord and they'll start to grow spiritually again. That's the lesson and it shows you one way the elders function in the realm of prayer. And I might add it's a very pertinent function that is hardly ever carried out. But it is very important for a healthy local church. Next time we'll move to the deacons. If there are questions I'll field those now.

ⁱ The word translated sick in verse 15 is a different Greek word, *kamno*, and it meant “weary” in the NT times, not sick. Both of these words translated “sick” have other meanings, other primary meanings, **sick** is a secondary meaning. The word *astheneo* can be used of physical sickness and if you study the Gospels and Acts about 70% of the uses are of physical sickness. But what's very interesting is that when you go to the Epistles it flips, about 70% are used of spiritual illness. So it can be used both ways. To see it used of spiritual illness turn to 1 Cor 11:30. Here the context is about the Lord's Supper where some believers were getting drunk and so they are coming under divine discipline. Verse 30, “For this reason many among you are weak (*astheneo*) and sick,” notice the contrast between “weak” and “sick”. Clearly “weak” refers to their spiritual state and “sick” refers to their physical state”. So, here you can see the difference between weakness and sickness. Finally, “and a number sleep” that's a metaphor for physical death. And the point is that the people who were getting drunk got weak, then they got sick and then they died. James follows the same progression and he's trying to get the person who's now weak to call the elders so they can come over and pray for them and get them out of this jam before it's too late, before they reach premature physical death.

ⁱⁱ Trench, R. C. (2003). *Synonyms of the New Testament*. (9th ed., improved.) (136–137). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

ⁱⁱⁱ There are only six passages in the NT Church context that talk about rain and four of them are references to Israel in the OT (there are about 100 in the OT). And in light of that I'd like to point out that all these groups running around quoting Joel 2 and saying repent and pray for rain are out to lunch. The Joel passage has to do with the nation Israel and has nothing at all to do with the Church. The prophets are calling the nation Israel to repent so that the curses for violating the Mosaic Law would be lifted. And one of the curses for violating that Law was drought. And in our passage James is saying Elijah prayed for cursing on the nation Israel and he got it. That's what the prophets did. And not many people liked the prophets. I don't know why everybody wants to be one. These guys were hated. How much do you think they liked Elijah? He prayed for no rain and they didn't get any for three and a



half years. If you think 10 months of no rain is bad, try three and a half years. All you have to do is do the math and I think you'll see that's a lot worse than what we're facing. But that was the nation Israel, and the prophets pronounced doom for violating the Mosaic Law. But we are in the Church and we do not have prophets going around pronouncing doom on Texas and withholding rain on countries and all the rest of it. That's not to say our country can't improve its spiritual condition. That's a foregone conclusion and has been for over 150 years. That's not the point I'm trying to make. But I am saying that we are not having a drought in Texas because of our poor spiritual condition. That is ridiculous. And I'm dogmatic about it and I'll tell you why. Last year we had a lot of rain, about twice our yearly average. So if you want to explain the drought by our poor spiritual condition this year you're going to have to explain the abundance last year by our wonderful spiritual condition. So, you see, it should be obvious to any thinking Christian that you can't measure your country's spiritual well-being by whether they're getting rain or not. Israel could, we can't, we're not Israel, we're Texas and those principles of cursing don't apply to us. The principle that applies today is that it rains on the just and the unjust. Now I'm all for praying for rain, pray, pray, pray, but don't think that we're not getting any because of our sorry spiritual condition and God is boogey man and out to get us. That is baloney.

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