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Let Us Pray; James 5:13-18
GPBC
1.3.20

Introduction – I always like to start a new year with two sermons; one to encourage us to read the Bible and one to encourage us to pray. These are companion sermons because they are companion means of grace, twin practices of the faith. Where you find one, you most surely will find the other. Reading the Bible will move us to pray and praying will move us to read the Bible.

When we read and see the glories of God, the rich promises of faith, the beauties of our Savior, and the truth for life, we want to talk to God about what we've seen when we read. We want to praise Him for who He is, thank Him for all He has done for us in Christ, ask Him to help us believe His promises, and seek His grace to live out His truth.

When we pray, we sense the inadequacy within ourselves to approach God and address our Father and plead for His mercies. We don't want to be guided by our will and our fleeting feelings. We feel our need for a sure foundation upon which to lift our prayers to God. When we speak to Him we want to declare what is true of Him. We want to pray according to His will. We want to align our hearts with His purposes. We need the Bible for that.

The Bible informs our prayer lives and our prayer lives are the spring that flows from the Fountain of the Word. If we struggle to pray, if we often fail to pray, we need to check our Bible reading. If we go for days without seeking God in His Word, we need to check our time in prayer. They are companions.

And for us as believers, they are our lifeline! Just as much as our bodies need food and water and oxygen, so do our souls need Scripture and prayer. The Bible feeds us and prayer is how our faith breaths and fills the lungs of our souls.

I cannot exhort you enough to choose a plan or method and get into the Bible this year. And I cannot use too strong an encouragement to plead for us to make time to pray in 2021. Let us not spend an ounce of our energy or a moment of our day until we have spent time with God. Today's passage has been a tremendous motivation to prayer for me over the years. Let's walk through it together.

I. A Call to Prayer (vv13-14)

- a. James asks “Is anyone among you suffering?” The word “suffering” here means “trouble.” Do we have any troubles in life? Are we suffering in any way? Trouble and suffering come in many forms; relational, personal, health, mental, emotional, financial, marital, familial, spiritual.
 - i. James reminds us that as believers we have the greatest recourse available. We have the most assuring resource in the world. With Christ as our Mediator and High Priest, we have access to God, audience with the Most High, an ear with the Almighty, a clear path to the throne of heaven – we have what the world does not have – we have prayer! Bring it to God. Cast your cares on Him because He cares for you. 1 Peter 5:7
- b. We not only experience suffering in this life, but by the grace of God we know wonderful joys. “Is anyone cheerful?” Have we any reason to be thankful today? Have we any blessings? Have we any joys? If so, we know and believe that every good and perfect gift comes down from above, from the Father of lights. James 1:17
 - i. So praise Him. Sing to Him who has been so good to us who are undeserving. Singing praise to God is really just another way we pray. If our study through the psalms on Sunday evenings has taught us anything, it has taught us that singing to God and praying to God are much the same thing. As Buddy the Elf says, “singing is just talking loud and moving your voice up and down.”
- c. “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. In other words, we are to pray ourselves, v13, but there are times, like dire illness, that we need others to pray for us. So God has not only given us prayer, He has given us the local church, and He has placed spiritual leaders in our local church, and they are to come to us and pray when we need prayer.
 - i. Anointing with oil here is a symbolic expression of the seriousness of the illness and of the urgency of prayer. Nothing magical about the oil. Prayer is the point of this passage, as v15 indicates, anointing is simply expressing that those who are praying are sincerely interceding for their brother or sister.

- ii. In the name of the Lord is the third component which means our prayers are directed to God, only effective through Christ, and seeking and relying on His will.
 - d. The point here is that we should always be praying, in good times and in times of suffering, and we should be praying for one another, especially in difficult, trying circumstances. A call to prayer.
- II. A Promise of Prayer (vv15-16)
 - a. James not only calls us to pray, but he gives us great reason and assurance for our prayers so that we will pray and not leave off praying. He lifts before us a wonderful promise of prayer.
 - b. V16b – The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. That is an absolute statement, a sure promise in Scripture concerning prayer. You’ve heard it said this way, “prayer works!”
 - i. Prayer is not in vain. Praying to God actually accomplishes great and mighty things that we can never achieve on our own. Things that only God can do, and will do when we ask. James 4:2 says “You do not have because you do not ask.” Jesus issues forth the very same promise when He says in Matthew 7:7 – ask and it will be given to you.
 - c. Now who is this righteous person who prays with great power? This kind of prayer is not reserved for the Christian giants and heroes of yesterday or the Christian celebrities and rockstars who sell out the arenas and have a million followers and write the best sellers of today. Some of us don’t pray because we’ve believed the lie of the enemy that prayers from little ol’ nobody me won’t make any difference. God’s not listening to me. I don’t want to bother God with my petty problems.
 - i. James says, “I beg to differ!” A righteous person means someone who has been made right with God through the righteousness of Christ. If you are in Christ, you are clothed in His righteousness, you are a righteous person. So pray!
 - d. Now the great power of the prayer of the believer is not in the believer or from the believer – it’s from God – v15 “the prayer of faith” meaning that our prayer is a believing in and clinging to the promises of power of God. Prayer is not about what we can do; it’s about what God can do if we would just pray!

- e. And look how powerful prayer can be. V15. Now I believe James is purposefully using language here than can be applied in two realms, physical and spiritual, bodily illness and spiritual sickness. Both of those are out of our reach but not out of God's reach. We can't heal and we can't save, but God can and does!!
 - f. V16 – btw – if this is how prayer works and works with great power, then we ought to be constantly confessing sin and praying for one another.
 - g. One final note before we move to the last verses. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. What does that mean “as it is working?” That means as we are praying. Prayer does not go to work until it is prayed, but when it is prayed, by a righteous person, in faith, and confessing sin – it works with great power!
 - h. That's what we need in 2021. Maybe 2020 is a call to pray! We need to see God work the impossible. Change impossible situations. Save loved ones who are miserably lost. Do what only God can do. And He has promised right here that He will if we as His people will pray.
 - i. 2 Chron 7:14 – if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face then will I hear from heaven and heal their land.
- III. An Example of Prayer (vv17-18)
- a. James not only gives us a reason to pray with a promise, he also motivates us to pray by an example.
 - b. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours – in other words, he was just a man, a sinner like the rest of us, but he was righteous, he was a believer, just an ordinary believer, like us.
 - c. And he prayed fervently – note that word fervently. What does that mean? It's v15 – the prayer of faith. Prayer that knows nothing will change unless God moves. Prayer that knows our loved one will not be saved unless God saves them. Prayer that knows only God can change us and others. Prayer that is standing on God's truth, clinging to God's promises, and trusting in God's faithfulness. Prayer that knows prayer is all we have.
 - d. And look at the great power of Elijah's prayer working, a righteous person praying the prayer of faith. Vv17-18.

- e. Don't believe for one second that your prayers mean nothing, accomplish nothing, and are in vain. Put away all your doubts and discouragements to prayer. That's what this passage is about.
- f. Have you a loved one who does not know the Lord? Pray! Pray fervently. Pray in faith. Have you an immovable mountain in front of you? Pray. Pray fervently. Pray in faith. Have we darkness around us? Have we temptations within and without? Then let us pray and pray fervently and pray in faith.

Conclusion – The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working – enough power to stop the rain and start it again. Oh my dear friends, let us enter 2021 feasting on the Word and flooding the throne of glory in prayer!