

James and the Prayer of Faith

Sermon 21 in the James Series

James 5:14-16

It has been a little over a month since we have been in the Book of James.

We also come to some difficult and controversial material. This was a difficult message to prepare, so it could be a difficult message to hear – but I will do my best to make a complicated issue simple, without being simplistic.

James closes his epistle with two main points.

The first point concerns prayer.

James talks specifically about prayer those who are sick.

James then talks about the effectual, fervent prayer of the righteous.

And in both cases there is the issue of potential sin involved.

So that, in some ways, incorporates the second major point – rescuing and the one who errs from the truth v. 19-20.

Let's read together James 5:13-20

Let's resume with some observations on the Prayer of Faith in Regards

I. The Prayer of Faith in Regards to the Sick 14-15

The person is sick

The elders are called

- How can they know if they are not called?
- It is the responsibility of the sick one TO CALL – to let the elders know.
- Obviously – not on the phone in James day – someone else would have to send the message.

We can assume this is a very serious situation.

v. 13a – the suffering one is to pray for himself.

v. 16b – tells us to pray for one another.

But we are dealing specifically with v. 14-15

The elders pray over the person

They anoint him or her WITH OIL in the Name of the Lord

The prayer of faith – by whom? Whose faith?

Jesus often said, “*Your faith has made you whole.*”

But we know it was always JESUS POWER that made them whole.

A strict reading shows the prayer of faith is the prayer of the elders – not the sick one – he is being PRAYED FOR.

In the apostolic days of the miraculous gifts – it wasn’t so much the faith of the person who was in need – as the power of God through the apostle.

We will speak more to that in a moment.

Will raise him up.

No qualifiers are given.

It reads literally like an iron-clad guarantee.

Please note – in our strict reading – it is THE PRAYER that God uses to raise him up – it doesn’t say THE OIL.

But the oil is in there!

We will deal with that – but it says the prayer of faith.

If he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

This is part of the entire “calling of the elders”.

It is not just a physical issue – there is confession of sin too.
He or she MAY be sick because of sin.

Paul to the Corinthians regarding their misuse of the Lord's
Supper – for this cause many are sick and weak among you, and
many sleep.

II. Background on the Passage

There is only one other place in Scripture where we see prayer with
the addition of anointing with oil for the sick.

Mark 6:7-12

This passage helps ILLUMINATE the passage in James.

I have read a lot on this subject, but I think the overall best
summary has been done by William Hendricksen in his
commentary on Mark, and I will be drawing much of my
materials here from his work.

READ

Here we have Christ sending out the Twelve.

-- He sends them out two by two.

-- They have the power to do miraculous gifts – sign gifts if you will -- to
accompany their preaching.

Among these are power over unclean spirits.

In Luke 10 we find 70 others commissioned in much the same way to
go out two by two – with expanded instructions on how to go about
this project -- and to preach the gospel of the kingdom.

Not much is said about sign gifts there – but this IS said, Luke 10:17

Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."

Now here in **Mark 6:12-13**

- they preached repentance from sin.
- they cast out many demons
- they anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.

2 things come to us from this passage that seems to line up with what James is alluding to:

- The anointing with oil by the disciples (James says elders).
- The call to repent (which elders would do also in the NT sense of proclaiming the death and resurrection of Messiah – which the original 12 could not do in Mark 6, since it hadn't occurred yet).

-- Another thing that the accounts have in common –
Mark is recording very early history – during the life of Christ.

The Epistle of James is a very early epistle – early in the life of the church -- maybe the first epistle but surely one of the first.

Many of the Apostles, MOST, were still alive and ministering.

They were exercising still exercising sign gifts – as proof the Kingdom had come -- although it is interesting that James DOES NOT MENTION ANY SPECIFIC sign gifts – such as tongues, or prophecy.

-- We don't know if James is talking about THE GIFT of healing here. Maybe he is. We simply do not know.

-- What we do know is James is in Jerusalem.
His audience is the believing Jews who primarily were in Jerusalem, but have been scattered to different parts of the world by persecution.

These scattered ones wouldn't have access to APOSTLES.
But in their churches, they DID have ELDERS.

It is possible – that we are talking about a miraculous type of healing at this early stage of the church – when it is probable James readers might not even have a copy of any other NT book.

III. The Purpose of the Oil

Now back to James 5:14

I am still distilling much of the study of William Hendricksen here.

READ

In Biblical times oil (primarily olive oil) was used for many purposes.

Cosmetics

Food

Oil in the lamp to give light

To consecrate a priest for office in the OT

Anointing kings in the OT

In connection with offerings.

Even in connection with burial.

Oil was used extensively in the ancient world as a medicine – in the Bible we see the Good Samaritan poured oil and wine into the wounds of the man who was attacked by robbers.

Some think THIS oil is MEDICINE.

However, in Mark – it doesn't appear that the disciples were using oil as medicine, so I don't think that is what James means either – although some good commentators take the view that James was telling the elders to use oil as medicine.

For our part at SGBC – we as pastors -- would ALWAYS recommend you use the best medicine and the best medical help you can get when you are sick.

In fact, it can be foolish to refuse legitimate medical help and just try to get better “by faith”.

That is true, and that is wisdom, but I don’t think that is the message James is telling us.

What should we think?

Turn to Zechariah 4:1-6

I dealt with this passage in our series on Zechariah that you can find on SermonAudio.

-- Oil, especially in the OT is often a symbol of the invigorating presence and power of the Spirit of God.

READ

v. 6 -- -- Oil as a symbol of the invigorating presence and power of the Spirit of God.

It could be fitting in this early day – before the NT Scriptures were readily available to encourage the sick, Jewish believers.

Lenski makes this point about the healings we see in Mark – *“The healings were always miraculous and instantaneous. Olive oil never works that way.”*

Hendricksen concludes:

It is likely that this was a visible symbol to the young church – and that the practice did not continue later.

“Hence, we find it mentioned here in what was probably the earliest gospel (Mark) and in James 5:14 in what might have been the earliest of the canonical epistles. As time went on, and spiritual knowledge increased, oil was no longer mentioned.”

Would we anoint with olive oil if asked?

Let’s admit this is a difficult passage – and there is not a consensus among strong Bible believers how we should understand it.

It is always better to interpret the difficult in light of what is more easily understood and clear.

We would rather encourage you – when you have a severe illness:
-- TRUST IN GOD ALONE. That is the overriding message of Scripture.
PRAY for yourself.
Have your pastors pray for you.
Let your brethren pray for you. AND PRAY FOR THEM!

IV. How to Apply James 5:13-16.

And specifically – verses 14-15

1. The context above and below is PRAYER.

-- Praying for yourself v. 13
-- Praying for one another in v. 16
-- The efficacy of PRAYER is mentioned in v. 16 (not the efficacy of oil).
-- The example is given of God answering the prayers of Elijah – a man with a nature like ours.

-- I pray for you – pastor Jeff prays for you.
-- The reason we are set apart from work is so we devote ourselves to the Word and Prayer.

Not all elders are set aside.
But it is ideal when they can be.

But please do not think my prayers for you are heard by God with more weight than the prayers you offer for one another – Christian friend.

2. It also says to confess your “*faults*” “*trespasses*” or “*sins*” to one another in verse 16.

However, this is not the same Greek word for **sin** found at the end of verse 15 ... “and if he has committed **sins**, he will be forgiven.”

It is very possible that James is not exhorting us to open our hearts and tell each other our specific and secret sins.

I remember a terrible incident many years ago when a public confession was made.

I am not even sure I was an elder in the church yet.

We were at a Family Camp setting.
People were giving testimony.

A man stood up and admitted he had lustful thoughts toward one of his female co-workers.

Of course there was his wife – hearing this for the first time from her husband -- in the company of her fellow church members.

Obviously, she was completely humiliated.
It took a lot of healing.

It is very likely that James is exhorting us to keep short accounts with one another and readily admit when we are wrong.

The same word is used twice in **Matthew 6:15** right after giving us the Lord’s Prayer.

“If you do not forgive men their **trespasses**, neither will your Father forgive your **trespasses**.”

3. The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

Does that exclude the efficacy of a woman's prayers? No.

No, the Greek here means men and women.

ALL are exhorted to pray – ONE ANOTHER.

To quote Douglas Moo:

“The person is simply the believer, the person who is “righteous” by virtue of receiving forgiveness through Jesus Christ and is therefore part of the people of God. Prayer, James wants to make clear, is a powerful weapon in the hands of even the humblest believer. It does not require a “super saint” to wield it effectively.”

In fact the word “fervent prayer” is one word in the Greek – a different word than James has been using for prayer – which mean SUPPLICATION.

It's not a different kind of prayer – but it shows the intensity of the prayer.

Does the fact that James uses Elijah as an example mean that only ordained prophets or men of God can be heard? No.

In fact, James REMOVES Elijah from the category of a special prophet and uses him as an example of a righteous man.

The Roman Catholic Church has used this passage to try and prove two unscriptural doctrines.

Confession to a priest – taking confession out of the “one another” passages.

And LAST RITES – which has nothing to do with HEALING at all – which is exactly what the passage is talking about. Last rites is wiping away your sins before you die – not physical healing – which is exactly what verse 15 is talking about.

Some tele-evangelists and faith healers get a lot of mileage from the misuse of this passage.

Send me your prayer requests – with your money – and I WILL PRAY FOR YOU!

I have a SPECIAL PIPELINE to GOD! NO!

Brethren – we MUST pray for one another.

I rejoice that you pray FOR ME.

Pastor Jeff would say likewise.

I rejoice that you PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER – which is why we bring you PRAYER REQUESTS!

And your pastors WILL pray for you, and please call us when you're in the hospital – and we will visit you – or simply let us know your regular needs in person, by phone or e-mail.

We pray for people when we love them.

We pray for ONE ANOTHER.

Prayer is a bond that God has designed in His providence – for our good and mutual edification. To Him be all the glory.

PRAY

HYMN 472

Benediction: