

James 5:13-18 – Pray for the Suffering and the Sick

TSK, GreekLexicon, PNT, Vincent, Trapp, Robertson, Poole, Geneva, Henry, JFB, Family, Rienecker, Gaebelein, Clarke, Adamson, Doriani, Calvin. Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: You have **seen the abuse of the poor and needy by the enviers**. You have seen the Apostle **James strongly rebuke those abusers**. But Apostle James did not end there. **He knew poverty was followed by suffering, so he addressed the poor in their suffering**. He wanted to help them. This is what you will hear about today.

Our headings are:

Pray for the suffering

Pray for the sick

Our goals are: **That because you are saved by Jesus, you will make use of the graces he offers to you so you don't have to unnecessarily struggle in your life.**

Pray for the suffering

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.

1. There were many who were suffering in a society that was very much a caste system.

There were noblemen in high offices, there were soldiers who took advantage of the people, there were those who bought their freedom from slavery, there were women who were second class citizens (infant girls were left to die – either for the convenience of the parents or as sacrifices), there were the freed poor, and there were slaves. **Because of this structural unfairness, there was much suffering in society**. And Christians were easy targets! Yet, God prepared them for this.

2 Timothy 2:3 You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

2. So Apostle James called on Christians to pray – pray for themselves and pray for others who were suffering.

He assumed that **prayers moved the hand of God**. That's what God's Word said! Prayers don't heal! God does!

Psalms 50:15 Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me."

And notice Apostle Paul did not say: "**Is anyone among you suffering, let him grumble.**" No! Let him pray!

3. But what about the 2nd question (Is anyone cheerful?) and what about the 2nd answer (Let him sing Psalms.)?

Apostle James was saying, **when they had joy because God provided for their needs, they had to remember the work of God** – as the Psalmist does, and praise him. Their **Psalm-singing would glorify God** and even **enhance their own joy**, knowing they did not deserve anything!

Thanksgiving for healing, which included the singing of the Psalm, was always a part of the Christian's life. This was part of regular worship of Christians. So a reminder to do it after God heard their prayers was most appropriate.

Ephesians 5:19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,

Even before in the Old Testament, 700 years before Jesus was born, King Hezekiah's thanked God for his healing from a sickness he thought would have killed him.

Isaiah 38:17 Indeed it was for my own peace That I had great bitterness; But You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, For You have cast all my sins behind Your back.

4. Lessons:

a. Prayer is not a ritual thing you do because "everybody does it." Prayers work. God hears and answers in the best way for you...which sometimes means "no." Often he says "yes."

b. Praying is like breathing to the good Christian. If you aren't praying, you are suffocating...you are worried...you are carrying burdens that are not yours to carry.

c. Let your heart go up with your prayers. Don't just use your lips.

d. Prayers for suffering start with you when you are suffering, but others and the elders must pray for the suffering also.

e. Give thanks when your suffering is over...whether God uses a miracle, diet, or medicines. Sing of his greatness.

f. Do you know you have to sing not only to God but also to your neighbors? When your brother hears you singing with joy and passion, it encourages him! Yes, your tune may not be great, but your passion and joy say a lot!

Pray for the sick

14 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. 15 And the **prayer of faith** will save the sick, and the Lord will **raise him up**. And if he has committed **sins, he will be forgiven**.

1. Apostle James then called on Christians to call for the elders to call on God for them when they were sick.

Of course, he was not forbidding others to pray for the sick. That was common course for all Christians.

2. The elders had to come and anoint the sick with oil and pray in faith so God would heal him (assuming it was God's will).

Matthew 9:21 For she said to herself, "If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well."

Sometimes it isn't God's will to heal! Man's days are numbered! We have clear evidence that even miracle workers like Apostle could not heal Timothy (1Timothy 5:23), Trophimus (2Timothy 4:20), and Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25). Apostle Paul himself had a "thorn in his flesh" – a sickness God would not take away from him.

But what about the anointing oil? The anointing with oil was a **symbol of the work of the Holy Spirit** on that person's life.

The oil was **intended to stimulate the faith of the receiver**. You see that often in Scripture. Look at one example:

Zechariah 4:2... So I said, "I am looking, and there is a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. 3 "Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left." 4 So I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, "What are these, my lord?" 5 Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." 6 So he answered and said to me: "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: **'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the LORD of hosts.**

There are some who believe this was medicinal oil, but this passage does not say so, and neither do we have any such examples in the Scriptures. God is not against using medicines. He gave medicines. But **elders aren't called to be massage therapists**. If God wanted oil for medicine, he would have sent doctors, not elders. More, how does anointing **the body result in a curing of the soul of sins** – as you will see later?

There are others who believe this type of healing is no longer possible – that it died when the Bible was completed. It is true there were miraculous healings right after Pentecost to mark the expansion of God's kingdom around the world. Even the shadows or handkerchiefs of the Apostles brought healing. **But this was not those types of miraculous healing**, but a general principle for elders to follow. (Elders have done this throughout history.) There are a number of reasons this still continues. First, this was a work for "the elders" in general. **It was not a call for the elders with "the gift of special healing."** **Not all elders were able to heal miraculously** at the time of Pentecost. Second, the **emphasis is on the fervent prayer**, so this anointing was not focused on the great miracles of the time. Fervent prayer was regular Christian behavior.

There were those who later came up with "extreme unction" where they anoint with oil those about to die. But that is not what God intended here. Healing was the goal...not preparation for death!

The oil didn't heal the sick and bring forgiveness, but the prayer that flowed from faith brought healing and forgiveness. (Oil can't heal sin!)

3. If the sick person had committed a sin that caused him to be sick, prayer would bring forgiveness and healing.

Sins like adultery, laziness, or gluttony directly caused sickness. Sin and sickness may directly have links. Consider Herod Antipas who directly died after displaying his pride. (Acts 12) Sin breeds illness. Proverbs 3:28-35. God confirmed sin caused sickness. Deuteronomy 28:58-63. Jesus testified to that link.

John 5:14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, **"See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you."**

But there are times there is not a direct link. (Of course all sickness is ultimately because of Adam's sin!) Job was struck with sickness but it wasn't his sin. Jesus testified to that as well!

John 9:2 And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, **who sinned, this man or his parents**, that he was born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, **"Neither** this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.

These types of illness God allowed in order to teach people to depend on God.

16 **Confess your trespasses to one another**, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

4. Apostle James then directed those whose sin caused their sickness to confess their sins to one another!

This showed true sorrow. They could not hide their sins!

Was this a confessional, like to a priest or an individual? No! This was **public confession of sin** and it

was done for the honor of God and the good of the sinner and those around him (like singing above).

Was this referring to healing physical? No. This referred to spiritual healing. (V15.)

1 Peter 2:24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness — **by whose stripes you were healed.**

5. In order to encourage elders to pray for the physical and spiritual healing of sick people, God reminded them he would hear their prayers because of their faith.

17 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 land for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

6. God then encouraged the elders to pray in faith by reminding them he hears the prayers of righteous men as he did Elijah's prayers.

Elijah prayed for it not to rain and God heard him, and he prayed it would rain and God heard him.

1 Kings 18:1 And it came to pass after many days that the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, "Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth."

Elijah was an ordinary man and God still heard his prayer. (Elijah didn't have special healing gifts.)

This must have encouraged the elders of Apostle James' day – as ordinary men.

Elijah's prayer was fervent! The land was long dried up and the trees and the roots were withering, but God gave new life. He gave the plants rain. This would have also encouraged the elders to pray.

7. Lessons:

a. While people of Jesus' day over-spiritualized sickness and assumed sickness was directly caused by sin, people today under-spiritualize sin and think viruses directly cause sickness and not sin.

Sometimes you are sick because of sin and sometimes you are sick because God wants to teach you.

b. If you have sinned directly and if your sin is known, you must publicly confess it. That honors your Savior. That removes a blight from the church. That brings healing.

c. Call your elders to pray for you when you are sick. If you don't, you are ignoring the gift of God.

Proverbs 15:8 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright is His delight.

d. Faith in God causes healing – not the power in the man who prayed.

Conclusion:

Pray for help when you suffer. When those troubles are severe or you are sick, call the elders to pray for you. If there are spiritual problems - sins (and sometimes that is the cause of sickness) deal with those problems. God will forgive you and God will heal you, if that suits his purpose.

Brothers and sisters in the Lord:

1. Pray as easily as you breathe for the things you need. Remember, **many don't get because they don't ask.**

Use the graces God has provided.

2. Elders must take up this task to pray for the sick to be raised up.

3. Remind others it is the blood of Christ that gives that life-giving medicine to the soul. Let them know that God offers Christ's blood as their blood, and if they refuse Christ's blood, they would have to give their own.

Finally, if you are not a Christian, healing faith is the least of your worries. To be saved from hell you need saving faith! Only God gives it and he offers it to anyone who asks. The price of your faith has been paid by Jesus when he died on the cross.