

Sunday, September 6, 2026 pm

STUDIES FROM JAMES (19)

Praying and Singing

James 5:13-18

Tonight we continue our study through the book of James. We have noted numerous practical lessons from this study these past 2 years. As we begin to bring the letter to its close, tonight we want to focus on an admonition James makes to brethren as they deal with whatever life sets before them. In particular, he talks about singing and prayer.

I. Are you Suffering?

- a. Suffering was certainly something the audience of James would have been familiar with. We have noted throughout this study examples of being mistreated by the ungodly of this world, and perhaps even by ungodly brethren in some cases. In the first century church, physical persecutions was a real thing. Peter dealt with this in his 1st letter – 1 Peter 4:12-16 – where He discussed suffering as a Christian.
- b. We may suffer today as well. Suffering can come in many different forms today – physical ailments, hardships of life, broken and strained relationships, and primarily in our text – suffering for our faith. There are many who are working to make it more difficult to remain openly faithful to our Lord. And often, when we make godly decisions there are those who will respond negatively – lost friendships, possibly economic consequences, being ridiculed and even maligned (falsely accused) because we stand true to God's word. EVEN in churches, those who stand firm with truth on uncomfortable and socially charged issues may be rejected by professed believers – some will leave a church because of its firm moral and doctrinal stand. Others will be withdrawn from because they refuse to repent. So-called believers sometimes render the most hurtful attacks and misrepresentations. 1 Peter 4 applies to us as well. And many other NT passages could be added to this.
- c. So what do we do? James says, we pray.
 - i. We pray that God's will be done – Matthew 6:10 – taught in the model prayer; Matthew 26:39 – the 3 prayers of Jesus.
 - ii. We pray for the removal of suffering IF it is according to His will. 2 Corinthians 12:8 – Paul had a “thorn in the flesh” that he prayed 3 times to be removed. The Lord said no, but he did make the request. WE may not understand how, but since God is sovereign and omnipotent, He is able to do as He wills – including helping us. BUT let us NEVER forget point 1 – according to His will.
 - iii. If it is not removed, let us pray for the strength we need to overcome. NOTE that this is how James began this letter – James 1:2-6. See also 1 Corinthians 10:13 – God can make the way of escape. Do we believe that?
 - iv. We pray for our enemies – Matthew 5:43-44. Then leave it in His hands – Romans 12:17-21.
 - v. Pray with faith – James 1:5-6, 1 John 5:14 – this is the confidence we have in Him...

II. Are you cheerful

- a. For most of us, life is filled with ups and downs. We have talked about the bad times, but what about the good times? What is our attitude toward life in general?
- b. Let us be reminded that this ought to be our default disposition. Christians appreciate our blessings and realize that most often they outweigh our troubles and sufferings. And while there might be exceptions to this, ESPECIALLY for awhile, we still ought to be people who are upbeat and thankful.
 - i. Philippians 4:4 Paul noted we are to “*rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, ‘rejoice.’*”
 - ii. Romans 12:12 speaks of rejoicing in hope and being patient in tribulations.

- iii. 1 Peter 4:13 – even in our sufferings, we find reason to rejoice. Think of Paul and Silas in prison in Philippi singing songs at midnight (Acts 16:25). Matthew 5:12 – with the last “beatitude” about being persecuted for righteousness sake.
- c. Let him sing – singing is typically an act associated with rejoicing. When we are down, sometimes a song can lift us up. But when we are blessed we also sing praised to Him.
 - i. Psalm 95:1-2, *Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.* It is found frequently in the psalms.
 - ii. Singing is an act of worship designed to build us up – Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16. Those two texts seem to imply times of worship (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:15). Here, while worship times would be included, I do not believe this is limited to when we assemble.
 - iii. As Christians, do we sing at times other than when we are assembled?
- d. NOTE: WE may include other acts associated with cheerful times – sharing it with others, trying to cheer up someone who is struggling (suffering or sick), smiling and doing what you can to drive away gloominess in a room. The point: Do keep your joy to yourself! Our world (and we each other) need to see more joy and positive attitudes. Seek to be the one that when you enter a room, people smile instead of sighing.

III. **Is Anyone among you sick? (5:14-18)**

- a. The rest of our text addresses this concern. This is a difficult text to interpret as there are many questions:
 - i. Is the sickness physical or spiritual (or both)?
 - ii. Why do the elders pray for them? Was it with miraculous abilities or was it spiritual?
 - iii. Is the anointing with oil – related spiritually or medicinally?
 - iv. How does the prayer of faith save? Is it spiritual or physical?
 - v. If physical, is the healing miraculous or providential?
- b. ***Is this sickness physical or spiritual?*** Textually, it could be either or BOTH. And sometimes a combination of both.
 - i. As Christians we are all to be praying for one another – James 5:16, Ephesians 6:18 - *praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—*
 - ii. But as we pray for physical ailments, we can only do so much – pray and encourage. And leave it in the hands of more skilled people.
 - iii. Spiritually is where we OUGHT to be praying for each other. In our public prayers we OFTEN announce those who are physically sick and we pray for them, AND WE SHOULD! But what those struggling spiritually? We ought to be praying for them as well. And at times it is the spiritual struggles that are NOT so prevalent, unless they are made known.
 - iv. Sometimes, sickness is both physical and spiritual. Sin can lead to physical sickness – e.g., alcoholism, drugs, etc. Even social addictions (gambling, pornography, intense anger, obsessive worrying, etc.) have physical consequences. For these prayers need to be for both the physical and the spiritual.
- c. ***Let him call on the elders*** – Why the elders?
 - i. Because godly elders are proven spiritual leaders. They are not the ONLY ones whose prayers are heard, but if they are living as they ought to, they should be close to God in their lives. Hence warnings such as Hebrews 13:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, etc. apply to us.
 - ii. The fact that with this sickness we are to call upon the elders, I lean more toward this being PRIMARILY spiritual sickness (or physical problems due to spiritual struggles). BUT that is not to say that an elder should not be praying for those with physical ailments (they should).

- iii. ***They also anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord*** – because oils (e.g., olive oil in this text) had medicinal uses, some see this as physical sickness. It could be, IF the elder is also a medical specialist (or all these elders possessed the spiritual gift of healing – neither of these scenarios is implied in scripture). But also oils were used with spiritual purposes. In the OT they were used to anoint kings and priests, demonstrating God’s approval. Perhaps in our text, oils are merely a symbolic way of saying the elders pray for them and do for them WHATEVER they are able to do to help them with their sickness. This might mean applying a soothing oil for comfort or medicinally (e.g. Luke 10:34 – the parable of the good Samaritan), but it might also mean encouraging and helping them overcome whatever they are facing.
- iv. ***And the prayer of faith will save the sick and the Lord will raise him up*** – this is why I lean toward this application. Those struggling spiritually need prayers and spiritual help. Elders are capable of providing such help, with wisdom and experience.
- v. ***And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven*** – this too leans toward this spiritual application. As anyone helps one struggling in sin to overcome, they can be forgiven. (cf. Our next and final lesson in James). Elders are praying with and for those who need it. NOTE: Elders do NOT have the power to forgive sins. They can pray for and with one who needs it, but forgiveness belongs to God and Christ alone.
- d. ***Confess your trespasses to one another and pray for one another*** –
 - i. When it comes to being forgiven for our sins, we must confess and pray to God – 1 John 1:9, Acts 8:22. ONLY God can forgive sins.
 - ii. But sometimes our sins involve others and they need to know that you have repented. This confession (to make something known) is PART of the repentance – 2 Corinthians 7:10-11.
 - iii. Sometimes we are just struggling, and we want the petitions of our brothers and sisters in Christ as we strive to work through something. It may also be a cry for help.
 - iv. Another consideration is that confession makes others aware that you ARE repenting and seeking to be restored.
 - v. NOTE again “that you may be healed”. Consider Matthew 5:22-24 – when you are not right with your brother, take care of it! God expects that if you are to approach Him.
 - vi. ANOTHER thought that makes this challenging – how open and detailed should you be in what you confess – there are dangers in being too specific to too many. “One another” does not always mean everyone. If you have personal struggles, be careful with whom you share such things! The sad reality is that not everyone who hears will deal with the shared concerns in a godly way. Choose WHO you will confess to wisely. Do you have that friend that you can with confidence tell them anything?
- e. ***The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much*** – whatever your struggles and needs – spiritual, mental, physical or otherwise, you WANT godly men and women praying for you. We should ALL be praying for one another. God hears the prayers of the righteous – 1 Peter 3:12, *For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.* Proverbs 15:8, *The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, But the prayer of the upright is His delight.*
- f. ***Elijah was a man with a nature like ours (17-18)*** – James now appeal to at least his 4th OT example – he has mentioned Abraham, Rahab, Job and now he mentions Elijah.
 - i. The event he refers to is found in 1 Kings 17 during the reign of Ahab in Israel. It was a dark time and 1 Kings 17:1 Elijah declares that for 3 years it would not rain until he says differently. And it did not rain – which meant severer drought throughout the land of Israel.

- ii. It is not until after his victory over the 850 prophets and priests of the Baals and Asherah (17:20-40) that Elijah declares to Ahab that rain was coming (1 Ki. 18:41-46). These are the events James refers to.
- iii. But James makes the point that Elijah was just a man like you and me. Yet as a great man of God, prayer was one of his tools. His prayers demonstrated his trust in the LORD.
- iv. The POINT: Godly prayers are heard by God! He many NOT answer in the affirmative, giving us what we want, but He does hear and answer our prayers.
- v. And there are many examples of godly men who prayed often to God – Abraham, Moses, David, Paul and even Jesus Himself.

Again, a recurring theme in the book of James is the reminder of how much we need each other. In a world that often stand hostile toward Jesus and His followers, the church needs to be a haven of rest and comfort where we can flee to in times of need. God's church was created perfectly – He knew what He was doing. However, within its borders are imperfect people with flaws and sometimes brokenness. Would it not be great if we, as the Lord's people here could apply EVERYTHING James has said to everyone in His audience. There is no greater example of genuine trust than the ability to openly confess and request prayers and help from one another. Truly, the effective, fervent prayer of the righteous accomplishes much. What about you? Can you depend on others and can they depend on you? Think about it!