

The Suffering Saint and Prayer of Faith

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James 5:13-18

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James 5:13–18 [13] Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. [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 one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. [16] Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. [17] Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. [18] Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. (ESV)

Introduction

- James, the Lord's brother wrote this letter to believers in desperate need of wise counsel.
- From this letter, we can gather that many of these Christians were poor (1:9), oppressed (5:1-6), and enduring painful trials of various kinds (1:2).
- In this epistle, as we've seen, James counsels his friends on a variety of topics relevant to their current situation.
- In our passage James provides further counsel on how to respond to the trials they faced.

Main Theme: Suffering is a divine invitation to pray.

Overview of Passage: A survey of the text was given.

Encouragements Drawn From Text

Encouragement #1: See your suffering as a divine invitation to pray.

- As we've seen, in verse 13 James invites those who are suffering to pray.
- While that may seem an obvious thing to do, most of us would acknowledge that prayer is not always in every instance our first response or main response to trial and difficulty.
- God by his Holy Spirit through James reminds us that our suffering is first, above all an invitation to draw near the triune God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit---and to experience His presence, His nearness His encouragement, His help.

[25] Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. [26] My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

- May the Lord help us when we experience both mild and more severe forms of suffering to faithfully and regularly draw near to our Father in prayer to receive what only He can provide.

Encouragement #2: Pray in the context of your local church.

- In this text, James places a high degree of importance on pastors and congregation members in the same local church praying together.
- My we as Grace Community Church place a high value, in particular, on praying for one another and with one another.

Encouragement #3: Don't underestimate the power of your ordinary prayers.

- The end of verse 16 through verse 18 provides some of the most wonderful encouragement I know of in all of scripture for ordinary people like us, to expect God to move in powerful ways in response our prayers of faith.
- In these verses, James uses the example of Elijah to motivate us.

Prayer, James wants to make clear, is a powerful weapon in the hands even of the humblest believer; it does not require a "super saint" to wield it effectively. -- Douglas Moo

- Because through Christ, the powers of the age to come have broken into this present age, we as ordinary non-OT prophet Christians can pray for and expect God to move mightily and powerfully.

Conclusion

- Suffering is a divine invitation to pray. Are you suffering? God through His Word invites you to draw near to Him in prayer today.

O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!

- *Hymn: What A Friend We Have In Jesus*

- We've seen also this morning that God invites us to pray together in the context of the church. For those who are able, after the service let's pray together.
- And as we do, let us not underestimate the power of our ordinary prayers.

Questions for Discussion/Application

- Re-read the text, James 5:13-18. What initial insights and observations do you have from reading this passage?
- In verse 13, James exhorts us, "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray." Why is it so important that we see prayer as a primary place we ought to go to in the face of suffering and difficulty?
- What does it look like practically for us to apply verse 13 in the midst of suffering and difficulty?
- What hindrances can keep us from making a prayer a priority in times of suffering and sorrow?
- How does the call to pray for healing stretch your faith?
- How does a proper understanding of God's sovereignty serve us when God chooses not to heal in response to prayers of faith?
- Consider taking time to pray, asking God to help us to grow in looking to the Lord in prayer in times of suffering and difficulty.