

Scripture Reading:

James 5:12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes," be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.

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

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.

19 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, **20** let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”

The Prayer of the Church

We come this week to our final installment of our messages for a young church from the Book of James. On our journey we have seen:

- James addressing the Saints as the “beloved brethren” encouraging them to apprehend the “joy and crown” of salvation
- James showing that we must be “doers of the Word” and not merely “hearers only” by our acts of mercy
- James teaching that God’s gracious gift of saving faith would be demonstrated in our lives with actual works of faith
- James showing that the Holy Spirit must be the pilot controlling the rudder here at Trinity Covenant Church
- James showing that we must honestly confess our sins before God
- And in our last lesson, James teaching that we must truly acknowledge the Lord’s sovereignty and be willing to go where He leads us as His church, the Body of Christ

And finally as James concludes his short Epistle, he will teach us the importance of approaching the Throne of Grace in prayer!

In the closing text that we read this morning, James mentions prayer or praying seven times in nine verses!

- **We should, and will, focus where James focuses with instruction about prayer**
- **We will review the Lord's Prayer to better understand the power of its simplicity and the importance of our catechisms**
- **We will discuss the importance of the AMEN**

First the text before us: James 5:12 "But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes," be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment."

- **James gives us a final warning that we should not "judge lest we be judged."**
- **Being honest and truthful in all that we do, including prayer!**
- **Avoiding the sin of legalism**

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

- **Again, James stresses the importance of keeping God at the center of our Christian life:**

Trouble? We are NOT to despair... *We are to be a people of prayer!*

Good times? We must NOT take God's blessings for granted... *We should rejoice with Psalms!*

As John Calvin rightly observed: "God always invites us to himself but our fallen nature drives us away."

- **James addresses times of trouble:**

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. 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."

- **Details: We are to make our requests known because God cares about the details of our lives**
- **Power: Oil brought by Elders shows the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Church**
- **Honesty: Confessing our sins as part of covenant renewal worship and praying Psalm 51 before the throne of God!**

However, the \$64,000 question is, “Do we believe that our prayers are effective?”

- James says that “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”
- We don’t have a problem believing that God answer the prayers of the righteous...
- We struggle with believing that we ARE righteous: One reason this is the LAST lesson!

James immediately gives one of his practical examples to make his point:

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.

19 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”

Again, we could miss what James puts in plain sight: He is comparing results of effectual prayers:

- Elijah’s prayers are effective even though he is a fallen creature with a nature JUST like ours...
- We put these Saints “way up there,” forgetting how Elijah was faithless in the wilderness
- We are righteous IN Christ and as the writer of Hebrews confirms, it gives us access to God throne:

Hebrews 4:14 “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

To make things even MORE practical, James then contrasts Elijah impacting nature with the saving of a sinner:

Which is the bigger miracle:

- That the rain stopped and started on demand because of Elijah’s prayer?
- Or that we sit here this morning as members of Christ Church in response to some faithful Saint’s prayers?

James is telling us to take what Jesus said seriously: As righteous Saints, we must learn what Jesus taught us about how we should pray!

Jesus gave instructions on what NOT to do... We should not show off:

Matthew 6:5-8 "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full."

We should NOT pray 'hail marys' or say the prayer of Jebeez over & over:

"And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words."

Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal can be homework!

- **Jesus then says, "pray this way" giving His Disciples and us a simple model prayer:**

The Heidelberg catechism devotes a number of questions and answers to the Lord's Prayer:

- **I want to review these to receive their instruction on prayer this morning AND also to remind us about the wisdom we have from our Reformation heritage which we should not neglect!**

Question 120 Why hath Christ commanded us to address God thus: "Our Father"?

Answer . That immediately, in the very beginning of our prayer, he might excite in us a childlike reverence for, and confidence in God, which are the foundation of our prayer: namely, that God is become our Father in Christ, and will much less deny us what we ask of him in true faith, than our parents will refuse us earthly things.

- **We address God as Father, reminds us of our adoption – And that we ARE righteous!**

Question 121 Why is it here added, "Who art in heaven"?

Answer . Lest we should form any earthly conceptions of God's heavenly majesty, and that we may expect from his almighty power all things necessary for soul and body.

- **God and only God should be our focus**

The Heidelberg then outlines the petitions which Jesus instructs us to bring before God in prayer:

Question 122 Which is the first petition?

Answer . "Hallowed be thy name"; that is, grant us, first, rightly to know thee, and to sanctify, glorify and praise thee, in all thy works, in which thy power, wisdom, goodness, justice, mercy and truth, are clearly displayed; and further also, that we may so order and direct our whole lives, our thoughts, words and actions, that thy name may never be blasphemed, but rather honored and praised on our account.

➤ We should remember that this is a petition: It is NOT our job to have His name be hallowed in heaven:

Our prayer is that God's name would hallowed here in our lives!

Question 123 . Which is the second petition?

Answer . "Thy kingdom come"; that is, rule us so by thy word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to thee; preserve and increase thy church; destroy the works of the devil, and all violence which would exalt itself against thee; and also, all wicked counsels devised against thy holy word; till the full perfection of thy kingdom take place, wherein thou shalt be all in all.

➤ Very helpful instruction from the catechism and it should make us ask, "Do we believe what we are praying?"

Question 124 Which is the third petition?

Answer . "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"; that is, grant that we and all men may renounce our own will, and without murmuring obey thy will, which is only good; that so every one may attend to, and perform the duties of his station and calling, as willingly and faithfully as the angels do in heaven.

➤ Down-home Christianity – Believing the Great Commission

Question 125 Which is the fourth petition?

Answer . "Give us this day our daily bread"; that is, be pleased to provide us with all things necessary for the body, that we may thereby acknowledge thee to be the only fountain of all good, and that neither our care nor industry, nor even thy gifts, can profit us without thy blessing; and therefore that we may withdraw our trust from all creatures, and place it alone in thee.

➤ Our focus is day to day!

Question 126 What is the fifth petition?

Answer . "And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"; that is, be pleased for the sake of Christ's blood, not to impute to us poor sinners, our transgressions, nor that depravity, which always cleaves to us; even as we feel this evidence of thy grace in us, that it is our firm resolution from the heart to forgive our neighbor.

➤ God is working with broken tools –Keep short accounts: As James reminded us, we are to be humble and not "teachers of morals."

Question 127 Which is the sixth petition?

Answer . "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one"; that is, since we are so weak in ourselves, that we cannot stand a moment; and besides this, since our mortal enemies, the devil, the world, and our own flesh, cease not to assault us, do thou therefore preserve and strength us by the power of the Holy

Spirit, that we may not be overcome in this spiritual warfare, but constantly and strenuously may resist our foes, till at last we obtain a complete victory.

➤ **Remembering our frailty – Why we should always be praying for the armor of Ephesians Chapter Six**

Question 128 *How dost thou conclude thy prayer?*

Answer . "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever"; that is, all these we ask of thee, because thou, being our King and almighty, art willing and able to give us all good; and all this we pray for, that thereby not we, but thy holy name, may be glorified for ever.

➤ **The Lord's Prayer opens and closes with the focus on God!**

➤ **We must come to see the Lord's Prayer NOT as a vain repetition, but rather as the door through which we can pray the entire Psalter back to God!**

Question 129 *What doth the word "Amen" signify?*

Answer . "Amen" signifies, it shall truly and certainly be: for my prayer is more assuredly heard of God, than I feel in my heart that I desire these things of him.

Or as James has said, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

WE need to learn the proper use of the "AMEN" as Pastor Doug Wilson has rightly stressed in Mother Kirk:

"Amen" is used 72 times in Scripture: With 50 of them in the New Testament

➤ **God identifies Himself with this word Amen:**

Isaiah 65:16 "So that he who blesses himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth [or literally God of Amen]; and he who swears in the earth shall swear by the God of Amen!"

Rev. 3:14: "These things says the Amen, the Faithful & True witness"

➤ **Amen is used as a covenant oath: Far stronger than a simple "Yes, I agree with that."**

The Jealousy test for the women in Numbers 5:22 "Then the woman shall say, "Amen, so be it."

Duet. 27: "And all the people shall answer and say, 'Amen!' [verse after verse]

After Nehemiah charges the people 5:13: "And all the assembly said, "Amen!" and praised the Lord."

➤ **Amen used as a benediction:**

When the people of God receive a blessing, it is right and proper to seal that blessing with an amen:

Gal. 6:18 “Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen”

Phil. 4:23 “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”

- **We should use Amen to bless God as a privilege of a justified people: A taste of eternity!**

Romans 1:25 “the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen”

Romans 9:5 “Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen”

- **The whole congregation is involved in the worship of God, and the amen is one place where this involvement is most visible**

Deut. 27:15 “And all the people said, Amen, and praised the Lord”

I Chronicles 16:36 “And all the assembly said, Amen and praised the Lord”

Neh. 5:13 “Then all the people answered, Amen, Amen”

There are many ways that we can properly use AMEN during our covenant renewal worship:

- **When the Elders call for an AMEN after a Scripture reading or absolution! We should respond with a hearty AMEN!**
- **When we sing glory to God in a psalm or hymn we should conclude with a hearty AMEN!**
- **When we receive God’s blessing in the benediction**

Can we learn to do it right?

- **Well here is an challenging goal from the example of the early church:**

“Jerome commented that in the early church, when visitors used to come, they were commonly frightened at the amen – it had the sound of thunder, said by the people who understood it”

They were practicing, as should we, what we see commanded in Psalm 106:48

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: And let all the people say, Amen praise the Lord!”

- **Finally, James seems to leave things hanging with the last two verses of his Epistle:**

“19 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”

- **Not if we remember all that James has taught us AND why we are here and not in heaven with Jesus**
- **We are part of God’s eternal plan to “save His people from their sins” and this includes seeing the fullness of the gentles come into the Kingdom.**

James has given you what is needed [including today’s admonition to pray!] as a young congregation to be faithful in our lives, in our covenant families, and here at Trinity Covenant Church to joyfully serve our risen and reigning Savior, taking and proclaiming the Good News to ALL the nations!

Communion Meditation:

II Samuel 7:24 "26 So let Your name be magnified forever, saying, 'The Lord of hosts is the God over Israel.' And let the house of Your servant David be established before You. 27 For You, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, have revealed this to Your servant, saying, 'I will build you a house.' Therefore Your servant has found it in his heart to pray this prayer to You. 28 And now, O Lord God, You are God, and Your words are true, and You have promised this goodness to Your servant. 29 Now therefore, let it please You to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue forever before You; for You, O Lord God, have spoken it, and with Your blessing let the house of Your servant be blessed forever.'"