

Prayer for the Sick

Part Two

- James 5:14-16
- I promise to keep this sermon brief, as we have a Mexico mission report, and the installation of a new deacon today as well!
- Two weeks ago we began to unpack this section, by looking at verse 14: Is anyone among you sick? James refers to believers who are in the church, among you, and who have a physical sickness of some kind, most likely the kind that has them laid up at home or in the hospital. They call for the elders, plural, the men who are the spiritual shepherds of the flock. The elders come to the sick person who has taken the initiative to call (if he is able), and they anoint him with oil and pray. We talked about the oil as symbolic, a physical representation of a spiritual reality, that the elders were setting apart the sick person for special attention from God in prayer. Remember, the emphasis on this passage is prayer. Not oil, not the laying on of hands, NOT saying certain things in the right order. No, the encouragement is to look to God, who alone has the power to heal. Let's continue with this passage today, by examining verses 15 and 16 briefly. We will look at two main points James makes here: the importance of the prayer of faith, and the confession of sins.
- **The prayer of faith**
- "And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up." We will come back to what "the prayer of faith" means in a little while, but first we need to understand that when James says the prayer of faith "will save the one who is sick," he is not referring to salvation. He is referring to physical healing. He adds, "and the Lord will raise him up." Douglas Moo writes, "Salvation is never seen to be the result of prayer in the New Testament." Salvation is a gift of God that comes through grace by faith. A lost person is saved when he believes, not when he prays. In fact, if he prays but does not believe, he is not saved!
- OK, what is "the prayer of faith?" At face value, this phrase is simple. The elders are to pray with faith. Why pray any other way? Why pray if we don't believe God can heal? And why ask God to do something we don't think He will do? Remember the story in the Gospels about the boy who had a demon that kept him from speaking, and would throw the boy down, sometimes into fire or into water? The father brought him to the disciples, because Jesus wasn't around at the time, and they tried to cast the demon out. But they couldn't. Then Jesus showed up and asked what was going on and the father said the disciples had tried but failed to cast out the demon. Jesus said to the disciples, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?" Jesus saw the disciples did not have faith to cast out the demon. Then the father said to Jesus, "If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Jesus said, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes." Jesus saw that the father didn't have faith, either. Then the father cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:14-29)
- We will come back to "the prayer of faith" and what that means in a few minutes. But first, James adds, "And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven." What does that mean? What does the confession of sins have to do with the sick person? Why is that necessary?
- **The confession of sins**
- James adds to this thought in verse 16, as he writes, "Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." Interesting in these two verses that the sick person is saved and the sinner is healed. You would expect it to be the other way around, but I believe James understood the connection that often exists between physical sickness and sin. Paul did as well. Remember he said in 1 Cor. 11 that in the church in Corinth, there were people who were sick and some had even died because they were eating the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. In John 9, the disciples asked if the man was born blind because of his sin or his parents'

sin. Jesus said, neither, but so the works of God could be displayed in him. His sickness was not related to his personal sin, but to the original sin that broke the whole world. But there's also the lame man by the Pool of Bethesda whom Jesus healed, and later found Him in the temple. Jesus said to the man, "See, you are well! Sin no more that nothing worse may happen to you." There is a dual truth at work in Scripture, that on the one hand, all sickness comes from original sin. The world is broken because of it. On the other hand, there is sickness that results from personal sin. But we have to be careful here, because most sickness does not arise from personal sin. I remember in the 90's hearing some teachings that said every sickness is connected to a particular sin, so that if you have osteoporosis, it's because of bitterness. If you have MS, it's because of coveting. No! That's taking liberties with the Scripture that it does not allow, and will put people in bondage.

- So, what is James doing here when he says, "confess your sins to one another?" He is commanding the sick person to do some self-examination. I believe he is telling us to search our hearts when we get sick, and ask the Lord to search it, and confess any sins that we have not confessed, or have been hiding. That should happen **before** we call the elders to come and pray! "Confess your sins to one another."
- Final Point: does that mean, if we follow this prescription from James, that all will be healed? No. Let me give you three names. First, Trophimus. 2 Timothy 4:20, Paul writes at the end of the letter, "I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus." Do you think Paul was a godly man? Do you think Paul had faith? Do you think Paul prayed for Trophimus to be healed? I think so. Why didn't God heal him? Second, Epaphroditus. Philippians 2:25-27. Was Paul a godly man? Did Paul had faith? Do you think Paul prayed for Epaphroditus to be healed? Why did it take so long for God to heal him? Third, Paul. 2 Cor. 12:8-10.
- If this is a promise, "the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick," and it is, but not every person is healed when we pray, what gives? Because though we will hopefully always pray in faith, and we will hopefully always have faith in God to whom we pray, we will not always pray the "prayer of faith." That only comes when God is going to heal! John wrote, "And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, he hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him." 1 John 5:14-15 Jesus said, "...so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give it to you." The key is that when we pray the prayer of faith, which is given to us as a gift from God, we are praying in His name, with His authority. This kind of prayer cannot be manufactured; it is a gift from God! John Blanchard wrote, "The 'prayer offered in faith' is circular in shape; it begins and ends in heaven, in the sovereign will of God." And I would suggest that most of the time, people don't know they are praying the prayer of faith while they are praying. Sometimes God may give them assurance in their heart that He is going to heal, but not always. We look back and say, "God gave a great gift there." But when we pray and the believer is not healed in life but is healed through death, we can also say, "God gave a great gift there. Blessed be the name of the Lord!"
- So, what do we do? Confess your sins. Call for the elders. The elders will pray. God will answer according to His will. If it is His will to heal you at that time, then He will provide the prayer of faith, and He will heal. If it is not, then we can say with Jesus, as He spoke to His beloved apostle: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."
- Prayer