

James 5:13-20 – Prayer Avails Much

- Ryle's question: Do you pray?
 - Prayer is a sign of spiritual life just as breathing is a sign of physical life
 - Jesus makes the mute to speak
 - If you know prayer is powerful, then you will be encouraged to persist in prayer

I. What to Do When You Are Sad or Happy (vs. 13)

- Different times require different responses (Eccl. 3:4)
- In afflictions: be constantly in prayer
- In prosperity: be constantly in praise and thanksgiving
- In all times: be Godward

II. The Healing Power of Prayer and Confession (vs. 14-16)

- The situation described in vs. 14: serious physical illness
- Call the elders to pray for you: they are ordained to the ministry of Word and prayer
- Anoint with oil:
 - View #1 – The anointing with oil is a form of medicine
 - Luke 10:33-34, Isa. 1:6
 - This view basically means, come armed with prayer and medicine, use natural means such as medicine, and pray for healing.
 - Problems with this view:
 - Why have the elders apply the medicine?
 - The word “anoint” is never used for the application of medicine
 - The phrase “in the name of the Lord” suggests that the anointing is more than an application of medicine
 - But, we *can* and *should* use medicine as we pray for healing.
 - View #2 – The anointing with oil is a sacrament
 - The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches maintain that this is a sacrament.
 - Problems with this view:
 - No indication that the oil confers grace.
 - This is a practice that the elders of a church are to do, not a single “priest” or “bishop.”
 - View #3 – The oil is a symbol of “setting apart” or “consecration”
 - The purpose of anointing with oil is to visibly set apart someone for God's healing care. It is the elders saying, “Lord, we ask that you heal this person, we have anointed them to show that we desire your healing hand be upon this person.”
 - The oil serves as a physical symbol of the prayer request.
 - It serves as a visible reminder of God's healing care for His people.
 - The word “anoint” usually refers to a consecration or setting apart of some kind.
 - Things to remember:
 - There is no power in the oil
 - Healing is not automatic or guaranteed
 - Oil is not absolutely necessary, prayer is the main thing
- “If he has committed sins, they will be forgiven” (vs. 15)

- There is a relationship between sin and physical illness
 - The connection is not absolute, the text says “if he has committed sins”
 - Don’t totally disconnect your illnesses from sin. Pray the words of Psalm 139:23-24
 - Don’t make simplistic conclusions about the connection, as Jesus’ disciples did (John 9). Be compassionate.
- James’ call to the whole community: “confess your sins one to another” (vs. 16)
 - We are called to confess to one another, in order that we may receive physical and spiritual healing.
 - When you should confess your sins to others:
 - Confess to those you have sinned against
 - Confess when there is still a burden of guilt
 - Confess things hidden from the light
 - We live in fellowship with one another under the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:6-9)
 - Dietrich Bonhoeffer:
 - *In confession the light of the Gospel breaks into the darkness and seclusion of the heart. The sin must be brought into the light. The unexpressed must be openly spoken and acknowledged. Since the confession of sin is made in the presence of a Christian brother, the last stronghold of self-justification is abandoned. The sinner surrenders; he gives up all his evil. He gives his heart to God, and he finds the forgiveness of all his sin in the fellowship of Jesus Christ and his brother.*
 - *He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: But whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy. (Prov. 28:13)*

III. The Fervent Prayer of the Righteous Avails Much (vs. 16-18)

- The righteous man: a description of every Christian
- Prayer actually does things, it avails much
- The example of Elijah:
 - A powerful example of prayer availing much (1 Kings 17:1)
 - The point: Elijah is a guy just like us, therefore take hold of the power of prayer, and pray for God to do great things.

IV. Rescue Operations for Wanderers (Vs. 19-20)

- James ends his letter like he began it: always calling to action.
- James continues to exhort us to be doers of the Word. Now he calls us to help others also be doers.
- We have a corporate responsibility to give oversight to one another. Sheep watch out for fellow sheep.
- It’s a weighty matter: souls are at stake. When you restore a wanderer, you are used by God to save a soul from hell.

V. Application

- Pray
 - Pray fervently
 - Pray Persistently
- Confess your sins to others
 - Experience the freedom and joy of confession