

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **Let's Pray James 5:13-18 Part Three**

We have begun to examine **James 5:13-18**. Let us read this passage **(13) "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises. (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 offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. (16) Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. (17) Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. (18) And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit."** This passage of scripture without a doubt focuses on the need of the church to be committed to prayer. Those who possess a saving or living faith will find themselves striving to do this. And those who do not possess a saving or living faith will not find themselves striving to do this.

I have altered the outline of this passage since the message I gave two weeks ago. I have done this for clarity. Therefore, rather than breaking this passage into three parts in order to emphasize three different aspects of prayer, I have now chosen to simply break the passage into two parts. Though I have changed the outline, none of the content has changed.

The area that I labeled "prayer and comfort" I have relabeled "Prayers that we pray in response to what is happening in our lives (James 5:13)". The prayers that we pray in response to what is happening in our lives fall into two broad categories . The first category would be those prayers that we pray in response to difficult times. Look at **James 5:13 "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. And the second category would be those prayers that we pray in response to good times.** Look at the rest of **V. 13 " .....Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises."** Singing praise is just another form of prayer. What is the proper response to the good times and the bad times in our lives? Prayer. And that is exactly what James is exhorting us to do in **V. 13**. If we obey these commands we will find our prayer lives becoming unceasing and hopefully, as natural as breathing.

But as I shared with you last week, before we can ever truly be successful at obeying these commands, we must be convinced of this one glorious truth: "God is love." Because I know God loves me, I will pray when I am suffering. And because I know that God loves me, I will sing praise when I am cheerful. How does one go about becoming convinced of the fact that God is love? It is by growing in our appreciation of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, or in other words, growing in our appreciation of the gospel of Christ. Hopefully as we continue to confess our sin and to seek nourishment from the Word of God, our appreciation for the gospel will continually grow deeper and stronger. And this growing appreciation for the gospel will drive us to pray when we are suffering and to sing praise when we are cheerful because we know God is love.

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

We are now moving on to the second area of prayer that this passage emphasizes: Prayers that others pray in response to what is happening in our lives, or in other words, intercessory prayer (James 5:14-18).

The first area of intercessory prayer is the prayer of the elders for the sick (James 5:14-15). Let us read **James 5:14-15, .....** **(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 offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.”**

Before we begin to examine this passage of Scripture, I would like to say that this passage of Scripture easily is the most controversial in the whole epistle of James. There are many very excellent biblical scholars who disagree about the interpretation of this passage. Over the next several weeks I will do my best to present to you as clearly as possible the view that I hold and why.

I would hope that after we finish our examination of these two verses we will have a greater understanding of the role of elders in respect to sickness in the early church and how it applies today. I would hope that our study of these two verses will aid us in the development of our own personal convictions concerning this passage and its present day applications. Let's begin by looking at the problem.

### THE PROBLEM

In **V. 13** James was speaking about very general and basic areas of our lives. **“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises.”** But James, beginning in verse 14, moves from the general to the specific and focuses on one particular problem in respect to suffering and that is physical sickness. Look at the beginning of **V. 14 “Is any among you sick?**

In the time of Christ and the apostles physical sickness was a major problem. People were not vaccinated for measles, mumps, chicken pox, polio, smallpox or whooping cough. There were no antibiotics available to treat infections. There were no medications available to treat heart disease. Chemotherapy was not available to treat cancer, and surgical options were extremely limited. When an individual became sick in the time of the apostles, the medical community offered very little help. So, it is not surprising that people would turn to prayer for physical healing, and that is exactly what we see at the beginning of **V. 14.**

Someone might ask, “Do we have to assume that the person who is sick in **V. 14** is physically sick? Couldn't we understand that the person referred to as “sick” in **V. 14** is spiritually weak rather than physically sick?” The answer to that question is, yes, it is possible. In fact, there are a few commentators who actually take this position. But though there are a few commentators who support this view, the vast majority of commentators favor interpreting the word “sick” as referring to physical sickness rather than spiritual weakness.

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

I believe after careful study that this is the best interpretation based on my study using word meanings and relationships; the immediate, book and biblical context; as well as the historical setting. I could spend a great deal of time detailing for you why I believe sick is referring to physical healing rather than spiritual weakness, but in light of the fact that my position is held by the vast majority of Bible commentators and also appears to be supported by the translators of KJV, NKJV, NIV and the NAS Bible translations, I believe that our time this weekend would be best used by explaining how physical healing fits into the context and its implications for us today.

What is the problem that James, beginning in V. 14, calls his readers to address in prayer? I believe that it is the problem of physical sickness.

### THE RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM

As we consider the biblical response to the problem of physical illness among the readers of this epistle, there were two groups impacted. The first group that is impacted among the readers of this epistle was of course the sick.

Certainly the readers of this epistle who were suffering physically would have found an encouragement in V. 13 to pray for physical healing if they were in fact sick. Certainly this would have been an excellent initial response to their physical situation. But, James apparently is not satisfied with this initial, though excellent, response. He wants those who are sick to go further. So again let us look at **V. 14** and see what James tells the physically sick to do.

**“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.”** When the readers of this epistle were suffering physical illness, they were not only to personally pray for their healing but they were also to enlist the elders of the church to pray. Look at the very first part of the verse, **“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him.”**

If all the readers of this epistle who were sick saw this injunction as applying to them specifically irregardless or irrespective of the severity of their illness, the elders certainly would have had their hands full. Is this how we are to understand this injunction? I don't believe so.

I believe that our understanding of who James had in mind when he referred to the sick is qualified by the phrase, **“Let him call for the elders and let them pray over him.....”** James exhortation to the sick in V. 14 appears to be directed exclusively to the seriously ill. This is implied in two different ways in the phrase that we have just read.

The severity of the illness is implied when the sick were told to call for the elders rather than to go to the elders (Mark 5:21-24; Luke 7:2-10; John 11). I believe that the reason for this is simple. They were too physically sick to either go by themselves or be transported by others.

This is consistent with what we see in the Gospels in respect to the healing ministry of Christ. We continually see the sick either coming or being brought to Christ but we never see Christ being called to a particular sick person unless that person was deathly ill.

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

Jairus called Jesus to come and lay His hands on his daughter, who the Bible tells us was at the point of death, according to Mark 5:21-24. A centurion sent servants to Jesus to ask Him to come and save the life of a slave who the Bible tells us was about to die in Luke 7:2-10. Of course there were the sisters of Lazarus, who called for Jesus to come and help their brother who obviously was about to die, in John 11. James exhortation to the sick in V. 14 appears to be directed exclusively to the seriously ill. Why? First of all, the sick were told to call for the elders rather than to go to the elders.

Secondly, the severity of the illness is implied when the elders are told to pray over him rather than pray for him. The word “over” clearly conveys to us the image of the elders actually standing over someone who is lying down. Why would they be lying down? They are lying down because they are too physically sick to get up.

I believe for these two reasons that the exhortation to the sick in V. 14 is limited to the seriously ill. What is the Lord commanding the readers of this epistle to do when they were seriously ill? Based on V. 14 the Lord expected them to call for the elders in order that they might be prayed over.

As we continue, consider the biblical response to the problem of physical illness among the readers of this epistle. As I shared, there were two groups impacted. The first group that is impacted among the readers of this epistle was of course the sick. The second group that was impacted among the readers were the elders.

If the sick, who were seriously ill, were being exhorted to call for the elders for the purpose of prayer, what then was the responsibility of the elders? When the elders received a call from someone in their congregation who was seriously ill, the responsibility of the elders was to go and to pray over them.

It appears to me from the flow of the passage that as they were praying over the sick individual, they were at the same time to anoint the sick individual with oil in the name of the Lord.

The anointing with oil has nothing to do with the healing of the sick person. We know this because V. 15 tells us that it is the prayer offered in faith which actually brings about the healing. If this is so, then what is the significance of the oil? I do not believe that the oil was medicinal for the simple reason that the oil is not identified as the means of healing. I do not believe that it was for refreshment because I do not believe that there would be any need for refreshment beyond the actual healing which was expected. Rather, I believe that the oil was simply a symbol of the healing power and presence of God as the elders prayed in the name of the Lord.

What was the significance of praying in the name of the Lord? In Peter David’s commentary on this epistle, he said the following concerning this phrase, “The anointing is ‘In the name of the Lord’. The calling out of Christ’s name in baptism (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; Mt. 28:19) .... and in the rites of healing and exorcism was normal in the early church (Mk. 9:38; Lk. 10:17; Acts 3:6, 16, 16:4:7, 10; 9:34); this practice indicates that in calling out the name, the baptizer/healer/exorcist was acting as the representative of God calling upon the power of God.”

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

When the elders received a call from someone in their congregation who was seriously ill, the responsibility of the elders was to go and to pray over them in the name of the Lord, or in other words, pray over them as the representative of God while calling upon the power of God to heal. Either before or while they were praying, they were to anoint the sick person with oil, which I believe was symbolic of the healing power and presence of God, in whose name they were praying.

Does this surprise you that the elders would be called to the bedside of a seriously ill person? You might have thought their responsibilities would be limited strictly to “spiritual issues” verses the “practical issues” of life that people struggle with such as physical illness. Let me ask you this question: What is the basic responsibility of elders? The basic responsibility of elders is the general pastoral oversight of the local church, which I believe includes not only the spiritual well-being of the people but also the practical care of the people as well (Acts 11:27-30).

Listen to the words of Luke in “**Acts 11:27-30, “Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. (28) And one of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. (29) And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. (30) And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.”** Why would they send this financial gift that was intended to meet the physical needs of the people to the elders? They would send it to the elders because they were the overseers of the church; responsible not only for the spiritual well-being of the people but also the practical care of the people as well.”

Christ, who is the Good Shepherd, out of a heart of compassion, responded to the physical needs of those who called to Him for help and the elders of the church need to share that same heart of compassion. The elders need to respond to those who ask for help to the level of their ability and in accordance with the teachings of the Word of God.

### CONCLUSION

James 5:13-18 is calling the church to pray. We are to pray in good times and we are to pray in bad times. In addition to the prayers that we pray for ourselves, which we have considered in V. 13, we are encouraged to ask others to pray for us as well in VV. 14-18.

This weekend we have just begun examining this section of scripture. This section of Scripture begins in verses 14-15 by James commanding those who were seriously ill amongst his readers to reach out to the elders for intercessory prayer. My hope is that as we examine these two verses, we will begin to have a greater appreciation of the role of elders in respect to sickness in the early church and how it applies today.

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

In examining V. 14 we have only accomplished 1/2 of the goal. We have seen that elders were not indifferent to those suffering physically. In fact, when called to the bedside of someone who was seriously ill for prayer, they would go and they would pray, anointing the person who was sick with oil in the name of the Lord. But in light of our goal for this study, we still do not know how it applies today. Hopefully, if you are able to come back next week and we examine V. 15, I will share with you what I believe the answer to be.