

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Let's Pray James 5:14-18 Part Seven

We are continuing our examination of James 5:13-18. I have broken this passage into two major parts. The first part in James 5:13 I have entitled, "Prayers that we pray in response to what is happening in our lives." The second part in James 5:14-18 I have entitled "Prayers that we pray in response to what is happening in each other's lives." Or in other words, intercessory prayer.

We began our initial examination of intercessory prayer by looking at the intercessory prayer of the elders for the sick in James 5:14-15. Let us read this passage **(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.**" What did we discover as a result of our examination of this passage?

We have discovered that a seriously ill person was expected to call for the elders. We have discovered that the elders were expected to pray over the sick individual anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. We have discovered that the expectation of the sick individual, as well as the expectation of the elders of these dispersed Jewish congregations was that a healing would in fact take place. We also, discovered that this expectation should not have been surprising in light of the fact that it was God's plan that the gospel of Christ be confirmed through signs and wonders according to Heb. 2:3-4. We finally discovered, not by an examination of this passage or verse but rather by an examination of the biblical record in general, that once God confirmed a critical message through special messengers performing signs and wonders, that message did not need to be reconfirmed again in subsequent generations through signs and wonders. How does all of this that we learn from James 5:14,15 and the Scriptures in general apply to us today? Though the elders of the dispersed Jewish congregations had been given authority to heal, that authority to heal is no longer given to present day church elders since the message of the gospel had long ago been confirmed during the apostolic era.

The conclusion that I have personally come to concerning James 5:14-15 does not diminish the power of prayer but rather hopefully clarifies for you the diminishing role of certain individuals to perform signs and wonders as the gospel of Christ was confirmed, whether we are speaking of the apostles, those possessing the gift of healing or in this case in James 5:14-15, the elders.

We are examining the subject of "Intercessory prayer" in James 5:14-18. The first area of intercessory prayer that we have considered is the intercessory prayer of the elders for the sick in James 5:14,15.

The second area of intercessory prayer that we have begun to consider in James 5:16-18 is the intercessory prayers of the saints. Let us read this passage. **"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.**

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(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.”

In view of the incredible display of healing power through the intercessory prayers of the elders in VV. 14-15, James, in these verses appealed for the wider use of intercessory prayer in the congregation as a whole in VV. 16-18.

As we considered these verses two weeks ago, I asked the question, “What does James share with us in these verses that would encourage a wider use of intercessory prayer amongst the saints?”

James first of all shares with us what we are to do. Let us read the very part of **V. 16, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another.”** James is commanding us to do two things. He commands us to confess our sins to one another. He commands us to pray for one another. James is not commanding us to confess our sins in order to be forgiven, rather it appears that James is commanding his readers to confess their sins to one another for the purpose of mutual prayer.

How else does James encourage all believers, not just the elders of these dispersed congregations, to pray for one another? He encourages us to pray for one another by telling us what we are to hope for. Let us look again at the passage **“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.”** We are to hope for healing.

What does this mean? It primarily involves the hope for physical healing but this does not at all exclude the hope for a spiritual healing as well. At the end of V. 15, James introduces to us the possibility that some people who are seriously ill may have become seriously ill because of a sinful lifestyle. Look again at these verses **“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.”** What should people do in light of the possibility that some illness is the result of a sinful lifestyle? Verse 16 answers that question. “Therefore” in light of what you have learned in VV. 14-15 do what I am telling you in V. 16.

Not all sin leads to illness and not all illness is because of sin but certainly the Scriptures do in fact teach that if sin is not dealt with in a person's life, physical illness may be the result. Confessing our sins and praying for one another should be a way of life for us and it should, based on this passage, be especially on our mind when we become sick. If we do this, we have the hope for a physical, as well as, perhaps a spiritual healing.

Does this mean that if we do these two things, that healing will always be guaranteed? The answer, of course, is no. Confessing our sins to one another and praying for one another in no way guarantees a healing. The passage does not say that you “will be healed.” It tells us to do these things so that we “may be healed.” Though there is not the guarantee that we find in VV. 14-15 in respect to the prayers of the elders, James certainly encourages us to believe that it is possible that a healing might in fact take place if we are faithful to do what he says.

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How else does James encourage all believers, not just the elders of these dispersed congregations, to involve themselves in praying for their brothers and sisters in Christ? He begins by telling us what we are to do, then he tells us what we are to hope for, and finally, he tell us what we can count on.

WHAT WE CAN COUNT ON

Remember what I have shared with you based on the first part of V. 16? Confessing our sins and praying for one another should be a way of life for us and it should especially be on our mind when we are physically sick, knowing that our sickness might be the result of a sinful lifestyle.

But who should we seek out for the purpose of confession and for prayer? Should we confess our sins to just anyone? Should we trust just anyone to pray for our spiritual victory and for our physical healing? Certainly we can confess our sin to anyone that we like. We can ask anyone to pray for us that we might have victory over our sin and perhaps experience a physical healing. But if you want to experience the true power of intercessory prayer, then it would be important that you seek out righteous men and women for that purpose.

Let us read **V. 16** once again: **“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.”** The verse does not say, **“... the effective prayer of an unrighteous man can accomplish much.”** If we in fact do this; if we would in fact humble ourselves in this way doing exactly what this verse tells us to do, then what can we count on? We can count on the effective prayer of a righteous man accomplishing much.

A righteous man is not talking about a man who is merely saved. It is talking about a man who is fully consecrated to the Lord. It is talking about a man who is striving to live his life pleasing to the Lord.

The prayers of righteous people are effective. The word “effective” (ENERGOUMENE) etymologically is a compound term denoting a power working inwardly. The prayers of righteous people are energized. They are actually able to accomplish things. Unfortunately, the word “effective” that we find in the NAS has been translated in the KJV “fervent.” This gives us the impression that if we increase our passion while praying we increase the potency of our prayers. This is not true. What makes prayers powerful is not fervency but personal righteousness.

If you are looking for someone to pray for you. please do not go to someone who impresses you with their eloquent prayers. Do not go to someone who impresses you with their passionate petitions. Go to someone who impresses you with their pursuit of holiness. Go to someone who is aware of their sin and successfully struggling against it.

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After you have gone to them enlisting their help, continue to encourage them to pray for you. In **Luke 11:5-13**, Christ shares a parable with his disciples concerning a man who goes to his neighbor at midnight to ask for three loaves of bread. When his neighbor friend does not immediately get up in order to respond to the request Jesus says in **V. 8**, **“I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs.”** When a righteous man or woman does not initially get what he prays for, he is not encouraged to raise his voice or begin shouting or in other words to become more fervent. He is simply encouraged to keep petitioning.

The prayers of righteous people are powerful. The continual persistent prayers of righteous people are powerful. Their prayers are powerful because their prayers are energized and they are energized because they are righteous.

Does this mean righteous people, when they commit themselves to persistent prayer, have a blank check from God to ask whatever they want and it will be done? Of course the answer to this question is no! How does the Lord’s prayer begin? **“Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name Thy Kingdom come Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”** Those who are fully consecrated to the Lord only want the Lord’s will to be done. Therefore the righteous man only wants the will of God to be done. If this were not true, then he could not be described as a righteous man.

But though the righteous man may not desire that anything but the will of God be done, it is the will of God that the effective prayer of a righteous man availeth much. God wants to do powerful things through the prayers of righteous men.

Are you struggling with sin in your life? Are you finding it difficult to break away from something that is evil? Do you have little or no strength to pursue that which is good? Find a righteous man. Find a righteous woman and confess your sin to them and ask them to pray for you. Can those prayers make a difference? Of course they can. Why? The effective prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Two weeks ago, after I shared with you the importance of confession of sin for the purpose of prayer, a man came up to me after the service and did exactly that. He told me about what he was struggling with and then asked me to pray for him. He has been on my mind and in my prayers ever since.

Are you physically sick? Are you struggling with your physical health? What should you do? Find a righteous man. Find a righteous woman. Ask them to pray for you? Can those prayers make a difference? Of course they can. Why? The effective prayer of a righteous man availeth much. We can count on this. The Scriptures declare this. It is God’s will that great things to be done through the prayers of righteous men and women.

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We as a congregation have not yet begun to tap the full power of intercessory prayer. But we can!!! All we have to have are righteous men and women who are fully consecrated to God, who are prepared to pray, and people who are seeking to be fully consecrated to God in our congregation who are willing to follow the instructions given to us here in V. 16.

The passage tells us **“That the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”** How much can it accomplish? Look at the illustration that James gives us in **James 5:17-18, “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.** Now that is a lot of power.

Let us look quickly at what James says about Elijah. He reminds his readers, though Elijah was a prophet he **“was a man with a nature like ours.”** The Bible records for us that he was hungry (1 Kings 17:11); afraid (1 Kings 19:3), and depressed (1 Kings 19:3, 9-14). Yet when **“He prayed earnestly** (which literally means “he prayed with prayer”), incredible things happened. **“It did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.”** Elijah’s prayers, the effective prayers of a righteous man, both created and ended a devastating three-and-one-half-year drought. While **1 Kings 17** records the drought, only James gives it duration and links it to the prayers of Elijah.

Some people might question the power of prayer to bring about a spiritual healing. Some people might question the power of prayer to bring about a physical healing. But let us know this: that the power of prayer has the potential of impacting the entire world if righteous men and women pray.

CONCLUSION

I shared with you that my hope in our examination of these three verses would be that you not only have a greater understanding of this passage but a greater appreciation of the power of prayer, particularly intercessory prayer. I would certainly hope that has been accomplished.

It may be that the authority to heal granted to special groups of people during the apostolic period may have passed such as the elders of these Jewish churches of the dispersion but this does not mean that the prayers of the saints for one another do not have healing power, **“Therefore let us confess our faults to one another and pray for one another” THIS IS WHAT WE ARE TO DO.** Why? **“that we may be healed.” THIS IS WHAT WE ARE TO HOPE FOR.** Why? Because **“.....the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” THIS IS WHAT WE CAN COUNT ON.**