

Pentecost 18 – Proper 21

September 25-26, 2021

A Study on James 5:13-20

The pastors and their house churches in Samaria and Judea to whom James wrote this pastoral letter from Jerusalem were being persecuted by the leaders of the synagogues in their local communities. They were not formally accused and condemned and executed as their Lord had been, but they were being shunned socially and boycotted economically. Though they followed the ceremonial law, allegiance to Jesus as the Messiah effectively isolated them and reduced many to poverty. James wanted to close with pastoral encouragements to patience and faithfulness. He set the stage by inserting a formal tirade of judgment addressed to their oppressors—similar to the Old Testament declarations of judgment against pagan nations who troubled Israel that were interspersed in books addressed to God's people.

“Power of Prayer”

“James has been calling sinners to repentance, and here he exhorts the entire congregation to do the same. No aspect of our lives is private, only between ‘me and God.’ We hide behind facades of perfection, but sin and its consequences pervade every aspect of our lives. Left on our own, we would perish. But our Lord has given us a community of fellow saint to hear our confession, pray for our needs, and restore us when we err. We hear His Gospel from them. God continuously sends into our lives those who pray for us, sing praise with us, and speak God's words of forgiveness to us. As His people, healed in body and soul, we may approach His throne of grace with confidence.” *(from the Lutheran Study Bible – CPH-2005)*

1. Prayer is so important. What aspects of prayer is James emphasizing in vs. 13-18?

- v. 13 - We should go to God first when we are in trouble. Only he can truly help us.
- v. 14 & 16 - We should pray for the healing of sickness as a group of faithful believers, believing that God has the power to heal us if it is his will.
- v. 15 - When we ask for forgiveness, we will be forgiven. God will also rid us of the poison of anger and hatred towards others, and the effects it can have on our lives.
- v. 16 - We are invited to confess our sins to each other so that we can lift each other up in prayer. If a sin is between two people, we should approach each other to ask for forgiveness, taking great care not to gossip.
- v. 17 - There is great power in prayer. God can do mighty things through our prayers.

James 5:13-20

¹³ Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. 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 one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. ¹⁹ My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰ let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

2. What is meant by anointing with oil in v. 14?

In Luke 10:34 we hear about the Good Samaritan using oil to dress the wounds on the beaten man. This would have been a very soothing, healing thing given the arid land in which they lived. Today, we may not use oil to anoint a person who is ill but we do reach out with other soothing, healing gestures such as touching, praying with someone, encouraging, visiting, or taking care of physical needs while someone is recuperating.

3. Why is it our duty to gently and lovingly guide someone back to a close relationship with God when they have gone astray?

It is our duty because God commands us to vs. 19 & 20. We need to look out for one another, strengthen and encourage each other to follow God till the end of our lives. In Galatians 6:1-2, Paul adds another thought. Neglecting to “restore him gently” may result in our being tempted by the same sin! God uses us to bring his love, care and encouragement to his people—what an awesome thought!

In conclusion, James teaches us what our faith looks like in action on a day-to-day basis. When we read James, it reminds us how God wants us to live. May God bless your efforts to live out your faith daily for his glory.