

“PRAYER SHOULD COME FIRST”**Part 11****James 5:13-18***(Available on Cassette Tape)*

The Lord Jesus Christ taught his disciples how to pray. The apostle Paul told Christ’s followers to “pray continually” and our text for today says, “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” Therefore, let’s consider the power of prayer and its effect on us and others.

*Biblical Teaching Made Relevant in Today’s World
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I. Prayer Works

Our first business as believers is to give ourselves to prayer. Prayer should be a conversation that runs through the day. Paul said we are to “pray without ceasing” because prayer works! It rescues, it heals and it gives peace. The Christian’s most powerful resource is communion with God through prayer. The results are often greater than we thought possible. Some people see prayer as a last resort to be tried when all else fails. This approach is backward. Prayer should come first.

Prayer is conversing with God. Words may be used, but God’s Spirit hears our concerns even if they amount to just groaning as Romans 8:26 teaches. Prayer is acknowledging to Almighty God that we do not have all the answers – he does. We are not in total control of our circumstances – he is.

II. Prayer Should Come First

JAMES 5:13-18 says, “Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.”

To the sick and physically incapacitated, James says, “... call the elders of the church to pray over you and anoint you with oil in the name of the Lord.” The instructions are clear. There have been times when elders and I have anointed the sick with oil and they have been healed. Other times God has not seen fit to heal that person. (verses 14-15a)

In scripture, oil was both a medicine (see the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37) and a symbol of the Spirit of God (as used in anointing kings – see 1 Samuel 16:1-13). Thus, Christians should not separate the physical and the spiritual; Jesus Christ is Lord over both the body and the Spirit. However, the question remains, “Why do many Christians refuse to call the elders of the church to pray over them?” Could it be a lack of biblical understanding or a lack of faith or pride?

Starting with verse 15b, James makes a distinction between a person being physically sick and a person sin-sick, that is sick because of sinning. The Greek New Testament says, “If he has been constantly sinning.” Scripture indicates not all sickness is due to sin, but sometimes sickness is due to sinning. This truth is brought out in 1 Corinthians 11:30, “For this reason many are weak and sickly among you.”

Christians should confess their sins first to the Lord (1 John 1:9) then to the person who has been affected by their sin and also to pray for each other to be healed. (verse 16) Keep in mind there is no scriptural base for confessing to a pastor or priest; though, there may be times this can be helpful. We must never confess sin beyond the circle of that sin’s influence. Private sin requires private confession. Public sin requires public confession.

James’ central point is expressed in verse 16b, “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” It is “the prayer offered in faith”, (verse 15a) not the anointing with oil that heals. What is “the prayer of faith” (NKJV) that heals the sick? The answer is given to us in 1 John 5:14-15. If we pray according to God’s will, he hears us. The “prayer of faith” is a prayer offered when we know the will of God.

Is it God’s will to heal every person? No. When we don’t know with certainty, we should pray, “If it is your will, heal this person, Lord Jesus; your will be done.” Those who claim it is God’s will to heal every person, (and if God does not, it is due to a lack of faith on the part of the sick person) are denying both Scripture and experience.

In verses 17 and 18, we have the example of Elijah – a man who prayed earnestly. We should not overlook the phrase, “just like us.” Elijah was a man who doubted and hesitated “just like us.” His usefulness to God was in his ordinariness, “just like us.” He prayed in faith and obeyed the LORD, and that is all our Heavenly Father asks of us!

SUMMARY & APPLICATION FOR OUR LIVES

James gives practical advice on the power of prayer, but he also challenges believers to live by faith and be obedient to God’s instructions to use prayer and anoint with oil when in trouble or when sick. In reality this teaching is all about obedient faith.

The next time you are in trouble or sick, will you practice what this teaching places before you or will you rationalize it away? Amen