

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

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

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 build prayer into their lives. Those who do not possess a saving or living faith will not find themselves striving to build prayer into their lives.

I have broken this passage into two major parts. The first part I have entitled 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. First of all there are prayers that we pray in response to difficult times. Look at **James 5:13, “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.”** Secondly, there are the prayers that we pray in response to good times. Look at the rest of **V. 13: “Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises.”** What is the proper response to the good times and the bad times in our lives? Prayer. 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.

We have now moved 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). I would hope that this section from **VV. 14-18** will minister greatly to our lives. I would hope that we will come to have a much greater appreciation of the power of intercessory prayer by the time we finish this passage.

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.** Again, I would like to remind you that this passage of Scripture is easily the most controversial in the whole epistle of James. There are many very excellent biblical scholars who disagree about the interpretation of this passage. I am not here this weekend to give you all the possible interpretations. My purpose is to share with you what I believe is the best interpretation of this passage and why.

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It is your responsibility to check out what I say and see if what I am sharing with you is true.

My hope is 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. Last week, we hopefully accomplished the first half of that goal. After our examination of **V. 14**, I believe that we discovered that the elders of the church clearly were involved in ministering to the sick. Let us read **V. 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.”** The plain literal sense of our English translations, I believe, clearly indicate that the elders were in fact involved in ministering to the physically ill.

Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost and that was His primary concern. But it is also true that Christ, who is the Good Shepherd, out of a heart of compassion; responded to the physical needs of those who called for help. The elders need to have that same heart of compassion by also demonstrating a willingness to pray for the healing of individuals who specifically ask them to intercede for them in prayer.

This weekend we will continue to build our understanding of the elders' ministry to the sick amongst the readers of this epistle as we look at **V. 15**. Let us begin by considering the issue of expectations. First of all, let us look at the expectations of the readers of this epistle in the time of James. When the elders prayed for the seriously ill, would the readers have expected a healing?

Let us again 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.”** As elders prayed for the seriously ill, in accordance with the instructions given in V. 14, the readers of this epistle in the time of James would have expected a healing to take place.

Why? Because James, the brother of Jesus, the leader of the church in Jerusalem who wrote this epistle under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, made it clear to them that this was God's will. What does **1 John 5:14** tell us? **“And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”** Was it the will of God for the seriously ill to call for the elders? Yes. Was it the will of God for elders to pray over the sick anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord? Yes. Was it the will of God for the sick individual to be healed? Yes.

Verse 15 does not say, **“and the prayer offered in faith may restore the one who is sick, and the Lord may raise him up.....”** Rather it says, **“the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.....”** How much more clear can a passage of Scripture be?

Yet many well-meaning Christians today are continually rejecting the plain literal sense of the word “will” in James 5:14 and in effect reject what the passage is clearly teaching. Certainly we would not do this with other Scriptures.

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Let me read for you **Matt. 10:28-29** “**Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. (29) Take my yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls.**” No one would think of rejecting the plain literal sense of “**will**” or “**shall**” in this passage. Certainly we would never think to read this passage “**and I will give you rest**” and in our minds choose to understand it “**may give you rest.**” That would be totally unacceptable and it should also be unacceptable here when we are reading **James 5:14.**

The sick, when they received this instruction from James, I believe would have had the expectation that when the elders prayed that they would be healed. That would also be the expectation of the elders as well.

I believe that this expectation on the part of the elders is seen in **V. 15.** Let us look again at the verse: What does it say? “**and the prayer (the prayer of the elders) offered in faith will restore the one who is sick.....**” Notice the phrase “**offered in faith.**”

D. Edmond Hiebert, in his commentary on the Epistle of James, says the followings, “The prayer offered in faith (HE EUCHE TES PISTEO, the prayer of faith”) points to a specific prayer; the definite article with both nouns makes the expression very specific, not just any kind of prayer.” This was not some kind of generic prayer. It was very specific prayer and it would seem to be filled with expectation. What was the expectation of the elders? The expectation of the elders as they offered their prayer in faith was that the sick person would be healed.

Should this kind of miraculous expectation have been shocking to the readers of this epistle? I don’t believe so. Why is this? The expectation that a healing would take place should not be surprising to the readers of this epistle or the elders because miracles were common in the church when the Epistle of James was written. The readers of this epistle would have had no problem taking the plain literal sense of the words that James had written in **VV. 14,15** and expect miraculous healings to occur in response to the prayer offered in faith by the elders.

Let me ask you this question: When was James written? Internal evidence places this epistle as early as 45 AD. This means that this epistle was written long before the Jerusalem council. This means that this epistle was written long before Paul’s first missionary journey. Why is this significant?

The early date of this epistle is significant because the closer we get to the birth of the church and the early ministry of the apostles, the greater the incidence of miraculous healing (Acts 2:43; 5:15-16). Let me see if I can demonstrate this for you.

Acts 2:43 “**And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.**” How many signs and wonders were being done? It says many signs and wonders were being done. Who were performing these signs and wonders? The apostles were performing these signs and wonders. There may have been other believers who performed miracles in Jerusalem but this is not apparent from the Scriptures.

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It appears that the apostles were the initial source of miraculous activity in the church. To give you a sense of the dynamic of the apostle's healing ministry, listen to the words of **Acts 5:15-16**:

“As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them, as he passed by. (16) Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.” Who were these sick people being healed by? It would appear that they were being healed by the apostles. How many of the sick were healed? All of them. Would you say that there was an expectation on the part of the apostles as well as the sick that they would be healed? The answer would have to be, Yes! Certainly there was an expectation that there would be a healing. It was the will of God that at this time in the history of the church the apostles would heal.

What was the purpose for this extraordinary healing ministry of the apostles? We do not have to guess; the Scriptures tell us. The purpose of the healing ministry of the apostles was to confirm the Gospel message (Heb. 2:1-4). Listen to the words of **Heb. 2:1-4** **“For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. (2) For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense. (3) How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, and it was confirmed to us by those who heard (or in other words the apostles) (4) God bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.”** How were people in Jerusalem being persuaded that the gospel message was actually true? It was through the signs and wonders performed by the Apostles.

If you were a sick person living in Jerusalem during the time of the early church, during the time when it was God's expressed will to confirm the message being preached through signs and wonders, I would assume that you would not hesitate to confidently seek help from the apostles when you were sick.

But, let me ask you another question: Did this miraculous healing ministry in the early church spread beyond the Apostles? And the answer is yes. Where did it spread to initially? I believe that the healing ministry spread from the apostles in Jerusalem to the elders of these Jewish congregations that James is writing to in this epistle (James 5:14-15).

I would like to take us back in time to Jerusalem in 35 AD, two years after the crucifixion of Christ. What significant event took place in that year? Stephen, under the leadership of Saul of Tarsus, who we now know as the Apostle Paul, was stoned to death in 35 AD. It was on that day that a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem which resulted in its dispersion throughout Judea and Samaria with the exception of the Apostles(Acts 8:1). Listen to **Acts 8:1**, **“And Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”**

The Church in Jerusalem, which at this point in time was all Jewish, has now been dispersed. James is writing this epistle to those dispersed Jews.

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Listen to the words of **James 1:1** “**James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve who are dispersed abroad, greetings.**”

Let me ask you a question: If the miracles of healing were primarily if not exclusively being done by the apostles in Jerusalem before the dispersion, then would the dispersion of the Jewish Christians cut them off from the possibility of miraculous healing, or would they, when they were sick, have to find their way back to Jerusalem from which they just fled? I believe James 5:14-15 answers this question. Before the dispersion it appears that the authority to heal resided primarily, if not exclusively, with the apostles. But after the dispersion of the Jewish Christians from Jerusalem, it appears that the authority to miraculously heal through the power of prayer was extended to the elders of these dispersed Jewish congregations as well. Where do we see this taught in the Scriptures? We see it taught here in **James 5:14-15**.

Why would this have been done? I suspect it was for the same reason the apostles had been given authority to heal and that was to confirm the message of the gospel which these dispersed Jewish Christians confessed.

Did the authority to heal extend beyond the apostles in Jerusalem? Did the authority to heal extend beyond the elders of these dispersed Jewish congregations? The answer I believe is yes! Listen to **1 Cor. 12:7-9** “**But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (8) For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; (9) to another faith by the same Spirit and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit.**” As the church expanded beyond Jerusalem and the healing ministry of the apostles, and after it expanded beyond the elders of the dispersed congregations in Judea and Samaria, it appears that certain individuals were blessed with the gift of healing within many Gentile congregations (1 Cor. 12:4-12).

Now, I would like to make an interesting observation. No one questions that the gift of healing was in fact given to certain believers by the Lord within Gentile congregations during the Apostolic era based solely on this one passage we read from **1 Cor. 12:7**, which is the only passage in the New Testament that refers to this particular gift. Yet there are those who would find it difficult to accept that the authority to heal was also granted to the elders of early Jewish congregations of the dispersion based on this passage.

Who initially was entrusted with the authority to heal when the church was given birth in Jerusalem? I believe that the apostles were given the authority to heal. I then believe that authority was extended beyond Jerusalem and the apostles during the dispersion to the elders of Jewish congregations and finally to those specific individuals in the Gentile churches who were given the gift of healing.

Now, let us look again at **V. 15** and complete the verse, “**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 is this all about? How did sins get involved in our discussion of healing?

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The New Testament makes it clear that some illnesses are in fact the product of sin (Mark 2:1-12; 1 Cor. 11:27-30). Not all illnesses, but some. This is what I believe James is alluding to here in this passage. Is there any example of this in Scripture where a person comes for physical healing and in the process of being physically healed has their sins forgiven? Yes.

You might remember the story of the paralytic who was brought to Jesus for healing and had to be lowered down through a roof by his friends in Mark 2:1-12. Do you remember the response of Jesus to their efforts, **“And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, “My son your sins are forgiven.”** What was the obvious need of the paralytic? The obvious need was physical healing. That is why he came. But he also needed to be healed spiritually and Jesus did both.

Those who, like the paralytic in Mark 2, humbled themselves before the Lord and approached the elders of these Jewish congregations as an expression of their faith and an outward sign of their repentance, would not only be physically healed. But their sins, which may have caused the illness, would have been forgiven as well. What does the verse say, **“and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.”**

CONCLUSION

My hope was that after we had finished our examination of these two verses, we would have a greater understanding of the role of elders in respect to sickness in the early church and how it applies today. Last week we hopefully accomplished the first half of that goal. After our examination of **V. 14** I believe that we discovered that the elders of the church clearly were involved in ministering to the sick. This week we have added to that understanding by exploring the expectations of these Jewish congregations in respect to their elders' ministry of intercessory prayer. But, unfortunately we have not yet answered the question: How does this apply to us today? We will definitely answer that question next week.

Until then, I would hope that you will continue to strive to make a conscience effort to make prayer as natural as breathing as we continue to tackle this very difficult, but eventually, very profitable passage on intercessory prayer which begins in **James 5:14** and continues through **James 5:18**.