

James' Third Theme: Trials and Temptations, pt. 2

James 4:13-5:18

1. Presumptuous planning apart from God's will (4:13-17)

2. Responding to oppression (5:1-12)

3. Responding to sickness and sin (5:13-18)

A. Prayer and Praise in the Christian life (v. 13)

1. Like 1:5, in response to suffering we should pray.

- Prayer should be a normal Christian work (present, ongoing tense).
- Times of suffering call for greater prayer as an appropriate response.

2. When things go well in our life, we should (literally) sing "psalms."

- When things go well, we often get proud or forget to say thanks.
- Do our songs have enough variety in them for us to sing praise in our modern situations? (Older hymns praise God for deliverance from sea disasters and antiquated perils – where are Christian songs praising God for safety in air or auto transportation?)

Christians should praise God, whether in song or in prayer, for every blessing, for food and shelter, for work and for play. In a Christian home, if one child stars in a school musical, if another excels in a soccer match, if father gets a promotion at work, if mother completes a painting, they must take their joys to the Lord. It would bless them if they knew songs that helped them consecrate their blessings to the Lord, instead of succumbing to pride. This way, we sanctify pleasures and consecrate pains. Whatever happens, we go to God in prayer. If happy, we praise (James 5:13b). If troubled, we pray (5:13a). -- James (Reformed Expository Commentary), Daniel Doriani, pg. 192.

- We should take both joy and sorrow to God; often we take neither to Him.

B. Help for the Severely Sick (v. 14-15)

1. Sick –

- there is some discussion as to whether this refers to physical sickness or a metaphorical, spiritual weakness. The terms used are predominantly used in the Gospels for physical sickness, and most of the time throughout the NT. Coupled with "healed" in vs. 16 and the physical suffering focused on throughout James – it is best to go with the majority view that this focuses on physical sickness.
- The anointing with oil, and the impression that others must pray over the person who is evidently stuck in bed lead many to think that the sickness is a special, severe case. The context seems to indicate this being the case. The term for sick can mean "weak" or "powerless."

2. Call for the elders –

- In the case of severe sickness, the one who is sick (or those caring for him/her) should call for the elders of the church.
- Notice this is a private affair, they don't call a particular person who is known for his healing gift, they call all the elders – who equally bear responsibility to pray for the sick one.
- Since the elders are supposed to be holy men (1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1), their prayers should be those of "righteous persons" (v. 16) and be especially effective.
- The elders pray for healing – not for a miracle *per se*. Healing can be miraculous and it can seem ordinary – but it is healing nonetheless, that they pray for (however God chooses to give it).

3. Anointing with oil –

- This is evidently symbolic and is a ceremony intended to instill hope and faith in the one prayed for. It can symbolize God's power, and the Holy Spirit's presence.

- Mark 6:13 shows that anointing and healing were done by the disciples, so there is precedent for James' instruction here.
 - The focus however, is on prayer (ultimately God), as the effective cause of healing, not the oil.
 - For severe cases of sickness, some kind of anointing with oil by elders in a private setting seems appropriate – but not much more detail is spelled out by Scripture so we need to be careful to not go beyond what is written or to overlook what is.
 - The anointing “is neither magical nor sacramental.” It “makes us pause so that we take the action seriously. The ceremony can arouse faith.” (Dorani, 194).
4. “The Prayer of Faith” –
- May harken back to 1:5-8, single-hearted prayer that doesn't doubt that God can or will answer.
 - Seems to connect faith to healing, and thus lack of healing to lack of faith.
- a) This is not what we see when we study Jesus' healing however. About half the time Jesus responds to faith, but the other half he is trying to “induce or strengthen faith where it is weak or nonexistent.”
-- *James (ZECNT)*, C. Blomberg & M. Kamell, pg. 250
- b) James just reminded his readers that we cannot presume on God's will – 4:15. (Cf. Mt. 7:7-11 and 6:10).
- c) Additionally, we don't see the good Christians always getting healing in the NT – Timothy (1 Tim. 5:23), Trophimus (2 Tim. 4:20), Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25) and even Paul (2 Cor. 12:7-10).
5. Healing and Forgiveness –
- The language of “save” and “raise him up” can be taken two ways – spiritual salvation and physical rescue / raise up from sickbed, raise up to eternal life in the resurrection. This hints that sometimes these prayers heal the soul but don't heal the body.
 - Additionally, this hints that sin may lie behind our sicknesses. The Greek construction = James is not suspecting that that this sick one did commit sins, but he holds out the possibility in other cases.
- a) In James' day, people overspiritualized sickness – every sickness had a spiritual cause (cf. Job's friends).
- b) In our day, we underspiritualize it. All sicknesses have a microbial / natural cause.
- c) We need to avoid both errors. We shouldn't seek despondently for the sin causing our sickness, but we shouldn't dismiss the Scriptural connection that some sins do lie behind some illnesses. (Lk. 5:20, Jn. 5:14, 1 Cor. 11:30, Acts 12:23, Ps. 32:3-4, etc.)
- God provides spiritual healing and forgiveness – but he exhorts us to confess our sin. If God brings to mind some sin in the midst of our prayers for forgiveness – 5:16 requires us to confess it.
- C. APPLICATION: Will we seek healing? Will we have faith enough to pray, call the elders?
- D. Confession and Sin (v. 16)
1. Don't build a theology of confession of every sin from one verse. Be careful not to go beyond Scripture.
 2. In context, the confession is “to one another” not to the elders. There is a broader referent. Everyone has responsibility to keep short accounts with each other in the body. We should seek friends like this.
 3. Three basic kinds of confession:
 - Confess secret sins to God as the One we have wronged.
 - Confess private sins to the one or few we have offended.
 - Confess public sins publicly.
 4. Prayer of a righteous one, is powerful, “when it is exercised”/“as it is working” – hence we should pray.
- E. An Example of “The Prayer of Faith” (v. 17-18) – Elijah

Conclusion: Practical Response to James' Message (5:19-20)

- A. In light of riches and poverty, trials and suffering, and a life of wisdom – some will wander from the truth.
- B. We must seek and challenge them to endure and get life (1:12), doing this rescues them from death/sin.