

The Power of Righteous Praying

Scripture: James 5:13-18

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1987

Let's open our Bibles now for the study of God's Word to the fifth chapter of James...James chapter 5. The text for our study tonight is verse 13 through 18, James 5:13 through 18. And our study brings us to one of the most interesting and one of the most encouraging sections of this rich letter. It is one that has been, frankly, a battleground for interpreters through the centuries and still there are many people left in confusion as to its meaning. It is the passage that the Roman Catholic Church uses to support what they call the doctrine or the sacrament of Extreme Unction. It is a passage that many would-be healers and advocates of modern-day healing use to propound the idea that we have a guaranteed healing if we pray under the proper circumstances. It is a passage that is used for putting oil on sick people. It's a curious passage and it has created even more curious results.

Let me read it to you, you follow along and I'm going to read it from the New American Standard as its written, "Is any one among you suffering, let him pray; is any one cheerful, let him sing praises; is any one 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. 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. 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. 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. And he prayed again and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit."

Now in just the reading of that text I am sure questions come into your mind as they do into mine and have through the years every time I've read that. When he talks about suffering in verse 13, what kind of suffering is he referring to? When he talks about sickness in verse 14, what kind of sickness has he in mind? And what is it that the elders of the church have to offer in their prayers that other people don't? Do they have a special access path to God? And what is this anointing and why oil? And does the prayer of faith always restore the one who is sick and allow the Lord to raise him up? And what does sin have to do with it? And what kind of healing is he talking about in verse 16? And why does he give an illustration of rain in the middle of a passage about healing?

Now those are the questions that I've always asked and found difficult to answer until this week when I decided that I would lay aside all my presuppositions and try to figure out what this passage really

meant.

The first thing I did because I have studied the passage in the past in a cursory way, was take out 16 books, I counted them, 15 commentaries and one other book specifically devoted to this passage and I read all the sections on James 5:13 to 18 and I read the book that dealt specifically with it in one chapter. And after I had completed those 16 books, I put them all back in my shelf and I said I have a feeling that none of these is correct. Now the curious part of that is that all 16 of them said basically the same thing about the passage. And 16 times over I remained unconvinced that there was an interpretation in those books that I could live with.

Now I think you know me well enough to know that I don't go out on a limb and take viewpoints of Scripture that don't have some kind of precedent in history. But by the time I had finished those 16 books, I decided that I was at the end of my proverbial rope and so I put them all on the shelf, I slid back from my desk and I put my head down between my legs and I began to pray. And I said...Lord, You're going to have to show me what this is saying. None of these things that I've read make sense. And I asked the Lord to give me understanding.

I've done that before and I have found that He answers my prayer if I study hard. So I went back to my Greek material and back to the sources of the original language of the text. And for a couple of days I poured myself in, trying to eliminate any preconceived idea I had about the text. And over a period of those two days, it began to dawn on my mind just exactly what James was teaching. And, frankly, it was like striking gold after spending about 20 years hacking through granite. Once I hit it, it came alive to me. And I believe that when we're finished tonight we're going to see something that's thrilling in this passage.

Now I understand the risk of a whole new approach and it happens to me very rarely. But I feel excited and enthusiastic about what I'm going to share with you. The key to interpretation of any passage is always the context. In other words, each section of Scripture must be interpreted in the light of the whole book, the chapter it's in, the paragraph before, the paragraph after. In other words, context is the environment of thought in which a given passage is contained. We communicate using context. If I said to you, "Yeah, I went right up and right down." You don't know what I'm talking about. I might be talking about my temperature, my weight, a roller coaster ride, an airplane trip, short one, driving my car up a hill, taking a walk, you need a context. That's a simple way to say that every conversation with any meaning has to have a context. Every passage of Scripture has an environment of thought in which it exists and makes sense.

So, the first thing I want us to do is think about the context in which this passage is written. James is writing this letter to an assembly of Jews. They are called in verse 1 those who were scattered abroad. They are a church, an assembly of Jews who name the name of Christ. They have been scattered out of Palestine, out of Jerusalem by the persecutions of Acts 7 and 8, we call that the

dispersion, or the diaspora. And here is a group of Jews living in an assembly, naming the name of Christ, somewhere in the Mediterranean area, we don't know where but there would have been plenty of places they could locate in the Mediterranean region, in Asia Minor or some such place.

Because they are Jews to start with and most certainly because they are Christians and exalt the name of Christ, they find hostility. And so they are in a situation of tremendous stress. They are under trials, chapter 1 opens up telling them that they are to learn how to be patient in their trials. They are under temptations that are severe, they are under persecution. And James is writing to them in the midst of the stress and hostility and persecution and temptations and trials that the world is bringing to bear on them to exhort them to stay faithful. Some of them need to examine their...themselves to see if they're even saved. The ones who are genuinely Christians need to remain faithful in a very difficult situation. They are experiencing great trouble. They are being persecuted for what they believe. The pressure is coming at them from outside and from inside. From outside, the Antichrist, hostility from inside, the lusts and temptations that are elicited out of them from the things in the world that would attract them. It's tough. It's a battleground.

And through this wonderful epistle, James is calling his readers to endure it all. To endure it, as he says in chapter 1, without wavering, without being unstable, without doubting, to look pass the pain and the persecution to the glory, to look for the crown of life, as he calls it in chapter 1 which is that eternal life for which they are prepared. He calls them to accept their temptation as a part of humanness, but to use the means of grace to overcome it. He calls them to avoid being angry with the world, avoid being vengeful, avoid giving back an unrighteous attitude. He calls on them to put away all sin, to live by the Word of God obediently no matter how difficult it is. Not to be lured into the world to become its friend. And so from all of these implications and we just covered chapter 1 in that little review, we can be sure that they were in a hostile situation and it was very, very difficult.

In chapter 5 he returns to that same theme. Look at verse 7. He comes right back as he closes to the theme with which he opened the epistle. "Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil being patient about it till he gets the early and late rains. You, too, be patient. Strengthen your hearts for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not complain, brethren, against one another that you yourselves may not be judged. Behold, the judge is standing right at the door. As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful."

Now you get the thrust of that, don't you? From verse 7 to 11, he is calling them again to be faithful in persecution. They are in a continual situation of suffering. They are in a continual stress of animosity that could produce irritability, it can produce weakness. I mean, you can just sort of give up in that kind of onslaught. It's possible for a believer to get angry, to even sin with his mouth, to retaliate, to

feel vengeance. And so he says in verses 7 to 11, be patient, endure your mistreatment, strengthen your hearts. In the Greek the word means "prop up your hearts with determination, persistence, inner strength, hang on, do not complain, suffer affliction." That's the word in verse 10, it means to...it's that same word we saw in 2 Timothy, kakopatheia, it means to suffer evil treatment, endure, verse 11, hang on. You get the feeling of this epistle? It's an exhortation to people who under persecution, to hold patiently, strongly, without complaint, taking their share of suffering and enduring it all for the name of Jesus Christ.

Now with that kind of theme in mind as the overarching context for the epistle, we're not surprised, frankly, when we come to verse 13. And he opens the verse by saying this, "Is any one among you...what?...suffering?" That doesn't surprise us because that's exactly what he's been talking about. Let him...what?...pray. These verses, beloved, verses 13 to 18, are all about one subject, prayer. Prayer is mentioned in every single verse...from verse 13 through verse 18. The heart of endurance...what is the heart of endurance? You want to be able to endure, what do you do? Pray. You depend on a divine resource. You go to God.

And, frankly, I suppose we would have reason to be shocked if James had written an epistle to persecuted believers who were doing their best to endure a very difficult situation and started out and ended up and in the whole epistle never mentioned prayer. But he hasn't mentioned it till now. I'm so glad he did. It's fitting that it comes at the end because, in a sense, it's the climax of everything. The persecuted troubled tempted church will find at the heart of its endurance is a strong commitment to prayer. This then is a passage on prayer. People being called to patience and endurance and strengthening of their hearts and suffering without complaint and taking affliction like Job did and enduring it all are going to have to be people committed to prayer.

So what James is telling us then is that the heart of your endurance is prayer. Verse 6, go back to verse 6 of chapter 5, he speaks to the rich and he says, "You have condemned and put to death the righteous." I'm telling you, this kind of persecution was severe. There were some worldly rich people who were literally killing these believers. This was a rather serious hostility. For some of them, I want to tell you something, they were suffering. Some of them had suffered by implication of that verse death. Some of them were suffering bodily injury, no doubt, physical wounds in being persecuted physically. Some of them were literally crushed in their mental, emotional spirit. They were really devastated, weariness, weakness, defeat had set in in some cases. Some of the soldiers, to put it simply, are going down on the battlefield. Some of them have been wounded deeply. Some of them have been crippled seriously. And so, James says, "Is any one among you suffering? Let him pray."

That's always the resource, beloved. It's so simple and it's so direct. And somehow we've lost it somewhere along the line, to be honest with you. If any one is suffering, let him pray. On the other hand, he says, "Is anyone cheerful?" And he may be somewhat sarcastic in saying that. "Let him praise," that's the other side.

Now with that as a background then you understand that this is a passage about prayer. It's a passage about prayer. It's not a passage about healing. It's a a passage about prayer. Let's see specifically what it teaches. Four things that I want to point out to you: prayer and comfort, prayer and restoration, prayer and fellowship, prayer and power. Okay? The relationship of prayer to comfort, the relationship of prayer to restoration, the relationship of prayer to fellowship, the relationship of prayer to power...prayer provides to the wounded warrior comfort, restoration, fellowship and power. That's the idea. Each of these is a wonderful resource to that loyal Christian who is suffering greatly in his spiritual experience.

So, James...this is a look into his heart, there's a warm sympathetic spirit that comes through this portion of this epistle. It's not just five chapters of strong demanding, confronting exhortation. There's a tenderness here. He recognizes the hardness of the conflict. He knows there's the need of prayer. And he not only covers four features of prayer but he fits everybody into it. In verse 13 he talks about the believer, the individual. And then in verses 14 and 15 he talks about the elders, the pastors, the leaders of the church. Then in verse 16 he talks about the whole congregation, the one anothers. So he embraces the whole church in its prayer life and also speaks about the wonderful features of prayer that benefit the life of the believer. The primary attention of this passage based on verse 13 is clearly the casualties of the battle. The weak believers, the defeated believers, the ones who have lost the victory in their spiritual lives, the fallen soldiers, the seriously wounded in the fray and that's how it is out there. You've experienced it, haven't you? Sometimes it's more than you can take and the battle gets hot and heavy and your spirit is broken. And somebody has crushed you. In some places in Christian history, and some places in the world today, it might even be physical wounds that are inflicted.

Now I say all that to say this and this is the key to interpreting the passage if you understand the context. I am convinced that the thrust of this passage has absolutely nothing to do with physical sickness or disease at all. It is not a passage about healing physical diseases. It is a passage about healing spiritual weakness, spiritual weariness, spiritual exhaustion, spiritual depression which calls for spiritual means, namely what? Prayer...prayer. There's no compelling reason at all in this text to think that James has dropped in here a section on physical healing. That is incongruous. What...what a strange place to drop a section on healing diseases. The passage before would never cause you to expect that. And the final two verses wouldn't cause you to expect it either. It would really be out of sync with the context. But a section on how to help people who are spiritually weak and broken and embattled and bruised and wounded and hurt and have lost the victory, that makes sense.

Now with that in mind, let's look at point number one. This is just so rich. Prayer and comfort, verse 13, very simple, prayer and comfort. "Is any among you suffering?" Same word as in verse 10, exactly the same word. We saw it in 2 Timothy 2 in our study there in the mornings. It means to suffer evil treatment. Are any of you persecuted? That's what it means. Any of you being abused? Treated

wickedly? Including some kind of bodily beatings? Any of you in distress? Any of you in calamity? Any of you that are feeling the blows and you're crushed, "Let him pray." Turn to God for comfort. That's the idea. Turn to God.

Peter put it this way, "Casting all your...what?...care on Him because He cares for you." That's the spirit. Pray. Take it to the Lord. Jonah said, and Jonah was in deep trouble...no pun intended...Jonah prayed and he said, "While I was fainting away, I remembered the Lord and my prayer came to Thee." That's the spirit. Jonah 2:7. When I begin to faint away, I remember the Lord and I pray to Him. And God in His wonderful grace delivered that prophet.

The word here in the Greek means a continual pleading. When life isn't going the way it ought to go and you're weary with the battle and you're weak in faith and you've begun to sort of get crushed under the whole thing, continually plead to God for comfort. That's a basic truth. I mean, it's just so basic but so easily forgotten.

From the time I was a little kid, I grew up singing this song...do you recognize it? "O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry...what? Everything to God in prayer." That's right. "What a friend we have in Jesus."

And so, if you're suffering, pray. And perhaps as I said, even a bit sarcastically or ironically, he may be saying, "Is anyone cheerful?" I mean, I can't imagine that any one is in your circumstance. But should someone be cheerful, let him sing praises. Now let me tell you about that word "cheerful." That is a very interesting word, euthume. Eu means "well," e-u, transliterated, thumos means "the principle of life, or the principle of thought, or the principle of feeling." To put it simply, the soul or the spirit. What he's saying is anyone who is well in spirit--that's very helpful in understanding this text--anyone who is well in soul. To put it simply, anyone who has a happy attitude. You're on top.

That is in contrast to the other. He's not talking about physical things here, he's talking about your spirit. On the one hand you have the suffering soul. On the other hand you have the happy soul. On the one hand you have the wounded broken spirit. On the other hand, you have the whole rejoicing spirit. One is singing praise, the other is pleading for comfort. He says if you're cheerful, if you're happy in spirit, if you're strong of mind, strong of disposition, if you're inner self is experiencing well being, let him sing. And he uses a beautiful Greek word, psalloto from which the word "psalms" comes. Let him psalm. Let him psalm. Praise is basic to spiritual comfort. Prayer is basic to spiritual comfort. The two are closely related.

So verse 13 talks about comfort. You're in deep spiritual pain, your soul is broken, pray. Your soul is rejoicing, praise. And praise is really a form of prayer, isn't it? It's not the petitioning pleading form, it's the praising thanking form.

So the main interpretive point that I want you to notice out of verse 13 is that James is not concerned for prayer in relation to those who are physically sick. He's not concerned with prayer for those who have some disease. But those who are mentally and emotionally suffering the effects of their trials, temptations, and persecutions. Consequently as we approach the next point, he moves beyond the one who is suffering to the one who frankly has just lost the ability to endure the suffering. And when he comes to verse 14, you've got the fallen soldier. You've got the wounded warrior, the exhausted weary depressed defeated Christian.

And that brings us to the discussion of prayer and restoration in verse 14, follow this. The Scripture says, "Is any among you..." and then the Greek verb is *astheneo*, the root verb. The translations have always said "sick." As a result of that, everybody assumes that he's talking about sickness. But what does it refer to? There are several terms in the New Testament that can refer to sickness or disease. The term here is a very, very important one. *Astheneo* may refer to sickness, it may and it is so used in the New Testament, but all Greek lexicons agree that its primary meaning...and I checked out about five different ones...that its primary meaning is to be weak, to be feeble, to be impotent. In fact, in the epistles and Acts, it is used most of the time for that kind of weakness. In Romans 4:19, in Romans 14:1 and 2, in Romans 14:21, it is used of being weak in faith. In 1 Corinthians 8:9 and also in verses 11 and 12 of that same chapter, it is used of spiritual weakness. In Romans 5:6 it is used of spiritual weakness, the impotence of the unsaved. In 2 Corinthians 11:21 it is used to refer to the weakness of personality.

Look with me for a moment at 2 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 10. And this is a very interesting use of this same word. Paul is talking about his persecutions, about his difficulties. And he says that he has a thorn in the flesh which he prayed that God would take away. And He never did. God said in verse 9, "My grace is sufficient for you, my power is perfected in weakness." Then in verse 10 he uses this same word, *astheneo*, "Therefore I am well content...in another form...I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties." In other words, this same word used here for the weaknesses that come in human flesh as a result of the difficulties of life. It is a term then that mostly in the epistles and in the book of Acts has to do with weakness. And mostly with spiritual weakness.

Now if we just translate it in James 5...go back to James 5...consistently with its commonness use in the epistles, it would read this way: Is any among you weak? Now does that give it a whole different sense? You're in the middle of the battle, you're fighting for your life, as it were, against the persecutors, and you're losing out. He says in 13, "I know some of you are suffering, pray." But any of you who are weak, I mean, you've arrived at the point where you're defeated, you're down on the battlefield. Maybe persecution put you there. Maybe sin put you there. The point is that you're weak. You're weak mentally. You're weak emotionally. You're physically weak. You're spiritually defeated. It may have some ramifications in your physical body. The persecution, the trials, the temptations, the

battle, you've tried to pray during the process, you've just not been able to draw on the power of God and now you find yourself in a position of being spiritually weak.

Then he says do this, if you're just suffering, you pray. But if you've hit bottom, you want to know something? Hard for you to pray, isn't it? In fact, you may not be able to pray effectively. So what do you do? You've got to find somebody else to...what?...to pray. And who do you want to find? If you're spiritually weak, you want to go to someone who is what? Spiritually strong. So who would you go to? Verse 14, "Let him call for the...what?...the elders of the church." Go to the elders of the church. Why? Because they're the spiritual strength that you need. Go to the elders of the church, they're the overseers, the pastors, the spiritually strong. Read their qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. They're the godly. They're the spiritually mighty. Go to the spiritually strong, those who are victorious, those who are patiently enduring. Draw on their strength.

In verse 16, the end of the verse, the effectual..or effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. And, boy, when you're down at the bottom, you want to find a righteous man. You want to go to an elder or the elders. Call, *proskaleo*, a beautiful word, to call alongside, call the elders to come alongside you. Why? Lift you up. It's nothing different than Galatians 6:1, "If a brother is overtaken in a fault, you that are...what?...spiritual restore him." It's the same idea. It's the same idea. It's nothing different than that wonderful statement I quoted you from 1 Peter, "Casting all your care on Him." Go to the spiritually strong. If you're suffering, pray. If you've hit bottom and you're weak and the power's gone out of your life and out of your prayers and you're overwhelmed with the persecution and the trials and the struggles, then go the spiritual strong and let them pray over you. See that? Isn't that a beautiful ministry?

Well that makes so much sense. You know what it doesn't say in Acts 6:4? Remember where it says that the Apostle said you choose some men among you who can be appointed over this business and we will give ourselves continually to...it doesn't say counseling and the ministry of the Word. You know what it says? To what? Prayer. I don't know how it is but somehow in the colleges and seminaries and ministries of our nation we have come to the place where pastors think their role is to preach the Word on one hand and counsel on the other. That's not what Scripture says. You don't go to the spiritually strong to hear their worldly wisdom, you go to the spiritually strong when you've hit rock bottom to get on your knees with them and be strengthened by the power of their righteous prayers.

What ever happened to that ministry? Where did it go? And who put in its place the insipid kind of things we're living with today? Where people who have no power in prayer have become the experts on helping everybody with their problems? Strange. Sad.

It's a prayer ministry God has called us to. We're to give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word. I understand the ministry of the Word and now I understand better than I ever

did the ministry of prayer. It is to come alongside the wounded warriors, the broken soldiers, the broken hearted people who are at the bottom and they don't even have the strength to call on God out of their own heart. And they need me. That's the ministry. That's the pastoral duty, to come alongside that weary Christian who is defeated without strength and on behalf of that individual, lift up prayers to God from a righteous heart.

You say, "But what about anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord? What is that?" I'll tell you what it is. The word here for anointing, a very interesting...I have to tell you this so you'll understand...the word is...the verb is aleipho, it means to rub or oil. The best way to translate this would be, rubbing him with oil in the name of the Lord. It doesn't mean dotting his forehead with a little dab of oil. It means rubbing. Literally means to crush over. It's used of an outward anointing of the body. In this case with olive oil, elaion which is olive oil. And literally the text says, "After having oiled him." Isn't that interesting? Oil him.

You say, "Wait a minute. You mean you come and see the pastor and he oils you? What is that? What is that?" I mean, we're not going to come up with Grace Community Church Message Parlor, I'll tell you that for sure. What in the world kind of oiling is this? Well, somebody says it's ceremonial. It's emblematic of the Holy Spirit. You put a little dab on their head and that's sort of reminiscent of the Holy Spirit.

Well look, the word aleipho means to oil somebody, to massage them. It was used of washing someone. It's used of pouring oil over someone's head, or pouring oil over their feet, rubbing them with oil. You see, the word aleipho is never, I'll say it again, never used in Scripture to speak of a ceremonial anointing. That's a completely different word, it's the word chrio. It's a completely different word. Aleipho is the mundane secular usage where you literally oil something. The root of it is lipos(?) which means grease. It's not a ceremonial word. All uses of the ceremonial anointing use the verb chrio, and every time you see aleipho it has to do with that applying oil to someone. People did it after a bath. In fact, oil was the base of soap. And it literally could refer to washing someone. It was used with wine, you remember in Luke 10:34, the good Samaritan put wine and oil on the man? The wine, of course, because it fermented and had alcohol cleansed the wounds. And then the oil soothed him. It only was good for a topical or external application. Athletes were often rubbed down with oil because of the soreness of their muscles. And sometimes oil, often oil, was perfumed with a fragrance. It is still used in the Middle East.

Now to say to oil someone literally meant if you had a believer coming in weak and weary and wounded and crushed and broken in the battle and maybe that person had literally been persecuted by their employer or by someone who hated Christ and they came in with a wound, they would literally pour oil on that wound. If that person had been abused in their employment and made to work long hours, the elders of the church because there were no trustworthy medical doctors to go see in the primitive science of medicine in those days, they would come to the trustworthy elders of the

church. And those men in gracious kindness would take some oil out and rub the sore muscles of that weary believer who in the service of Christ had borne the brunt of someone's hatred.

But it also had a metaphorical sense. To say to someone that you want to oil them could as well mean I want to stimulate, encourage, message your spirit, warm your heart, provide strength to your weakness. So from a literal viewpoint you can see a persecuted Christian coming in whose body is broken because he has been attacked literally and physically for the cause of Christ. You can see a believer coming in who is wounded and broken and crushed in his spirit. On the one hand they might really apply oil. On the other hand, they might encourage and love and warm and strengthen and stimulate in the metaphorical sense. In fact, according to Luke 7:46, if you went to a home and you were the main guest, the first thing they might do after they cleansed your feet was pour oil on your head, a fragrant lovely oil just to soothe you from the dirt and the dust and heat of the day. In that part of the world, the sun could dry you out and it was a refreshing, refreshing time.

That's the spirit here. That's the idea. Oil was applied to external wounds. That goes way back. I found that in Isaiah 1:6, "From the soul of the foot even to the head, there is nothing sound in it." He's talking about Israel in the form of a human body here, metaphorically. "Only bruises, welts and raw wounds not pressed out or bandaged nor softened with oil." Now we know what they used oil to do. To heal external wounds and soften and make supple the parched skin.

That's a wonderful ministry. You know what it says? This is the ministry of restoration, that the wounded broken pained weak, weary, exhausted soldiers who were out there fighting the battle come into their commanders, their shepherds, their pastors and those pastors come alongside, get on their knees and pray with the spiritual strength that they have in behalf of that dear person. And in compassion reach out to strengthen, stimulate, bind up the broken heart and even minister to the wounds, if there be wounds in the human body. That's the ministry of love. That's the ministry of care. Somehow we've lost that. We've substituted for it something far less...far less. Even Mark 6:13 says the Apostles went around rubbing oil on people. They understood that. They ministered physical comfort.

Now all that to say, here are the weak and the weary and defeated, perhaps they've been injured by the persecutors. They are dry, parched souls. They're so severely wounded in the battle, they themselves can't even cry out to God. They just don't feel they have the spiritual strength. They come to the spiritually strong, the godly leaders and they are having the responsibility to meet their needs, to come down and pray with them and pray for them, encourage them, stimulate them, bind up their wounds.

It's all pictured in the twenty-third Psalm when it says of the great Shepherd, "He anointeth my head with...what?...oil." You know what that meant? When the shepherd brought all the sheep in to the little fold on the hillside after they had grazed all day, he put his staff down in front of the little entry and

only one sheep went through at a time. And as one sheep went through, he put it down. The next one stood in line. He checked over the whole body. Wherever there was a wound, he poured oil and soothed it. Wherever the skin was parched, he rubbed it soft and then let the sheep go in. That's the shepherd's ministry...that's the ministry...the ministry of caring. It's a ministry of restoration.

Somehow this is just as absolutely foreign to the church today as it can be. I don't know that we even instruct on how to do this. I'm not sure you need much instruction. This is the ministry of prayer. And I want to say to you that as pastor and elder here and I say this on behalf of the rest of us that we want not only to teach God's Word to you but we want to be strength to your spiritual weakness. We want to be the spiritually strong to whom you may come that we may gather around you and if need be oil you in the sense of stimulating, messaging, encouraging, comforting, strengthening, restoring you and crying out to God on your behalf with the prayers of righteous men.

And then he says, "That all in the name of the Lord." What does that mean? All in behalf of Christ, all consistent with Christ. Is that consistent with Christ? To say "in the name of the Lord" means consistent with His name, that means consistent with who He is because His name is who He is. God said, "I am that I am...that's My name." To do that in the name of the Lord means to do it because that's what Christ would do. To pray in the name of the Lord means that's to pray and say this is what Christ would want. And so we are Christ to people. That's what it means to do it in the name of the Lord.

And then is it any wonder that verse 15 says this? "And the prayer of those--implied spiritually strong godly men--offered in faith will restore the one who is..." and the text has always said "sick." You want to know something? That is not the word for "sick." That has never been the word for "sick." That word komnonta(?) from kamno means to be weary. It is only used one other time in the New Testament, Hebrews 12:3, and it is translated there properly by the word "weary."

He says, consider Him--Christ--who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. That's exactly what it means here. He's talking about the people who in the midst of persecution are fixing their eyes on their trouble rather than on their Savior and are not able to endure and have grown weary and lost heart. So it is not only the same word in Hebrews 12:3 but it's used in the very same context. Hebrews 12 says you better fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith because it's going to demand that you do that if you're going to run the race and lay aside the weights and move toward the prize that is before you. You look at Christ, He endured the cross, He despised the shame and consider Him so that you don't get weary and lose heart. That's what komnos...komnos has to say.

So, go back to James 5 and you see it, the prayer offered in faith by those godly men will restore the one who is weary and has lost heart. Spiritual restoration...spiritual strength. Obviously it has to be a prayer offered in faith. In James 1:6 he said, "He that asks doubting wavers and he

receives...what?...nothing," James 1:6 to 8. But when you pray believing, when these godly men pray believing sort of using their strong faith vicariously for this believer's weak faith, that prayer restores the one who is weary.

The word "restore" is such a wonderful word, sozo, it's the word "to save, to deliver, to rescue." And here it means to restore. It can mean to preserve, to make whole. In the gospels, "your faith has made you whole," it's the same word. But it doesn't...it doesn't have to do with physical sickness. The prayer of faith will restore the weary. What a beautiful thought...the prayer of faith will restore the weary.

"And the Lord will...what?...raise him up." See it there? Verse 15, "And the Lord will raise him up." That means to rebuild. That's the word egeiro, to arose, to awaken, to excite. Oh, what a tremendous thought. He's lost all his excitement. He's lost all his enthusiasm. The Lord will restore and excite and awaken. What a promise. Beloved, that is a promise.

When you come to the point in your life where you're spiritually weak, where you've exhausted all your resources and you feel like you've hit bottom, you've been through the suffering stage and you tried to pray and now you're into the stage where you're just weak and your prayers seem to go nowhere and you're losing the battle and everything seems to be falling apart and you can't get a hold of it all, go to the spiritually strong, the elders and leaders of the church and let us come alongside of you and let the righteous life and the strong godly men intercede on you behalf and as it were, oil you with comfort and strength and restore you. And the Lord Himself in answer to the prayer of faith on your behalf will restore you...restore you, raise you up, life your spirits.

And...notice the last part of verse 15...if he's committed sins, they'll be forgiven him. You see, this proves for sure that he's not talking about disease because not all disease is related to sin. But if in the case that your weariness and your spiritual defeat is a result of sin, in that environment of crying out to God and confessing your need, He'll forgive you. You'll experience that forgiveness. That's a third-class conditional, it's a possibility. If possibly sin on his part has been the contributor to his weakness and his weariness, this act of coming to the pastors to confess that weakness, that defeat, that need for strength will cause prayers of confession to rise and the sin will be forgiven. And if there's any sin, that's essential to full restoration. Tremendous.

Forgiven means to send away. The sins that bound him, the sins that pulled him down to weakness, if that was the cause, they're gone.

Now you can be weak in the battle just because of persecution. I mean, you just get crushed. But you can also compound that weakness through sin. You can become weak in your spiritual experience through your sin. In any case, if you've hit that point of weakness and weariness and exhaustion, you feel you have no strength, no power, you're defeated, you can't fight the battle alone, get in here, get

down on your knees alongside a righteous godly man and as he cries out on your behalf and comforts and oils you, as it were, with the comfort of his love and his righteous prayers, the Lord will raise you up. That's the promise.

What a picture of the duties of pastors to be engaged in the ministry of restoration, the ministry of restoration. That's what he's talking about here.

Then James goes to a third point, quickly. Don't miss any of this, this is so rich. Prayer and fellowship, Therefore...therefore gives us the transition...therefore because...why? why does he say therefore?...he has just said if you're weak, go get alongside someone spiritually strong and let him pray for you. And if your heart is sincere, and you're there because you want God to reach out and restore you, then He'll do it. So, if the prayers of a righteous man can assist that weakness in your life, "Therefore you ought to be confessing your sins to one another and praying for one another so that you may be whole."

In other words, this is to the congregation. Don't wait till you get to the bottom. Maintain a relationship with other believers that you're always praying for one another. It's a general element of fellowship. It's a marvelous thing. Mutual honesty, confess your sins to one another. It doesn't mean pour out every bit of garbage in your life, it means don't hide your evil. Sin wants you alone, did you know that? Sin wants to isolate you. Sin doesn't want anybody who shouldn't know to know. And as long as it's private and secret, you can nurse it and nurture it and feed it. And God wants it open and out and exposed among people who love you.

So confess is a compound. It means really confess. Not just homologeo but exomologeo, let it out, be honest, share your struggle, let people know you're in a battle so that you don't become weak and defeated and weary and exhausted and wounded and victimized. Open up, share, seek forgiveness with one another.

One another here could be one another of a different kind or one another of the same kind and he uses allos which is one another of the same kind. Somebody just like you, that's another believer...not just anybody. Confess your sins to another believer. Not every specific sin but the weakness of your life until God gives you the victory over those areas. It may be that you come to a point in your life spiritually where you've grown and you're experiencing victory in your life and you're dealing with those things and you don't have this need like perhaps someone fighting the battle in the early part of their Christian experience. But the point here is, don't let yourself go down to the point of spiritual weakness driven by your sin because you never dealt with it and you never dealt with it because it was allowed to keep you alone. Don't let that happen.

So, he says confess to one another and then pray for one another. You tell someone else where your battle is and then pray for their battle, share your life so that you may be the iaomai. It can be used of

physical sickness, but it can be used from deliverance...for deliverance from many things. When he says that you may be healed, there are many ways that word can be used. I was thinking of Matthew 13:15 which uses that same verb, "For the heart of this people has become dull, their ears they scarcely hear, they have closed their eyes lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn again that I should heal them. And there it speaks about salvation, spiritual restoration.

It's used the same way in John 12:40. It's used the same way in Acts 28:27, Luke 4:18, 1 Peter 2:24. It's used the same way in Hebrews 12 verses 12 and 13. It's a healing that could mean physical but in this context it doesn't, it means He'll make you whole again.

So, the point is this, if you're suffering, keep your prayer life hot. If you hit the bottom through persecution, compounded by your own sin, you go to the spiritually strong men who come alongside. They massage you with comfort and love and care and they carry your petition to God on your behalf. You get the sin out. You confess it to God. You sort of ride sort of piggy-back on their prayers into the presence of God. They beseech God, pleading with Him on your behalf. And God promises that He'll lift you up. And to prevent you ever getting to that kind of extremity, dear friends, share your burdens with each other and pray for each other so you're always fresh with the Lord and freshly dealing with those issues in your life. It's fine to pray alone, that's the first point. It's pretty desperate when you have to come and have the godly men come around because you're so spiritually weakened. It's wonderful if you just stay warm to your own needs by sharing with someone else and praying with them.

And he closes with a word about prayer and power. Prayer and fellowship, prayer and restoration, prayer and comfort, prayer and power, finally, this is so basic. The end of verse 16, "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." So simple. That's why you go to the elders. That's why you share with another believer because listen, a righteous person praying for you has tremendous power. Effective in the Greek is the word from which we get our word energy. The energetic empowered prayer of a righteous man who has no sin dealings in his life is going to have a tremendous impact.

I'll put it really simply straightforward to you, I think if the people who are going trying to get their problems solved by having some counseling would get together with a godly righteous man and get on their knees and spend time in prayer, they would find the power is in prayer, not in the counseling. But it has to be a righteous man because it says in Psalm 66:18, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not...what?...hear me." You want to be right with God so you can help somebody else. I want to be right with God so when someone comes to me in spiritual weakness I can help to lift them up. You need to be right with God so when some brother or sister comes to you and wants you to pray with them and help them, you're ready to have your prayers answered and to have them be powerful because your life is right before God.

That phrase "can accomplish much" literally says "is very strong." That's the Greek. The energetic prayer of a man who is dealing with sin in his life and living righteously before God is very strong. You know what that tells me? There's such a thing as weak prayers. And weak prayers come from weak people that's why weak people have to go to strong people. Beloved, we have a tremendous prayer ministry for each other. A tremendous responsibility to come alongside.

To nail it all down on this issue of power, he gives an illustration. I think this is so interesting. I never understood this until just the other day. Elijah, most of the Jews considered him the most romantic adventurous Old Testament person. And everybody knew about him. Elijah was a man with like passions, or with a nature like ours. In other words, he was just like we were...we are. He was a man, anthropos, generic, he was just human. He had like passions, homoiopathes, like passions. He suffered like we suffered. You can go back and read 1 Kings 17:11 and find out he was hungry. You can read 1 Kings 19:3 and find out he was afraid. You can read 1 Kings 19:4 and you can find out he was tired from battle. He was just a man.

"But he prayed earnestly." That is an amazing Greek phrase. You know what it is? He prayed with prayer. I mean, that's a...that's the compound way to say he really prayed. He prayed with prayer. Some people pray but they don't really pray. They talk to God as if He was a divine waiter and they were just giving Him an order. Or if He was a divine secretary and they're just dictating. But Elijah really prayed. You can read 1 Kings 17, it's the story, but he really prayed.

James says he prayed that it might not rain. And you know what? It didn't rain for three and a half years. He was a man like we are. He was a righteous man. His prayers were so powerful it didn't rain for three and a half years. He prayed again, the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

You say, "What in the world is this story supposed to tell?" Well, if you read 1 Kings 17, it doesn't say anything about Elijah's prayer. It doesn't say anything about the three and a half years of draught. It assumes his prayer and it does talk about the draught. In 1 Kings 18 it mentions the third year, but that's different than the three and a half. Elijah spent two years in Zarephath with the widow and in the third year went to comfort...to confront Ahab, but that's a different time factor. The only thing we know about the prayer is what James tells us. The only thing we know about the duration of the draught, three and a half years, is what James tells us.

But the interesting thing is James is saying take Elijah who was a man just like we are. And they knew he was a man like we are. He was strong at points and weak at points. And he said look at him, he prayed and look what God did. God literally controlled the rain in response to his prayer.

Now let me tell you something. That's an interesting illustration. But if he had been talking about physical healing, that's a strange illustration to use. If he wanted to illustrate physical healing, he

could have used a myriad of illustrations on physical healing, right? But if he wanted to illustrate how God sends down refreshing rain on dry parched land, this is a perfect illustration. Because what he's been talking about is the weary weak exhausted parched soul of the wounded warrior who needs an outpouring of the refreshing rain of the blessing of God. It's a perfect illustration...the perfect illustration. As God sent the rain in response to the prayers of a powerful righteous man, so in response to the powerful righteous prayers of men today does he send the restoring blessing joy refreshment to the parched dry weary exhausted weak struggling believer who needs so desperately a refreshing touch from heaven. What a ministry. The ministry of prayer. Let's bow together.

We thank You, blessed Father, for this great word to us. I search my own heart in all honesty and find myself wanting in my faithfulness to this. Lord, for so many years I didn't even understand it. I thank You, I thank You for the excitement of studying the Bible all these years and still being in the process of discovery. But I confess the folly of my own ignorance in the years of failing to do what I ought to have done because I didn't understand. The truth was always there. Forgive me for my failure to be diligent enough to search it out. But thank You for Your grace in showing it to us. Give us all a new hunger for prayer.

And if there are any in this congregation, Lord, who are suffering, who are receiving evil treatment for the cause of Christ, energize their prayers. And, Lord, if there are some who because of the persecution have just really had all they can take, they're just so weary, and maybe it's been compounded by sin in their life and they're weak and they have no strength, Lord, may they come to the pastors of this church, to the godly men. May they call them alongside to pray on their behalf to take that righteousness which You have given to those godly men and from that, pour out pleadings on behalf of that weakened believer and that they may see the power of God moving.

We pray, Father, that You shall give us the ministry of restoration, that we may stimulate, encourage, massage the weary, pour oil on their wounds, soothe and comfort and pray passionately in their behalf for spiritual strength. Help us to train...turn in all our human ideas for the divine plan of prayer. Help us to come alongside people in Your presence, to humble ourselves before You and call on You in the behalf of every need in every life. Give us back in the church the ministry of prayer.

And, Lord, make it happen on a congregational level where we share our weaknesses and pray for each other. Open us to that so that we never get to the place where we're so weak because we're ever strengthened by the righteous prayers of those we love. And help us to know that our prayers have power, even as Elijah prayed like he did and he saw the hand of God. May we know that there's power in prayer because we see Your hand at work. We see You lift up and restore and raise up the wounded, strengthening them and using them again in a greater way. Thank You that prayer brings comfort, restoration, fellowship and power. And we bless Your name for what we anticipate we shall see You do as we faithfully pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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