

STUDIES IN THE EPISTLE OF JAMES – PART 10

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Scripture: James 5:13-20

We are now at the end of our study of the epistle of James, and it's been really wonderful and challenging, as well as refreshing. As we've said before, James is hard-hitting. He doesn't mind punching with all his force, and he doesn't pull back on those punches. He lets us know exactly what we ought to be doing as sons and daughters of the Most High God.

Right at the beginning, he tells us that life is not going to be easy. Just because you're a child of the Lord doesn't mean that everything is going to be hunky dory. You are going to have troubles, you are going to have trials, you are going to have difficult times because that's the kind of world that we live in. But, as he says in ch.1, "Consider it pure joy when these things come." and we grappled with that and asked ourselves: What does it mean to just be joyful in the midst of trials and tribulations and distresses.

Then right through these 5 chapters, he unpacked it for us. He showed us that the thing that needs to undergird us at all times is to be patient, to endure. Because even in the midst of these dark times, even when we think "where is God in all of this?" even in the midst of times where we are saying "Lord, I'm about to go under," God is still doing something in that situation. God continues to uphold us. God's word from other passages of scripture is always true and the way to read into scripture is not only looking at the immediate context, but to look at the context all across. God promises: I'll never leave you. So even in those moments when we think I'm down and out, God is saying "I'm still there. I haven't left you." So James says, "Patiently endure, go through it. let your witness always be there. As a Christian, make sure that everybody sees your faith, that fruit is visible to people even through these difficult times.

James 5:13-20

¹³ Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to 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 would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

¹⁹ My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, ²⁰ let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."

O heavenly Father, we have gone through this epistle written by your servant, Lord, inspired by Your Holy Spirit. And we have been challenged and inspired and brought out of dark places. As we come to the end, we ask that Your holy presence would rest upon us, that You would show us those things from these 8 verses that are important for us today, in our situations and in our circumstances. We pray that we would receive from you in totality, Lord, whatever You want to do. For we pray this as always in the beautiful name of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

13 Is any among you suffering?

What does James mean when he talks about suffering? He's talking of situations in life that we go through that could be causing us pain or anguish, or frustration, that we get up every morning and we just feel that we are suffering. Things are not going well. It could be an ailment, a sickness, an illness that seems to be chronic; and so you suffer through that every day. It could be that you're living under the weight of words that have been spoken to you at some time in the past that seem to always hover over you, letting you think that you're this kind of person. And you suffer through that. Or it could be that you have events in the past that have happened to you and it seems like Satan has got his hands on that and has never let you forget it. And every time you want to move forward, he comes and reminds you of it, and then you suffer through it. Or it could be that you have pain; there's something going on in your body and you wake up every day with pain and no amount of painkillers are helping you. You've accepted it as your lot thinking that you will have to go through life in pain daily.

James is saying: If there are people like this out there, people that are suffering, then they must pray. What does he mean by that? It seems very much like what he would normally say. Everything in the Bible turns to prayer. But why is he saying it in this particular context? I'm sure some of you are resonating with that. Suffering seems to have become an integral part of your life.

Why is he saying to pray? Because prayer is the one chain that connects God to our situation. Prayer is the one pathway that God has to come and make a difference in that suffering that you are going through. Because when God comes into that suffering, then every one of His promises comes alive within that suffering, within what you're going through. Every one of those scriptures comes through because God is integral to that. He is saying, "I am with you in this suffering, and I will give you what you need to get through it. My son, My daughter, you will not go under this suffering."

Scripture often tells us that God very rarely will remove suffering. Because He makes all things work together for good. He looks at that suffering and He says, "I'll take you through it. And what will happen to you through that suffering will be that you will grow. But I will never leave your hand." So James says: if you're suffering today, then pray. Make sure that connection with God is secure in your life. So that everything that God wants to pour into that situation, in that circumstance, He can. Then you can get through with some feeling of, as James says, 'consider it pure joy', that God is doing something remarkable.

"is any one cheerful?"

Then he says, "Is any one cheerful? He is to sing praises." He goes from one end of the spectrum to the other. from suffering to cheerfulness. The word that is used for cheerful here, scholars tell us, is not a word that takes away the fact that you are going through difficult times. It's a word that means buoyancy – a sense of buoyancy. You're aware of what you're facing, but you're able to walk through with calmness, you're able to walk through with joy, you're able to walk through fulfilling all of God's purposes in you. It's like the peace that passes our human understanding. It's not the peace that says 'all my ducks are lined up in a row. Everything is good. Things are going well in my life and I have experienced a peace that's the peace of the world'. The peace that God gives is the peace that says in spite of everything going wrong in your life, you're going to say: Hey, shouldn't I be anxious? Shouldn't I be worried at this point? Shouldn't I be asking God what is happening? No! It's the peace that He gives.

And what does James say? "When you are in that stage", he says, "sing praises." Why does he say that? To make sure that we never get to a point that we look at the way we are embracing the

situation and think how well we are handling it ourselves. No. Sing praises. Let God know that you are aware that it is because of Him that you can face these situations.

¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick?

Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. He's saying in your church, are there people who are sick? If that scenario is right, three things ought to happen.

- Call the elders of the church,
- Get oil to anoint the sick person,
- Pray in the name of the Lord. Ask for healing in the name of the Lord.

Are there sick people in our midst? Call the elders of the church, invite them to pray using oil and 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. What does that mean? It means that when we pray, our faith is not in ourselves but in the One who is going to bring healing. We have faith in an omnipotent God. We have faith in a God whose arm is not short, even today. We have faith in a God who wants to heal. We have faith in a God who said, "Call unto Me and I will come. Seek ye and you will find Me." We have faith in a God who wants to touch, who loves, who cares, who wants to administer His grace to us. We pray in faith to someone like that. James says: When you do that, then the Lord will raise him up.

¹⁶ Confess your sins to each other...

But then he adds this also. He says: 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. In other words, there's another component to healing here. You could have an ailment because there is sin in your life, and that could be contributing to the illness that you have. The antidote to that is to confess that sin to one another. Tell somebody about it.

One of the successful ploys that Satan uses against us is to tell us that our sins are unique to us. Nobody else has it. Don't breathe a word about it to anybody. What will they think about you? And yet, the Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that all sins are common to all. What is Satan's agenda? It is to keep you in the darkness. Unconfessed sin is darkness, and Satan operates in the area of darkness. God is light and in Him there is no darkness. As James says, when you tell somebody else about what is going on in your life, they're going to say that they have the similar kind of problem. And you realize that this sin is not unique to you at all. So, you enter into some kind of a pact with them: calling when feeling tempted, praying together. And that area of darkness begins to be an area of light for God to work. So, he says, there could be healing that needs to happen in your life because of sin that is hidden. Bring it out into the light, confess to one another, and you will be healed.

¹⁶ ...The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

Sometimes, we get up to this point, then we read that last line and say, "Oh, so I guess that counts me out. Righteous man? I can't be righteous. Righteous people are people like Peter, Paul and the rest of them." No! James is very quick to understand that's exactly how we will respond. What does he say? He says, "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on earth for three and a half months." He's saying that you and I are like Elijah. Elijah confronted the priests of Baal and the priests of Asherah, prayed down fire from heaven. He's just like you. God can do the same thing through you. When God wants you to pray for rain to stop, He'll ask you and you pray, and it will happen.

The effectual prayer of a righteous man. What does it mean to be righteous? We're not talking of the righteousness that God sees us through. That's the imputed righteousness of Jesus that is placed upon us, that allows us to come boldly before the throne of grace. That's not the righteousness we

are talking about. We're talking about a righteousness that says that we are right with God. That's what it means – to be right with God. And any moment that you are in sync with what God wants to do, you are a righteous person. And James is saying, "That's the kind of people God uses; just like Elijah." The factual prayer, or the earnest, diligent prayer, to really pray for a situation or circumstance.

The prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. He says, Elijah then prayed that it would rain again, and it rained. And the earth bore fruit. The same kind of people that you and I are. That's what James is saying: No difference; same nature. All Elijah did was submit to the Lord. And that's what God wants from us, to be used even in such a remarkable manner. But he's not asking us to stop the rain. He's just saying, "You, just like Elijah, if you're right with God, all you have to do is pray for people, earnestly, diligently. The factual prayer of a righteous person availeth much or accomplishes much.

19-20 My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

James seems to think that the last thing that he should say is to tell people that, after all that he has spoken, maybe there are one or two in the congregation who are saying, "This is too difficult for me. I can't do this. I can't accomplish. I've got into a lifestyle that doesn't allow me to be this kind of a person." James seems to be 'doing a Jesus' in his letter. He says: Go after that one. In a church full of people who are doing everything that God wants them to do, who are following what he has written, there may be one or two who are not. And he says: Don't leave them, because when you go after them, and when you restore them, what you are doing is saving their soul and covering a multitude of sins. Don't leave them.

The responsibility is for us to always be aware of the one or two who may have gone astray, gone away from the truth. James is saying: That cannot be. Bring them in. How do we do that? We trust the Lord to be able to say what we need to say. We trust the Lord to be able to go and do what we need to do. Maybe it's just putting an arm around them. Maybe it's just a hello. Maybe it's just a verse. Whatever the Lord places upon you to be able to say to him/her that hopefully, as you do what God wants you to do, will bring them back to the truth. When you do this, it is a wonderful thing because you have done something and saved the soul of one who could have been lost.

That's where he ends his epilogue; on such a loving note. "Maybe the hard things that I've spoken to you", he says, "maybe one or two of you may not have been able to take this. But others who have, make sure you don't lose that person."

[Altar call for prayer for healing and anointing with oil for those who are sick, physically, mentally or spiritually.]

Heavenly Father, we pray that Your hand would rest upon us, that every part of this sanctuary would be holy because of Your presence here. Lord, we come in obedience to Your word, saying that if there are sick people here, pray for them. And so, Lord, we have oil. We ask that You would consecrate it, that You would let the words that are spoken by our leaders, speak healing in Your name over the people who come up. And Lord, we will be careful to give You honor, praise and glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.