

Sermon Outline

THE EFFECTIVE PRAYER

James 5:13-18

Introduction

Two extreme views:

- i) God's promise for physical and spiritual healing as an answer of every prayer of healing.
- ii) There is no more supernatural healing since the supernatural gifts of the Spirit have ceased after the end of the apostolic age.

WCF-5.3: "God in his ordinary providence maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at his pleasure."

1. The ordinariness of the circumstances and the people (verses 13-15).

- Some are suffering (v 13). "The word 'suffering' is wider than the sufferings of sickness...It is any ill circumstance which may come upon us, any trial, anything of which we or an onlooking friend might say "That's bad." – Alec Motyer.
- Some are cheerful (v 13).
- Some are very sick (*asthenei*) and bed-ridden (v 14).
- Some are sick (*kamnonta*) perhaps because of sins (v 15).
- James is describing an ordinary situation of a congregation of a church.
- Prayer is for every Christian, suffering, cheerful, or sick, an ordinary member or office-bearer of a church.
- Calvin: James "means that there is no time in which God does not invite us to himself."

2. The effective prayer.

- (a) In the name of the Lord Jesus (v 14).
 - Call the elders of the local church when you are *very* sick and cannot pray.
 - The verb "*sick*" means, "to be without strength, weak, feeble or impotent."
 - It may refer to spiritual or mental weakness. 1 Cor 8:9, "*But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.*" Also 1 Cor 9:22; 2 Cor 13:4 and 9.

- It may refer to physical illness. Acts 28:8, “*It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him healed him.*” And also 2 Cor 12:10; Acts 9:37; Phil 2:26; 2 Tim 4:20.
 - God still miraculously and supernaturally heals any sicknesses as He pleases!
 - Some interpret the “*anointing with oil*” to have value of a sacrament and the drop of oil to represent the Holy Spirit. But there are two different Greek words for “anointing”:
 - The verb used here, *aleipho*, is the mundane and secular word. Used for anointing the dead body of Christ (Mk 16:1). For anointing the feet of Jesus (Lk 7:38,46).
 - The word, *chrizo*, is the sacred and religious word. Luke 4:18, “*The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.*” It is the verb from which the word Christ comes. Also in Acts 4:27, 10:38, 2 Cor 1:21 and Heb 1:9.
 - It is a custom of that time, whenever they met somebody who suffered from a bodily ailment, to rub him with oil (The Good Samaritan).
 - Col 3:17, “*And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*”
 - John 14:14, “*If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.*”
 - John 1:12 says, “*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*”
 - Believing in His name means believing His revelation, all that He came to reveal to us about Himself and God the Father.
 - Every time we close our prayer “in the name of the Lord,” we call upon Him as our Priest, our Mediator, our Prophet, our Redeemer, our Saviour, our All in all.
 - Spiros Zodhiates, “Since the name of the Lord means His person and work, when we pray in the name of the Lord we limit ourselves. It is as if we draw a circle all around us and we understand the periphery of that circle to be the revelation and work of Christ. If anything we ask of God is outside that circle, He has never promised to answer that, or to give it to us.”
- (b) The prayer of faith (v 15).
- Jesus also teaches the same in Mk 11:22-24, “*Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his*

heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."

- A very definite prerequisite for that wish (the literal meaning of the Greek word translated "prayer" here) to come true, is that it must emanate from faith in God. The phrase conveys an assurance of success in prayer.
- Faith in God of those who pray, not the sick or person prayed for.
- James dislikes wavering mind, double-mindedness, disloyal and not being absolutely honest with God. James 1:6, "*But let him ask in faith, with no doubting.*"
- How about the cases where the elders have been faithful in prayer and believing earnestly that God will heal the sick, but no healing has followed?
- Apostle Paul did not heal Epaphroditus (Phil 2:27). He left Trophimus at Miletus sick (2 Tim 4:20). He did not cure his own thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12:7-9).
- Faith is the unqualified acceptance by man of God's revelation in the Bible or in Jesus Christ. The unqualified acceptance of God's person, His character and His will as revealed to us in the Bible or in Christ.
- For God to answer our prayer, it must be His will to answer thus. 1 John 5:14-15, "*And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.*"
- Is it possible for Paul who is an example of a person who is walking by faith and yet praying a prayer that was not of faith?
- Katie Stewart: there is a kind of "prayer that demonstrates faith by the mere act of asking, yet does not secure the answer."
- The prayer that demonstrates faith must be according to God's revealed will (or general will of God) to us. It is general will of God to heal (Mat 8:17; Lk 5:15).
- But only the Holy Spirit knows the specific (or secret/hidden/decretive) will of God for us individually.
- Rom 8:26-27 says, "*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*"

- It was not God’s specific will to remove Paul’s “thorn in the flesh,” but it is always God’s general will to heal.
- Only the Holy Spirit knew God’s specific will for Paul in this matter and He did not grant Paul’s request, and He made known to him later after his 3rd prayer.
- This is an example of how a Faithful Servant couldn’t pray the “Prayer of Faith,” but instead prayed a prayer that demonstrates his faith in asking.

(c) The prayer of the righteous (v 16b).

- Not everybody who prays is always heard by God.
- Who are the righteous? Alec Motyer: “Certainly James would not understand it in the sense of perfect moral character and integrity as he has mentioned in 3:2, ‘For we all make many mistakes.’ In 2:22-23, he gives his definition of righteousness when he says, ‘his faith was active in his works, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’”
- Being righteous means to have faith in Christ, having no will of our own, no selfish desires and ambitions, but being completely lost in Him.

3. **The illustration of the experience of the prophet Elijah (verses 17-18).**

- Elijah raised the dead son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17-24). He brought down fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:38). He was snatched into heaven in a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2:11).
- Great though this prophet was, James calls him a mere man. Why?
- Elijah was a man of like sufferings and experiences with us. Just like Apostle Paul, imperfect in his knowledge of God’s specific will. He prayed that his life might end immediately (1 Kings 19:4).
- Therefore, what Elijah accomplished, even the extra-ordinary miracles, we can too!
- In spite of our imperfections and weaknesses, God hears our prayers and answers them when we pray with faith, believing God’s revealed Word, taking hold of His covenant commitment to it, and asking Him to keep it. That’s the power of prayer!
- Deut 28:15 and 22, “*But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you... The LORD will strike you with wasting disease and with fever, inflammation and fiery heat, and with drought and with blight and with mildew.*”
- Elijah is just seeking to align his life with God’s covenant promises and threats.

- The prayer of faith is to ask God to accomplish what He has promised in His Word. That is the ground of our confidence in asking and we know that God will keep His Word, it is not something “worked up” from within our emotional life.

Conclusion

Why pray if He will give anyway?

Prayer is part of the process by which God gradually brings us to align our desire and our lives with God’s covenant promises and threats, until we are illuminated and subdued by His Word, saying, “Not my will, but Your will be done.”