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Sermon Notes

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The Power of Prayer Unleashed in the Church

James 5:13-20

The weapons of the Christian life are invisible and spiritual — weapons the world cannot comprehend because it cannot see them. The weapon systems of the American military are among the very best in the world, and that's not surprising, because our government spent almost \$700 billion on military in 2019... more than the next seven countries combined... China plus Saudi Arabia plus India plus France plus Russia plus the UK plus Germany... Amazing! And our military gets aircraft carriers and fighter jets and tanks and missile systems to fight physical enemies

But the weapons of the Christian church are spiritual and invisible, though they have powerful effects in this world

2 Corinthians 10:3-4 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

The primary weapon of the Christian life and the Christian church is
PRAYER

This perfectly lines up with the primary mission of the Christian church, and that is the salvation of sinners from eternity in hell.

So, as we come to this, the final sermon in our series in James, it is right for us to zero in on the power of prayer in the context of a healthy church.

James 5:13-20 zeroes in on prayer in a way unlike any other section in the New Testament... and every portion mentions prayer except the final two verses; and those final two verses rightly bring our focus to the salvation of a wandering sinner, saving him from the terrors of eternal death.

This fits the overall message of James, which has been a right understanding of the Christian life as a whole – a life in which the true faith in Christ which justifies inevitably results in good works. And central to that life of good works is a life of PRAYER!

Many of us may feel how weak we are in prayer, how defective, how powerless... we feel guilty about prayer and know that we do not pray as often as we should or with the passion that we should have or with the effectiveness we should have. We know we OUGHT to be praying, but we need help!

We read so many great quotes from the people of God on prayer:

Charles Spurgeon, positively

“To pray is to enter the treasure-house of God and to gather riches out of an inexhaustible storehouse. ”

“Prayer plumes the wings of God’s young eaglets so that they may learn to mount above the clouds. Prayer brings inner strength to God’s warriors and sends them forth to spiritual battle with their muscles firm and their armor in place.”

“The ship of prayer may sail through all temptations, doubts and fears, straight up to the throne of God”

Charles Spurgeon, negatively

“Neglected prayer is the birth-place of all evil.”

Okay, we read all that, and then we look at the weakness of our prayer lives, and we know we need help

God has sent the Holy Spirit as the primary helper to our prayer lives:

Charles Spurgeon:

“Prayer is an art which only the Spirit can teach us. He is the giver of all prayer”

“God hears your prayers because there is a secret work of the Spirit going on within you teaching you to pray.”

Even better, though, is the Apostle Paul’s statement!!:

Romans 8:26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

The primary way the Spirit helps us in our prayer lives is by the WORD OF GOD... and James 5:13-18 is a powerful place to start

I. When Should We Pray?

A. When We Are Suffering

James 5:13 Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray.

B. When We Are Happy

James 5:13 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.

C. When We Are Sick

James 5:14-15 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up.

D. When We Have Sinned

James 5:15-16 If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

So... there is no circumstances in your life in which you should not pray!!

1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray without ceasing

Ephesians 6:18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

II. Who Should Pray?

A. Individual Christians for Yourself

Pray when you are SUFFERING:

James 5:13 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray.

James uses a general word for suffering of any type...
whenever you are suffering, or in trouble, you should pray

Suffering sometimes makes people PULL AWAY from God

We doubt him, question him, wonder what he's doing, who he is

The great missionary to Burma, Adoniram Judson, after the death of his beloved wife, Nancy, and his precious daughter, seeing utter failure in all his efforts to win Burma for Christ, dug a grave in the jungle and sat by it staring into it for hours

He said with despair: 'I came to bring life and have brought nothing but death.'

He said, '**God is to me the Great Unknown; I believe in him, but I find him not.**'

That is what can happen in suffering...

Job found the same thing in his suffering... wondering WHO IS GOD??

Job 30:20-22 "I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer; I stand up, but you merely look at me. You turn on me ruthlessly; with the might of your hand you attack me. You snatch me up and drive me before the wind; you toss me about in the storm."

That is exactly the time to pray, to draw near to God.

James 5:13 "Is any one suffering? Let him pray!"

Secondly, pray individually whenever you are HAPPY

James 5:13 "Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise"

At our happiest times, we should go back to God and thank him, sing before him, rejoice in his presence... knowing what James said earlier:

James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows

Prayer should be the LIFEBREATH of every individual Christian's walk with God

Prayer is the very breath of your daily walk with Christ!

John 15:4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

John 15:7-8 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

But we must also see the CORPORATE LIFE of prayer... we are blessed to be in a church, and James extends prayer to include the whole church, beginning with the elders

B. The Elders of the Church for the Sick and Sinning

James 5:14 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.

Fascinating passage... sickness and prayer

This is the root of a lot of misunderstandings in the Christian church... the Roman Catholics get their doctrine of "extreme unction" from this... the final sacrament right before death. The "health and wealth" people get their doctrine of faith healing from it

Many issues...

Notice the role of the elders (plural) in a local church... a single local church has more than one elder (pastor)

Why call the elders? There is a sense of spiritual leadership... they should be men mighty in prayer, able to wrestle with on our behalf in prayer and be victorious

They anoint the person with oil! What does that mean?

Two possibilities: 1) symbolic/sacred meaning; 2) medicinal meaning

The anointing with oil happened in the Old Testament to mark out the King (the "Lord's anointed") or the Priest; the oil represented the presence of the Holy Spirit in that person's life; so the anointing of the sick would represent God's closeness to the person by the Spirit

It is also possible the anointing represents physical medicine

Isaiah 1:6 From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness-- only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil.

[The Good Samaritan] *Luke 10:34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him.*

People argue against this, saying oil is for wounds, not sickness. But James might just be referring to all the physical/medicinal treatments any ailing person would need. And the elders, like the priests of old, would be skilled HEALERS... this was before the scientific methodology made medicine a specialized study of extreme education. In the Puritan colonies in New England, the pastors were frequently the best trained doctors in the community

Also, notice that James links sickness with POSSIBLE sin:

James 5:15-16 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Now it is important to acknowledge that not all sickness is caused by specific sin... but SOME sickness is... that is the point of the "if" in the statement, "IF he has sinned, he will be forgiven"

God does discipline his people for sin:

Hebrews 12:6 the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

And sometimes, that discipline may well be SICKNESS

So when the elders deal with a person who is sick, it would be reasonable at some point to ask, "Are you aware of any sin in your life for which this might be God's discipline?" That should be asked gently and without exposing the person in front of family or friends... that question is a far cry from Job's friends basically saying his afflictions and trials were clear evidence that he HAD sinned!!

C. Church Members, for Each Other

1. James expands prayer to the whole church
2. It is in the context of sickness and sin

James 5:16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

If there is any sin involved, then we should CONFESS our sins... certainly to the Lord in prayer:

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

But this passage says we should confess our sins to EACH OTHER and pray for each other... that is a powerful tool in our church's growth in holiness

Discipleship: Look for a mentor that you can trust and be open and honest about your sins and confess them and pray for each other and hold each other accountable!!

In any case, it is powerful to share our sorrows and our joys with each other so we can join with each other in prayer

This is a BIG PART of our church's unity!

Romans 15:30 I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

III. How Should We Pray?

A. In Righteousness

James 5:16 The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

1. Sin blocks prayer

Isaiah 59:1-2 Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. ² But your iniquities have separated you from

your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

2. Justification righteousness

- a. God has made no promises to hear the prayer of an unbeliever
- b. Naturally, all of us are unrighteous in his sight

Romans 3:10-11 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.

- c. First and foremost in our prayer lives, we must be children of God to call on the heavenly Father in righteousness
- d. To be a “righteous man” (or woman), we must be justified by faith in Christ

Romans 3:21-24 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 1:30 Christ has become for us wisdom from God-- that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

3. Practical righteousness

- a. It is also vital that we do not harbor or cherish secret sin patterns in our lives

Psalms 66:18 If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened

B. In the Name of the Lord

James 5:14 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.

To pray “in the name of the Lord” is more than just to say “In Jesus’ name, Amen” at the end of our prayers

It means that we are praying for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed in our and in our situation... it means to pray according to his revealed will and for his purposes and to exalt his name and reputation in the world

So, even the prayer for healing should be made “in the name of the Lord” ... that is, that the sick person’s healing would result in the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ being revealed and his Kingdom advancing in this world

So often, our prayers are not made “in the name of the Lord,” but for our own purposes and pleasures and plans:

James 4:3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

C. In Faith

James 5:15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up.

To pray “in faith” means to do so relying on the Lord Jesus Christ... to pray “as seeing him who is invisible” ... it means to pray confident that he hears us; it means to not be double-minded, as in “maybe he hears and maybe he doesn’t”

James 1:6-8 when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

Faith is the “assurance of things hoped for” ... a confidence that the invisible God is the ruler of the universe and can do ANYTHING he wills to do

It is NOT like the faith-movement, the prosperity gospel people say, that it is like a commodity, and when you have enough you can make any demands you want from God and he must give it to you; and that, if the healing does not take place, it's because you didn't have enough faith!! You hear tragic stories in which grieving parents who have lost children to accidents or cancer were told that God would have healed them if they had had enough faith

Faith is the eyesight of the soul by which we see what God is doing... like eyesight, it doesn't CREATE reality, but it RECEIVES the available light in the room

D. Expecting a Powerful Outcome

KJV James 5:16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Prayer is POWERFUL and EFFECTIVE!

God wills to do MUCH through prayer

1. When we pray, we must pray expecting that God CAN do anything
2. And that all circumstances are working together for the ultimate good of the elect

Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

3. Prayer is the means by which so many things are accomplished in this world
4. When it comes to HEALING, we know that God is able to heal anyone anytime...

Matthew 4:24 News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them.

Mark 7:37 People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Jesus is every bit as powerful now as he was then!!

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

5. Notice the statement on healing here

James 5:15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.

- a. "the Lord will RAISE HIM UP"
- b. I can't help but think that this refers to the true and final healing, which is the resurrection from the dead
- c. At that time, there will be NO diseases at all... no death, mourning, crying, pain
- d. Any other healing that happens in this present age is just temporary anyway, though important
- e. God may very well desire to heal a sick person in answer to the faith-filled prayers of the elders or of the church
- f. But he may also not will the healing now, but rather point to the resurrection promise

John 11:25-26 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

6. So, we must believe in the POWERFUL EFFECTIVENESS of prayer, for God has worked amazing things in redemptive history by the prevailing prayers of his faith-filled people

IV. Elijah, a Man of Prayer

James 5:17-18 Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half

years. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

A. James cites Elijah as an example of the POWER of PRAYER

B. Elijah was a man JUST LIKE US

1. He was just a human being, with a NATURE like our
2. Made from clay... flesh and blood... with the same bodily drives and needs as our own
3. So, James's idea is that he was nothing special, and can serve as an example of an amazing life of prayer

C. Elijah's Whole Ministry was a display of the power of prayer

1. His feeding in the desert daily by ravens
2. His loading with the widow at Zarephath whose oil and flour never ran out
3. His contest with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel in which God answered his prayer and sent fire from heaven

D. James Zeroes in on the DROUGHT

1. We learn something the Old Testament narrative never tells us
2. The drought began as a direct result of Elijah's praying for it... he prayed EARNESTLY that it would not rain
 - a. Literally "he prayed with prayer"...Hebraic doubling for emphasis! FERVENTLT
3. But what did he pray for? A drought!!!!
4. Why? Because Israel was deep into idolatry and sin, and Elijah wanted God to judge them and bring them back to holiness in obedience to God

Deuteronomy 28:23-24 [I will make] the sky over your head to be bronze, the ground beneath you iron. ²⁴ The LORD will turn the rain of

your country into dust and powder; it will come down from the skies until you are destroyed.

This covenant curse was meant to bring Israel to repentance for their sins!

When Elijah prayed for fire to fall from heaven on the altar, listen to the words he used

1 Kings 18:37 Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.

5. Then, at the end of the 3 ½ years, he again prayed for rain... and it came at the answer to a man's voice!

E. This is the Confidence We Have in Prayer

1 Kings 17:1 Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."

God commits mighty things to us in prayer!

Like when Joshua prayed for the sun to stand still in the sky so they could defeat their enemies in battle:

Joshua 10:12-14 Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel: "O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon." ¹³ So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. ¹⁴ There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the LORD listened to a man.

But he is STILL GOD...

1 Kings 18:36 At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command.

Even the mightiest prayer warrior knows that he or she is just a servant asking God to move on behalf of his glory according to his own plan!!

Now, Elijah's mission in restoring wandering Israel fits perfectly with the final words in James's epistle

V. The Mission of the Church: Rescuing the Perishing

James 5:19-20 My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, ²⁰ remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins

- A. The Whole Book of James has focused on true vs false professions
- B. Sometimes, people make a profession of faith in Christ, then wander away from the truth
- C. The church's central mission: the GLORY OF GOD in the salvation of sinners
- D. Our covenant

"We will watch over one another in brotherly love"

- E. When we see someone wander from the truth, we are supposed to be the undershepherds in the Spirit of Christ

Matthew 18:12-14 "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? ¹³ And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. ¹⁴ In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.

- F. So... we GO AFTER people that wander!!
 1. We notice if someone hasn't been attending church or home fellowship
 2. We make phone calls, we visit them, we seek what's going on

3. Even moreso if we know someone is caught in a sin... we seek to “restore them gently” (Galatians 6:1)
4. James says if we win them over, we are rescuing them from DEATH and covering a multitude of sins
 - a. Death might refer to physical death now as a judgment
 - b. But the real danger is the Second Death, which is the Lake of Fire
 - c. The covering up of a multitude of sins refers to the ATONEMENT of Christ, the forgiveness that is God’s COVERING of sin

Psalm 32:1-2 Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. ² Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.

5. So we should pray for each other and know what’s happening in each other’s lives