

# *Sermon Text for September 21, 2014*

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*I Kings 18: 41-46, James 5:13-18*

“The prayer of faith”

We are winding down in James now, only two more Sundays left to look at the words of the brother of our Savior Jesus Christ. He has given us a whole slew of practical steps we ought to follow as we live our lives. He taught us to be people who yearn for the wisdom from above which is pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits. He taught us how dangerous the tongue can be especially here in this church as we find ourselves steeped in a culture of silence that tends to be a prime breeding area for gossip and statements said as truth when they are just conjecture that can result in destroying someone's reputation.

The ongoing theme in James is that saying that you love Jesus and confessing him as your Lord and Savior is not enough. Your life, your actions, your attitude, every interaction that you have with people ought to reflect the faith that you have. What we believe has to come out in how we act. So James has given us some very simple topics to cover to use as measuring sticks in regards to how are we doing in putting our faith to work.

But today's Scripture takes a drastic departure from the others all of which dealt with something on a horizontal level as we interact with those around us. Today's topic is principally vertical as we look at a word that is repeated 7 times in these verses. That is the word prayer. In February of 2013 we looked at a 3 sermon series on the topic of prayer and we asked, and hopefully answered the questions: How do we pray, What do we pray, and then Why pray?

Today, we will see in both of our Scriptures how prayer actually does have a real impact on our lives. There may be many of you sitting out there asking the question how is my everyday life influenced by prayer? James shows us how today. He talks about what he calls the prayer of faith and uses Elijah as the example. Elijah who is just like one of us, just a regular guy.

We will see that prayer is not about getting our will done in heaven, but rather God's will done here on earth.

Our Old Testament Scripture is probably much less familiar than the classic one which it follows. Just before these verses we find Elijah challenging the prophets of Baal to ask their god to bring fire down from heaven. When they are not successful it is Elijah's turn and he wins the day by God bringing fire down and his prize is the slaughter of all the false prophets. What we read today takes place immediately after that challenge and both of those Scriptures are within

the context of 3 years of drought that had been brought about by God through Elijah's prayers. The Scripture we read today shows the breaking of the drought again as a result of Elijah's prayer on Mount Carmel, the same place he was victorious over the prophets of Baal, he returns there.

When we went to Israel we went up to Mt. Carmel and from there you can see for miles and miles. You can see Armageddon on one side, you could picture being able to see the clouds that could cover the entire area. And if a storm came, it would come suddenly just as it is depicted in this Scripture.

James describes prayer almost as the pill to take in every and all situations and season. Are we suffering, he asks, and his community was suffering as our little town reels from the suicide of another teenager. The word suffering here is the same one Paul uses for the term afflicted. Are we afflicted? Teens that are afflicted often don't see a way out, often aren't able to find hope, the church has been a place where unless they conform to society, follow the rules, and be like everyone else, they are not welcomed. Are you afflicted or suffering? Pray. It will make all the difference.

Are you cheerful? Sing songs of praise. I can think of no other religion that has the type of congregational singing like Christians do. Ephesians 5:19-20 we read Paul describing the importance of letting our thanksgiving be known in the singing of songs. Who else worships God with the celebrations and praise that we do? Historically we don't always sing as a church only when we are cheerful. The slaves in the fields would sing, or in their churches gospel was built around the songs of the afflicted, of the suffering. Nobody knows the trouble I've seen, nobody knows but Jesus.

What about if you're sick. What do you do when you are sick? Here James incorporates not just a private one on one consultation to pray or sing songs of praise as we find in verse 13, but here we are all involved, I mean all of us. You are not allowed to be sick on your own. The elders of the church need to be called so that they can pray over you and you can be healed. A major responsibility for the elders, we discovered last Wednesday, was not just to be good administrators but faithful prayers. That may come as a surprise to some of us, but that is what James tells us here. James has given us a few surprises along the way and this just might be another one.

Listen to what Clement says in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and how it ties in to these verses: "Let the deacons of the church move about intelligently and act as eyes for the elders. Let them find out

those who are sick in the flesh, and bring such to the notice of the main body who knows nothing of them, that they may visit them, and supply their wants.”

James continues to give us very practical advice on what to do if we are suffering, or cheerful, or sick. Then in vs. 15 he talks about our main topic for today which is the prayer of faith. The prayer of faith sounds like a specific term which we can understand from other Scriptures. Hebrews calls faith the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. So there is something in this prayer of faith which relies upon a confidence that God's will is being done. This is not a sense of being unsure what we ought to pray for or what God wants in a certain situation. The prayer of faith comes from knowing what God's plans are for that situation.

Elijah when he prayed on Mt. Carmel knows that God would send rain. James describes Elijah as having prayed fervently which in the Greek is literally he prayed in prayer. It was prayer on top of prayer. It was prayer that was assured of things hoped for and consisted of things to come. Even with 6 times a journey to the sea produced no results he still prayed. It reminds me of the widow in Luke 18 who would not take no for an answer and continued to bother the judge until he gave in.

This is the prayer of faith where there is a certain confidence which is reflected as we read in I John 5:14-15: This is the boldness that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears.” The prayer of faith comes with a boldness that has been given to us by our Father who calls us His children. We do not have a Spirit of timidity as I Timothy 1:7 states, but rather a spirit of power. This is all tied together.

James here speaks of the prayer of faith as being able to save the sick. We know this word save in Greek can also mean heal. I have already shared with you my firm conviction that healings still take place even today. Back in the 1<sup>st</sup> century there was thought to be a direct correlation between our sickness our sin. So if you had cancer it was because you were sinful. If you had diabetes it was because you were not doing the will of God.

Thank God medicine has progressed where we no longer attribute all of our maladies and sicknesses and illnesses to the pernicious presence of sin. You do not contract ebola from gossiping, although that might curb gossip, there just is no longer the understanding that this connection exists. What I can say with confidence, however, is that our relationship with God does have an affect on the health of our soul, mind, and body. This is where the prayer of faith does have an impact on our own life.

The context in which James writes reminds us that the prayer of faith was able to bring about healing and it was prayer which came about from a relationship with our Savior which has manifested itself consistently in our life.

For many of us as we read in verse 16 that the prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective and we can say it sure is, but too bad I'm not one of those righteous ones who can pray powerfully and effectively. We tend to consider ourselves as not being in that number of the giants of the faith who can pray that prayer of faith which can save or heal.

James has an answer even for that. Look at vs. 17 where he tells us that Elijah was someone just like us. This is where not knowing who Elijah is helps us because we don't know how he raised from the dead a widow's son, or produced oil necessary for the survival of a widow and her son and turned it into a business. What James is saying that because he knew God's will he was able to pray and God's will was done. James is saying that if Elijah can pray for a drought and there is one, and pray for rain, and it rains, then we are able to pray confidently that our teenagers will make it, and they will.

What we are trying to do today is to take us away from a habit of only going to God in a crisis or while we are in a hospital bed. We cannot build up our faith in God, we can't have any type of confidence or assurance in God if we only go to him when we are in desperate need.

I think of you as I look out and see how God has manifested Himself in your lives as you have let me periodically peek into the window of your souls. You have seen God's presence in very practical ways each and every one of you. You should all have a confidence in God that doesn't just come from James telling us we are like Elijah, but comes from seeing God taking care of your newborn when he was so sick, or of your kid who is hundreds or thousands of miles away. Or a reconciliation with your son, or a presence of God on a mountaintop.

The intersection of God moments in our lives need to be remembered so that we can pray the prayer of faith as people who have seen God's presence in a very real tangible ways.

This is true as a church as well. Our giving to mission last year was extraordinary. God has blessed this church with a people who are faithful. We have experienced affliction and sufferings, joys and celebrations. God calls us as people and as a congregation to be people, to be a church that does not hesitate to pray the prayer of faith so that His will be done on earth. Amen.