

XXV. James in Biblical Perspective  
The Gospel Life According to James  
“True Religion and Best Practices, Part II”

James 5:13-18

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

June 22, 2014 – Morning Sermon

We are in the last section of the book of James covering best practices of Gospel Wisdom in the life of a Christian and the church in James 5:13-20. This is the Word of God. James 5:13-20 says *[13] Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. [14] Is anyone 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. [15] And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. [16] Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. [17] Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. [18] Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.*

*[19] My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, [20] let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, this is God’s Word and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Perhaps you remember hearing in our services that there would be an anointing service with the Elders in the Pastor’s Study immediately following the early service. I have had people continually ask me why we do this and what happens in that room. The reason we do this is mostly found here in James which I have just read. So why did it carry on to our church and other churches? Why do we practice this? James has given us the opportunity to answer this as pointedly and instructively as I possibly can and by the help of the Holy Spirit. The addressing of this issue, the prayer for the sick who are requesting this with anointing will be covered in the text in this study, takes place in the conclusion of the study of James on the Gospel life according to James.

James has said that you have a Gospel foundation and motivation. You are living in a broken world where there will be trial and so his consistent theme has been that the trials of life are used by a sovereign God to mature us for joyful maturation and persistent ministry in a sin cursed world and that those trials send us to the Lord for wisdom, from His Word, through prayer, and the Gospel life deals with the issues of life. Then James went through a series covering three chapters where he dealt with an external sin that will be found that should not be found. He shows how this comes from our heart and how to tackle the sin, not with therapy on the sin, but with Gospel wisdom to the heart so that the sin is put off and a new life out of love to Christ begins to develop. He deals with the tongue and how we live, racism, partiality and wealth.

Now he gets to the end of the book and he brings to us a series of Gospel best practices. In other words, when the broken world is here and the consequences of sin are around us as believers in this world, what is our first response? We have some wonderful

doctors and nurses in our church that take people through the process of restoration and healing but sometimes something happens and you need first responders. Those first responders are trained for the crisis of the moment to address the issue and what they do in order to set in course the restoration of the person and what is done must not be in opposition of what will be done later.

James is giving us four issues that are prevalent in the church. Here are the four issues. One is suffering – is anyone suffering, afflicted, in adversity. Secondly is cheerful – is anyone among you cheerful. Thirdly, is sickness – is anyone among you sick. Fourthly is wandering – is anyone among you wandering from the truth. Those four statements are not exhaustive of all the situations we find ourselves in our Christians lives and in the church but they are encompassing. All four of those will be found in your life as a Christian.

Remember what we learned about adversity for it is not an interruption in life – it is life. Life is an adversity as a believer in a sin-cursed Genesis 3 world. So what do you do when that happens? Secondly, there will be interruptions in your life where things are just going wonderful. There will be cheerful moments. Now I know there are some that never look like they have a smile on their face ever but there are seasons in our life where we are cheerful. Thirdly, you will encounter sickness. Fourthly, there will be moments in our life where we are prone to wander and that's why we sing the hymn, Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing. *Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.* So James has identified those four moments that are not exhaustive but it is encompassing. As a Christian you not only can have any one of those four going on in your life, but you can have more than one of those at one time. In fact, you can have all four of those at one time.

So what's our first response? In the last study we looked at James 5:13. The first one we covered was is anyone among you suffering? The first step, best step, not the last step or the least step is to pray. James is just being consistent with what he said in James 1:2-5, [2] *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. [5] If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.* So my first response in suffering/adversity is to pray for strength and wisdom from His Word and from above. God, give me a Christ-centered, not a suffering centered, view of this situation that I can grow in this trial of life and it not become a temptation to sin.

The second one we covered was is anyone among you cheerful? Things are going good. What a great wife, great husband, good kids, good report cards, my team won. There are just moments of cheerfulness in our life. My son-in-law is having a moment of cheerfulness right now because he is on one of our mission's teams to Brazil where he went to do soccer clinics, teach soccer coaches and evangelizing where they are having the World Cup right now. You ought to see the emails I'm getting from him and my grandson as they are doing ministry down there right now. They are having a great time. So what do you do during these moments of cheerfulness in your life? Your first response, not the last step or only step, ought to be to praise the Lord.

Gospel wisdom leads you to prayer in times of adversity and praise in times of blessings. Why? It is because within us is a constant movement to take the blessings that

brought us cheer and wrap our hearts around them instead of the Lord who sent them to us. We tend to worship the gift instead of the Giver. So what do you do? You praise the Lord because first, you didn't deserve those blessings so praise Him who sent His Son to purchase them on the cross for you and secondly, praise Him so that your appreciation and admiration for the blessing does not become adoration. There are times that we have affection, admiration and appreciation for the blessings that easily becomes adoration. You can appreciate, affirm and admire the blessings but your adoration goes to the Lord. Once you begin to adore it your hand gets fastened around it and the blessing begins to hold you and you're drawn to it instead of the Lord. That's why he gives us that antidote.

Now James gives us a third one – is anyone among you sick? When he says 'among you' he is speaking to believers. He is not talking about something incidental like a runny nose. He is talking about something of significance in sickness that could be debilitating, immobilizing, or captivating. This is for any believer who is in a season of sickness and this is his directive – “let him call for the elders of the church.” These all have been consistent. Anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Anyone among you cheerful? Let him sing praises. Anyone among you sick? Let him (the one who is sick) call upon the elders of the church.

Someone said to me recently, “Pastor, I was sick the other day and no one called me about an anointing service.” No one will call you for that for this is your invitation. If you are in a season of sickness that is debilitating, immobilizing or said to be terminal you now know that you can call upon the elders of the church but they will not call upon you. We will equip you to know to do this but you, according to the Bible, are supposed to do this.

Now what happens, what's the practice, the premise and the promise here? I will walk you through the text so we can understand it. When you call upon the elders of the church there is a two-fold process that then is to take place. James 5:14 says *[14] Is anyone 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.* You are not calling upon apostles or people with the gift of healing, it is elders of the church. Then one the elders will pray over them and two the elders will anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.

This has been the historic practice for over 2,000 years where churches that are following God's directive and are called upon to pray for the sick, the elders will pray 'over' them. This is why posture is important where the person who is sick either kneels or sits or whatever they are able and the elders gather around laying hands on them in an attempt to pray as directed here in the Scripture, over their life, over them physically and spiritually.

Secondly, the elders anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. Oil anointing is explained in the Bible. Anointing with oil in the Bible represents three things. One is that anointing in the Bible and in that culture means medicinal assistance, medical help. It is not that the elders are doctors but that they are responsible to make sure God's ordained, providential means built around the laws of creation that He has put in place are being honored. In the parable of the Good Samaritan the Good Samaritan paid the bill and the man beaten up was anointed with oil and wine as stated in the Gospel of Luke. Wine was used as an anesthetic and disinfectant and oil was used to soften and cleanse the wounded area. It was a medicinal act in that culture. Secondly, anointing with oil means it is a sacred moment. Whenever there is anointing with oil it is done to identify a

sacred moment of a focused calling and relying upon the Lord. Thirdly, anointing with oil in the Bible is symbolic of the work of ministry and presence of the Holy Spirit.

Baptisms in the Old Testaments had three different kinds. They baptized with oil, water and blood. They did this through either pouring or sprinkling and sometimes all would be present at the baptism. For instance, when Aaron the High Priest is ordained he is sprinkled with water like all priests are when they are ordained but the high priests were also baptized with oil which we see in Psalm 133 where it says oil was poured out upon the high priest and dripped to the neck of his robe and down to the hem of his robe to cover him, calling upon the Holy Spirit to give the high priest the ability to lead God's people wisely and faithfully. It is a sacred moment of ordination.

I think as the sick are anointed with oil it is purposely representing all three. Elders are not doctors but they should inquire of the sick as to whether they are taking proper medical care for their condition. It is not a lack of faith to use the providential means of healing that God has provided according to His laws of creation. Secondly this is a sacred moment because this moment of requesting physical healing is the Lord is using this spiritually in your life. Thirdly, whether it is physical or spiritual we are utterly dependent upon the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. So I think the anointing of oil is actually encompassing all three of those things at the moment. So this is the two-fold process that has been put in place.

Notice that they anoint in the name of the Lord. How do we pray? We pray to the Father in the name of the Son. Do you see how the preeminence of Christ is here? It is not the preeminence of prayer or sickness or the elders but it's the preeminence of Christ that you pray in the name of Christ and that you anoint in the name of Christ. James is clearly bringing us to a Christ-focus in this designed blessing that God has put into place for His people.

Now let's look at the premise. The premise is that the elders are going to pray a believing prayer, the prayer of faith. James 5:15a says *[15a] And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.* First I want to tell you what the prayer of faith is not. The prayer of faith is not yelling at God or commanding God. The prayer of faith is not identifying the prayer of sickness with demons. The prayer of faith is something very specific and Biblically defined. Let's look at the three-fold promise.

There are three promises attached to the prayer of faith. James 5:15 says *[15] And the prayer of faith will (one) save the one who is sick, and (two) the Lord will raise him up. And (three) if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.* The Greek word used for the word save here is *sozo* and it basically has two meanings. Save means to deliver someone from a situation who needs this help or to preserve someone. For instance if you see an animal caught in a trap you go and open the trap to deliver it from the trap to set it free from it or you get your paycheck and realize you need to save some money then you are preserving some of this money at least for a period of time. So it means preservation, a temporal preserving of something and it means a deliverance which would mean an eternal deliverance which is absolutely setting someone free from something. The second promise is that the Lord will raise him up from the sickness and sins but raise him up always, ultimately means to Himself. He raises us up from sin and its consequences to Himself. I will raise them up on the Last Day. Then thirdly their sins are forgiven by the Lord. So the Lord will save, the Lord will raise up, and the Lord will forgive sins.

What is the practice of this? James 5:16a says *[16a] Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.* What is the point? Here we have elders with someone who has requested prayer because of sickness, giving the prayer of faith, anointing them with oil all in the name of Christ, with the promises from Jesus that Jesus will save (preserve and deliver) them, raise them up to Himself, and their sins will be forgiven through this prayer of faith. The result of this spreads into the church. Now we are confessing our sins not just to elders but to one another and we're praying for one another. We are confessing and praying for spiritual and physical healing in the name of the Lord and while there may be the special case among the elders there is to be the presence of this throughout the entire church as members share and confess with one another. They bring the Gospel to each other. They remind them of God's redeeming, saving, delivering work and they pray for one another physically and spiritually throughout the church.

Then James gives the basic lesson about this prayer ministry that is among the elders at a special occasion and throughout the church. James 5:16b says *[16b] The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.* I prefer the alternate translation of this which says the effective prayer of a righteous person has great power. I understand why the ESV uses the word person in this verse but I think we ought to restrict ourselves to the Greek which uses the word man. The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Does that mean men and women can pray? Absolutely. I'll tell you why it uses that word, man, in this verse in the Greek in just a moment.

By the way, when a person hears this, 'the effective prayer of a righteous person...' they tend to think they might not be righteous enough to do this. James gives an illustration here to try to encourage and direct us. James 5:17-18 says *[17] Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. [18] Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.* Here is a prayer of faith by a righteous man. Elijah is an ordinary man called to an extraordinary job. Through his prayer of faith God did extraordinary things. In this account Elijah would send his servant to look over the mountain toward the Mediterranean and if he didn't see anything Elijah would keep praying. Finally the servant comes back and says to Elijah that he saw a cloud about the size of a man's hand. Then Elijah told the servant to go tell the king to get to high ground for there is a flood coming. He understood that the Lord was about to answer what He had directed him to pray.

Was Elijah a sinner? Absolutely. When you read about Elijah you'll see his sins of fear, of wavering obedience for he is not a perfect man but he had a positional righteousness in Christ. He had a personal pursuit of righteousness for his Lord. He had a gift of righteousness that positioned him acceptable and out of love to the Lord he pursued righteousness, unevenly and imperfectly, but he pursued it. So what about us? We are ordinary people like Elijah. We also have a new heart, no longer living under the dominion of sin but we still have sin living in us. We are not perfect in this and he wants us to learn from Elijah that we can be like Elijah, a sinner saved by grace who is positioned in righteousness and pursues righteousness for the Lord. We learn that ordinary people through the prayer of faith, trusting the Lord, positioned in righteousness by the Lord's gift, pursuing righteousness as a gift back to the Lord because we love Him

that God loves to use them to do extraordinary things either through providential answers or through miraculous answers in their life.

So here is the takeaway. I am summing all three of the first situations with this takeaway. The presence of Gospel wisdom in the life of Christians and churches will be marked by a culture of God-centered intercessory prayer and intentional praise. We are asking God to help develop a culture of prayer and praise. In a sin-cursed world, in light of the risen victory of Christ, God, give us a culture of prayer and praise which is God-centered with intercessory prayer and intentional praise.

Here are three things about this intercessory prayer. The first thing is that it is pervasive prayer. You can have a prayer meeting, a call to prayer, a day of prayer, or a moment of prayer and all of those things are important. At the last General Assembly we passed an overture that we would observe a commitment to prayer because of some of the things that are going on throughout our country right now and a desire for God to give a Gospel awakening. Should we be praying all the time? Absolutely, but it's not wrong to have times of prayer. We don't want to rely solely on a Wednesday night prayer meeting though. We want a culture of intercessory prayer that is pervasive.

We have elders available as soon as someone calls. The reason they are ready to have that time in prayer is because they have taken seriously their call to shepherd the church with prayer and the Word. They are attempting to pray for the congregation regularly. We're not just waiting for the pastor or elders or staff to pray but we're all praying for one another – confessing our sins and praying for one another. We have formal and informal times of prayer. We have a responsiveness to prayer in every single area so it is pervading the leadership, the membership and it is a culture of intercessory prayer that God allows us to develop because we know without Him we can do nothing. We know that you have not because you ask not. We know that when you do ask you ask wrongly so learn to ask rightly, to Christ, pervasively throughout the entire life membership and heartbeat of a church.

That means you pray about the spiritual and the physical. Did you notice that as James is dealing with the issue of physical and spiritual sickness he immediately goes to the issue of sins? Why does he do that? All sickness like all death in this world is only here because of sin. When Jesus comes back and we go to the new heavens and the new earth one of the blessings of that place is no death or sickness. Why? It is because there will be no sin. We don't have sickness until Genesis 3. There is no sickness or death in Genesis 1 and 2. That does not mean the person's sickness at that moment is directly related to a particular sin in their life. Please understand that.

By the way, it may be related to a particular sin. For instance, take sexually transmitted diseases. I can get rid of all of them and I think it's right for our doctors to work on vaccinations, pills and everything. I can get rid of sexually transmitted diseases in one generation and that is one man, one woman, sexually active only within the bounds of marriage with their spouse. That would get rid of all of them. All sexually transmitted diseases have a direct relationship with breaking God's law. That doesn't mean you could get it through another process like someone's tainted blood but if a person had cirrhosis of the liver and had been drinking a fifth of Jack Daniel's daily then there is a connection there of the person being a drunkard and it has a physical consequence. The physical affects the spiritual and the spiritual effects the physical.

It just doesn't mean that the person who is sick has a direct relationship to a particular sin at that moment but the moment of sickness always becomes an occasion to investigate and examine ourselves spiritually. During a sickness we begin to realize how frail and fragile we are. We start to realize how mortal we are. We start seeing things differently. Many times it's the days of sickness that become the occasion for self-examination and sins begin to be seen in our life yet may have absolutely nothing to do with our sickness but we begin to see those things and call upon the Lord. The same Lord who will ultimately deliver us from a sin sick body will deliver us from our sin record through the cross of Jesus Christ and you are forgiven. He will raise you up not only from a sick bed but from a sin bed and He will raise you up to Himself and deliver you to Himself with glory so that we are pervasively praying through all those things in our life.

Secondly, there is believing prayer. The Lord will raise you up so that the Lord will deliver you, save you and bring you from that. Does it mean when the elders pray over you that the sickness will leave you? It may or it may not. God may deliver you providentially that it through means using doctors, nurses, treatments etc. God can deliver you miraculously beyond the means. God can do either one of those but God will answer that prayer. Sometimes the answer to that prayer is 'no' to providentially or miraculously here on earth but He will deliver you from that sin body. There is a sickness unto death the Bible says. There is a sickness unto the glory of God and God will raise you up from that one day to Himself.

We tend to think that if God doesn't providentially or miraculously answer my prayer here then He didn't answer my prayer. He did answer it. He took you there. He gave you a body where you won't ever have to make that prayer again. I was talking with someone the other day who said "I'm not moving real fast but it is better than the alternative." I said "Oh no it's not." On the other side you won't have to worry about that arthritis or sickness or about anything. We think that if the person dies they received the second best answer and actually they received the best answer.

So when does the Lord providentially heal? He will providentially heal you and maintain you if He still has more for you to do here. If you have finished your course then He takes you to be with Him. David, after he had served God's purpose fell asleep and laid among his fathers. Once we have served our purpose in our generation then God brings us home. That is raising us up from the sickness from our sins to Himself and that's a forever answer, a glorious answer for a new body in the new heavens and the new earth.

When does He do miraculously healing? It is when God wants to do a sign, wonder and miracle for a reason. A miracle creates wonder in order to be a sign. In Mark 2 you see this with the four men who bring the paralytic to Jesus. Jesus saw their prayers and said to the paralytic "Your sins are forgiven you" and they say "What are You doing forgiving his sins for only God can forgive sins." Bingo that's who I am. Then Jesus says "So that you will know that I have the authority to forgive sins, rise up and walk" and they were amazed. It was a miracle that created wonder in order to make a statement. The statement was that 'you think it's hard to raise a paralytic' but the hard thing is to raise them up from their sins. Jesus is going to do the easy which will amaze you because you think it's hard in order for you to know that I can do the harder which is to make men and women right with Me through the forgiveness of sins and He raised him

up through the prayer of faith. The miraculous healing was to point to a glorious healing and that is our right relationship with the Lord because of the forgiveness of sins which He purchases for us on the cross.

So there is this glorious prayer of faith. It's not the prayer or the oil or the elders but it's the Lord that raises up providentially, miraculously either to stay here for further purpose or to go there to be with Him. He is raising them up over the sickness, from the sickness, over the sin, from their sin to either serve Him now or to go be with Him for all of eternity. This prayer of faith is a God-centered prayer to the Father through the Son in the Spirit. It is a God-shaped prayer. If it's a prayer of faith we know that faith comes by hearing the Word and it is a God-confident prayer. My Father will answer this right. We'll say 'I prayed for healing and the Lord didn't answer.' Yes He did. It was 'no.' Go read how many times the Lord says 'no' in the Bible to our prayers and it's a good answer. God answers the prayers of His people. Jesus taught us that not my will be done but Your will be done. The Father knows how to take care of His children. We pray about anything and everything but when we pray we ultimately rest in the will of our Father at how He will answer this to deliver us and save us and raise us up.

Finally there is prevailing prayer. You are in the position of a righteous man. You are pursuing righteousness. It is believing prayer that God says I move mountains. I start great awakenings. I do the miraculous, the continual and I bring the revival. I open and close doors. I hold in derision the kings who would rise up against Me. It is My people praying. Someone asked me one time when I was doing a lecture on the Battle at Gettysburg, "What would have happened if one of those armies had an AK47?" I said "They would have killed more people but if you had asked a general what they would have like to have had back in those days, they would have said forget the machine gun and give me a cell phone where I could get in contact with somebody." That's what prevailing, pervasive prayer is.

We think we're really something with iPhones, don't we? God has had wireless for a long time. The signal never drops. The bill has been paid for. Prayer is not an intercom on a cruise ship. Prayer is a cell phone on the battlefield. Lord, bring reinforcements. Do Your perfect will. Bring encouragement, resources and those things needed in my life where mountains will be moved, awakenings come and people will be raised up. Do providential and miraculous work. In other words, prayer makes a difference. Why? It is because God changes things through praying people and God changes praying people while they are praying. I know the bumper sticker says 'prayer changes things' and actually prayer doesn't change things. God changes things through praying people and He changes the people praying as they are praying as well things. I know that doesn't fit on a bumper sticker but that is what this passage is teaching us. That is the confidence that we have that our Lord is doing a great and glorious work. That work is given through the means of prayer. It's not the oil, elders or the prayer but it's the Lord who works through praying people confessing their sins, bringing them with confidence that He will answer rightly, timely and truly.

Here is my last thought. I used to go spend summers with my grandparents and they used to get up at 5:30 every morning. My granddaddy had corn flakes at 5:30 every morning. The reason I knew this is because he would hit the side of the ceramic bowl as hard as he could about 900 times with his spoon as he ate his cereal. He didn't eat corn flakes that way for he was really waking me up. He didn't like me sleeping past 5:30 in

the morning even in the summer. Sure enough I'd wake up. Here is what I'd hear. I would hear him and my grandmother in the next room praying for every member of the family including me, a rebellious, ungodly, blasphemous, profligate grandson.

What if you could hear Jesus in the next room? Who is it to condemn us? Christ Jesus is He who died, rather who is raised, who is at the right hand of the Father, who now intercedes for us. There is your Righteous Man. He is praying, not in another room, but He is praying in the throne room for you. Will He hear us praying from every room here now? Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You Father for this unbelievably, important, pivotal, life-changing text of Scripture of how we bring Gospel first aide when we're suffering, cheerful and sick and even when we stray as we'll look at in the next study. Thank You that our confidence is not in the first aide, the best response, the best practice but it is in the Lord who turns adversity into our growth and grace, who takes cheerfulness to remind us of the majesty of His grace and who even takes sickness to deliver us providentially, miraculously here and then into eternity, raising us up to Himself. So Father make us a people of prayer with the glorious embracing of this means of grace, prayer, but with our eyes fixed, not on elders, each other, oil or even the prayer, but the prayer of faith is in Christ who will save us into eternity. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.