

A Faith for Every Circumstance

Jas. 4:13-18

Intro: Sometimes people think faith is only about “pie in the sky, by and by”. The truth is—if your faith doesn’t help you through life, it’s not much of a faith. And it’s certainly not Biblical faith; for Paul tells us, “godliness is profitable (if I may change the order slightly for emphasis) not only for the life that is to come, but also for the life that now is!” How can faith help us as we face life every day? For an answer let’s turn again to James 5.

In this chapter, James shows us that our faith in Christ equips us to deal with whatever life may present to us. The fabric of life is interwoven with abuse and freedom, pain and pleasure, joy and sorrow; sickness and health; sin and righteousness. For James all of these circumstances should be met with faith's response and to that he speaks in this final practical chapter. This morning we considered how faith can help when we are abused by others. Now let’s see how faith can be shown at other times.

I. Faith's response to suffering--Pray! v. 13

- A. Suffering--to feel badly, endure bad things
- B. Let him keep on praying. Prayer provides the strength to endure.

II. Faith's response to cheerfulness--Praise!, v. 13

- A. Cheerful--something like "good tempered", happy
- B. Psallein! Sing praises. One of the clear passages where a form of the Gr. word "psallo" means "singing", not playing a musical instrument! In classical Greek it meant to pluck, then to sing a song with instrument, and finally meant to praise in song.
- C. It is wonderful to attribute to God our good times as well as pray to him in bad times!

III. Faith's response to sickness (and personal sin)--Confess and Pray!, v. 14-18

- A. Sick, physical sickness, to be weak or without strength, the effect of sickness being emphasized. Today with the advance of modern medical knowledge it may be we feel less inclined toward prayer. In the ancient world, there was not much that could be done for a sick person, but make him comfortable and pray for God’s intervention. In our day, the tendency is to think that medical science eliminates the need for praying. So let’s consider this advice carefully:
- B. Call for the elders
 - 1. Let them pray
 - 2. Anointing with oil (Trench distinguishes between ceremonial anointing "crio" and this word "aleipho" practical rubbing with oil). I believe this refers to providing a comforting balm for the sick person to give relief from bodily discomfort.

3. The prayer of faith will save the sick. The healing is not miraculous, but providential. It seems unlikely that all elders in the Dispersion had gifts of healing resulting in miraculous cures. Besides this work was reserved for confirmation of the word and not general healing of all the sick. God has been healing the sick since creation in answer to prayer. The positive statement is designed to encourage faith, but not to guarantee God's performance of man's will! The healing is predicated on the will of God. (By the way, medical studies show a clear correlation between faith and healing. The very process of faith itself encourages the production of bodily chemicals conducive to improved health and healing! But even so we need not assume that all praying is merely psycho-somatic)

4. If he has committed sins they will be forgiven. The "if" shows that sins may or may not be a factor in this person's situation. Those who seek God's physical blessings should ask themselves, "Will he hear my prayer while I live in disobedience to Him". Surely confess of sin is in order before we ask for God's blessings. It is on the basis of penitent spirit that forgiveness is promised.

C. Confess your sins and pray for one another, (Some read here a cultic prayer partnership; other read a walk down the church aisle. Both are misguided.) James simply enjoins genuine confession to one another and trusting intercession in behalf of one another.

1. The principle upon which this legislation is based is simply this: the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous avails much. At last we learn that the reason "elders" might have been called is because they surely are "righteous". But confession and prayers are not limited to them!

2. Elijah offered such prayers, v. 17-18 James does not appeal to him as a miracle working prophet, but a "man with a nature like ours" (again, another evidence of providential healing). He appeals to Elijah's prayer for a drought and then rain, both of which are acts in which God controlling and upholding his creation withheld and then granted rain upon the earth. He continues to control and uphold his creation for the benefit of His people and in response to their prayers.

Conclusion: The Christian is always aware of God's blessing and help in his life. Though we may set aside time to focus on Him in prayer and study, our thoughts are centered in Him all the time as the source of all our blessings and as the source of our help in time of need.