

## The Oil Of Prayer.

Text: James 5:13-20

Suggested Hymns:

420, 361, 422, 238, 427

- 1) Faith's secret undertaking
- 2) Praying for the sick
- 3) Prayer and oil
- 4) Therapy for sin
- 5) Pray God this sin is not eternally fatal!
- 6) Jesus is still the Great Physician

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is James 5:13-20, *<sup>13</sup> Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.*

*<sup>16</sup> Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. <sup>17</sup> Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. <sup>18</sup> And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.*

*<sup>19</sup> Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, <sup>20</sup> let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

James, more than most writers of the New Testament, shows the tremendous scope of faith. Faith is like an hourglass: it receives the myriad sands of grace from above and distributes and broadcasts them below.

Jesus said that mustard-seed-sized faith can move mountains. Faith is dynamic because it draws from above, taking divine energies and translating them into action.

In this Epistle, James pushes out the boundaries of faith especially in the direction of doing, active faith. For faith without a perceptible flexing of the muscles is a corpse, it is dead. The body of faith exercises itself in love, both visible and vocal. The person loved can see and hear it. He is acted upon, touched, and spoken to by the hand and voice of another. Almighty God is gracious and bestows His love through many *faith-full* people. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. Faith's Secret Undertaking**

Today we want to talk about faith's secret undertaking, which is prayer, the unseen source of power which enables a person to be a blessing for others. Tuned to God through His Word, a Christian responds in prayer. Prayer presupposes this tuning in on the Father's will, this being in communication with the purposes of God among men.

Therefore he begins with prayer in behalf of himself. He concludes with a cycle of prayer and praise. Like the AC power in our homes, he has a bi-linear, two-way, back-and-forth contact with God through prayer and praise. In suffering he offers the prayer of petition; in joy, the prayer of praise.

People misunderstand and limit the value and power of prayer by using it only to draw down, instead of to pull up as well. The full prayer not only asks and receives from God but also offers Him the sacrifice of praise. We are grounded unless we also rise to praise God for His goodness and mercy, unless we open our lips to thank Him for past favours and present gifts.

A person so conversant with God, aware of his full responsibilities and privileges before God, is equipped with the proper tools to serve God.

In addition, a person needs to be trained in righteousness. By faith and trust in Christ as the only Saviour from sin, he is accounted righteous by God, that is, forgiven and fully pardoned, and thus he becomes capable of carrying out God's tasks assigned to him, qualified to operate according to the perfect law of love. His service will be truly helpful to men and acceptable to God.

In Psalm 50 the Lord invites believers, ***“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor Me.”*** As we wait for Jesus’ second coming, we must not think of Him as far off in the distance. He is right here with us, especially in our time of need, and he invites us to call on Him for help.

Prayer honours God by showing that we trust and respect His unlimited power, His unlimited wisdom, and His unlimited love. Praying shows that a child of God actually believes that he or she has a personal relationship with the God who is *here* and who *acts*.

Prayer is verbal confidence in the Lord’s promise not just to watch His children from a distance but to intervene in their lives upon their request, to make good things happen for them. Prayer is God’s gift to His people to help them see themselves, not as helpless prisoners of fate, but active participants in how God directs His world. The Saviour guarantees access; the Father promises to listen, always; and the Holy Spirit promises to fill in the gaps and interpret.

***“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective,”*** says James. God invites us to believe that God actually helps us to change things in our lives and the lives of others. It is as though the Father invited us to put our little hands on top of His big hands as He steers the world. God wants us to know that He has many good things for us that He deliberately holds back, waiting for us to ask. James mentions Elijah, a mortal just like us, whose mighty prayer first switched off the rain for over three years and then switched it on again.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. Praying For The Sick**

Although we live in the century of medical miracles, we still find place for the oil of prayer in behalf of the sick. The Bible constantly urges us to pray for, with, and over the sick.

James suggests and supports the practice of calling in the pastor (or elders) and friends for help when there is sickness. Believers have engaged such help ever since Old Testament times.

We think of the therapeutic missions of Elijah and Elisha,<sup>2</sup> two great prophets. We read about Elijah healing a sick child in 1 Kings 17:17-24.

***<sup>17</sup>Now it happened after these things that the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him. <sup>18</sup>So she said to Elijah, “What have I to do with you, O man***

*of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?"*

*<sup>19</sup> And he said to her, "Give me your son." So he took him out of her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed. <sup>20</sup> Then he cried out to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son?"*

*<sup>21</sup> And he stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, I pray, let this child's soul come back to him."*

*<sup>22</sup> Then the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived. <sup>23</sup> And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house, and gave him to his mother. And Elijah said, "See, your son lives!" <sup>24</sup> Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth."*

Much of Jesus' healing was directed to the person in the sickroom, to the stretcher cases in the streets, and to the lepers in the countryside. How many others, beyond the few examples mentioned in the Gospel accounts, did Jesus heal, touching eyes, ears, and fevered brows, grasping paralysed hands and lifting them up?

That is one reason why the doctor-missionary, nurses' aid, registered nurse, and hospital assistant get such a thrill out of their professions. Day after day, through their silent prayers and with careful hands, they keep bearing suffering bodies with Jesus. He is the Physician, the Creator, who redeems our lives from destruction.

### **3. Prayer and Oil**

The practice of anointing the sick with oil (to which the apostle refers) still is a custom in many parts of the world. It is a first-aid method of treating illnesses.

It has no relation to the Roman Catholic Extreme Unction, although they will try to quote it in support of the Last Rites performed by the priest. Our passage does not speak of people who are going to die, but of those who have every

prospect of being restored to health. Furthermore, it is the “prayer of faith” which heals.

The oil is medicine. Olive oil was widely used as a soothing balm for sores, wounds, or injuries (as in Isaiah 1:6). The good Samaritan in Jesus’ parable used oil to dress the wounds of the man beaten and robbed.<sup>3</sup>

Surely, we should use medicine to restore health, and use health supplements to help prevent disease in the first place. Essential Oils are also mentioned many times in the Bible. Are they not all gifts of the Creator? To deny medicine is to deny the good of God’s creation, planted in the earth for man’s benefit.

Worse than faith without medicine, is medicine without faith, because it fails to recognise the hand of God guiding the surgeon’s knife, the nurse’s measurements, and the nurse’s helping hands. Medicine without faith may cure the body but rob the soul of its health.

James’ point is to use prayer along with regular medical procedures when a brother or sister is sick.

#### **4. Therapy For Sin**

Another important aspect of the healing mentioned by James is the spiritual aspect. When people are burdened with a load of guilt before God, they can become physically sick.

When people are consumed with bitterness or anger or hatred toward another person, they can become physically sick or a small illness can blow up into something more serious. In verses 15 and 16, James urges the visiting elders to help people repent of their sins and be assured of God’s mercy and forgiveness. As they confess their sins and receive absolution, they will also find healing from the poisons of hatred and anger.

Behind all sickness lies sin. Here is the cause of cancer, heart attacks, strokes, microbial degeneration, and every illness, including life’s last disease, death. A specific disease like leukemia may not be caused by a specific sin, like hurting and harming a neighbour, but sin is a general condition which affects the whole person, body and soul. Its infection is inherited, since our first parents succumbed to it.

#### **5. Pray God This Sin Is Not Eternally Fatal!**

Therefore confess your sins one to another, personally, privately, and publicly. It is healthy. — *“Confession is good for the soul”* is a proverb with good sense, because confession is commanded by God in our text.

Confession of sin before Christ exposes these deep penetrations of evil. True confession implies faith in the One wounded for our transgressions. By His stripes we are healed; by His resurrected life we are made whole. We are made new men and women, redeemed from living death to become alive unto God in faith.

## **6. Jesus Is Still The Physician**

The healing of our bodies waits only on the pleasure of God who made us. Did you, like Peter, leave your mother-in-law home sick? How is Jairus' daughter doing? What of Bartimaeus; is there any hope? Will the centurion's servant be able to work again? And if a man die, will he live again?

You see, faith and prayer patiently wait on Jesus, just as they did years and years ago. In our prayers we dare not overextend the privilege of approaching God by attempting to prescribe to Him the time or the method of healing. Leave that to His infinite love and wisdom. However, before and after the medications, be sure to draw back the invisible bandages of unbelief, and let His healing penetrate.

*“Pray one for another”* is one of the most familiar passages in this Epistle. Doesn't it sometimes seem too wonderful for faith to comprehend that our Lord hears not only the mumbled supplications of dry, fevered lips but also the pleas of those who anxiously attend the sick?

Stop wringing your hands helplessly when your loved one languishes, and start praying with the patient and for the patient. Do something for him. Believe and pray. When God lets one of His loved ones slip into a coma, don't just stand there — kneel and pray: Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon him or her. Lord, have mercy upon us.

James quotes the example of Elijah for our encouragement in prayer. One might sincerely ask: *“What have Elijah and I in common? He was a prophet of fervent prayer. I can't pray like him.”* You have this in common — and here is the point — you are a believing child of God.

The startling answers Elijah received were not his making but God's. Believe it and trust in Him. The windows of heaven are open; daily it rains with God's love. It is only the lips stubbornly closed in prayerlessness that remain parched and perish.

And prayer without faith is like shouting into the wind. ***“Whatever you ask, believing, you shall receive,”*** said the Healer of nations.

Although prayer is not specifically mentioned in the closing verse of our text, it is strongly implied. James says, <sup>19</sup> ***Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back,*** <sup>20</sup> ***let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.***

Our problem in so many, many cases of suffering is not only physical but spiritual. The patient has wandered from the truth of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Do him a real service and pray God that his soul, mind, and body may respond to the truth that we are all walking in the wake of death unless delivered by our Lord Jesus Christ through the forgiveness of sins.

Support health charities if you wish, but please, for the sake of eternal health, pray God that every sufferer finds his Saviour. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings 17, 18

<sup>2</sup> 2 Kings 4:32-37

<sup>3</sup> Luke 10:34