

SERIES: Discovering A Living Faith – (James) wk. 4

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We pick it up in verse 13. *"Is any among anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises."*

Verse 14, "Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. 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 earth for three and a half years for three years and six months. Then he prayed again and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit, my brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his ways will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."

Here's the question we need to wrestle with as we dig into this text specifically as it relates to verse 14: Is this text talking about someone who is sick or is it talking about someone who is sick because of sin? If you're to take the position this is just about anyone who is sick, let me raise some questions for you. "Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church." First of all, why must we call? This is an imperative. It's a command. You must do that. Why is that? We would have some very busy elders if every time you got sick you were required to call the elders. And why the elders? do the elders have a God's ear more than other people do? Are The elders somehow a cut above? That begins to create a very dangerous theology where you have this two-class system. So, you kind of had the clergy class and then you have the rest of you slugs that have to just kind of manage the best you can.

Go to verse 15. It says, "The prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick and the Lord will raise him up." That is a promise. Is The promise that if you, or in this case the elders, have enough faith, is the promise you will be healed? The problem with that is it just doesn't seem to hold true. I have gathered at the bedside of many suffering from disease, some who were terminal, and we have asked God to bring healing and God has not seen fit to heal. If that's what this verse is saying. What do you conclude? The only thing we can conclude is it's your fault because you lack faith. That's not a real encouraging message to people that are already suffering. When you think of what we've talked about related to the grace and mercy of God, contrary to a performance-based system, none of that makes sense. That can't be what the verse is talking about.

Then it says if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. First of all, we'd ask the question, where's that coming from? We're having a nice little chat about healing and suddenly we're talking about sins and why would those sins be forgiven? There is no mention of repentance. There's no mention of confession. Is the formula that if the elders pray and you are healed, that your sins are forgiven? I would suggest to you that what he's talking about is someone who is sick because of sin. And then the rest of the passage is addressing this basic issue. I think the issue is that the prayer of a

righteous person is effective in the presence of God. He's summarizing the entire book and coming to the conclusion that we are called to live as righteous people and righteous people have the ear of God. Righteous people's prayers are effective.

So, let's go back and kind of unpack this passage then accordingly. "Is anyone among you sick?" I think clearly the answer would be yes. They know what's going on. They are very aware, so he's asking the question but implying they know that's the case. "Then he must call for the elders of the church." Why the elders? Because this is an issue of discipline because someone has maintained a lifestyle of sin and offense before God. God has uh, a mediated-out discipline. Discipline is the issue of the elders. Clearly God does discipline his children. Hebrews 12 is very clear. Does God use sickness and disease to do that? Absolutely he does.

Now, in the first century, they believe that if you are sick, it's because of sin and Jesus had to correct that. That was out of balance. I think in today's economy we have swung to the other end of things. We don't ever associate sickness with sin, at least sickness with the idea of God's discipline. And so somewhere in there, there is the balance. There's the reality. It's not that God is punishing us because he's angry with us. It's because God is seeking to bring correction. So, God has different ways to get our attention and sickness would be one of those.

Typically, if someone is under discipline, it would be their responsibility to go to the elders and to confess their sin to the elders, to repent of their sin in order to lift the discipline. This particular person is too sick. So, what must he do? He must call the elders, and the elders in this case come to him so that he can confess his sin. He can repent of his sin in order that the discipline would be lifted. So that's why it's the elders and that's why it's a must.

What are they going to do? They are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. In this particular verse, pray is the verb. Anoint is a participle, so praying is the point. That would be the equivalent of saying, praying in alignment with God's will. Now, if you've ever gathered around someone, for example, who is suffering from a terminal illness, it's very hard to know - what is God's will? We want that person healed, but we don't know that that's what God wants. Sometimes God chooses to heal and sometimes God chooses not to. It's hard to understand, but if this is a situation where someone is sick because of sin, God's will is very clear. God's will would be that this person confesses, that this person repents, and that God's discipline is lifted. So, in this situation, it would be very obvious how to pray in alignment with the will of God. So, the elders come and pray in alignment with God's will.

So, what is the piece about anointing with oil? The Greek language offered two very distinct Greek words for this concept of anointing or rubbing with oil. And it's a derivative from the word from which we get our word Christ, which means Anointed One. It almost always refers to a ceremonial or religiously anointing someone with oil that the oil is symbolic. There's another Greek word that is simply an everyday kind of garden variety street term that just simply means to rub. Whenever this term is used, it's referring to the medicinal use of oil. In the first century, the most common medicine was oil. They had a variety of oils and they would rub it on people in order to bring about certain healing affects.

This text is not talking about coming with some sort of oil in some sort of symbolic way. It's talking about bringing the medicine of the day. The idea is this, you may have tried every medicine possible, but if the sickness is because of discipline, no medicine's going to touch it. But once the sin has been repented of, once there is confession of sin, once God's hand of discipline is lifted, then that medicine may be very effective. So, the idea is bring the medicine and apply it and begin the process of healing.

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Verse 15, "And the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who was sick and the Lord will raise him up." Now this is the dangerous verse if you rip it out of context, because we then make it promise something God never promised because this is a promise. But within this context what he's saying is if someone is sick because of sin, then if that person repents, if that person confesses that sin, that discipline will be lifted and that person will be restored and that person will be healed. There is a promise that God's grace is enough. God's discipline is never punitive. It's always corrective. For those seeking to parent their children in a grace-based environment, this is a critical principle to understand. There is a huge difference between discipline that is punitive - you are naughty, you must be punished - versus discipline that is corrective, which means as soon as my children get it, as soon as there's a correction discipline lifted, that's all I was after. Those are two different mindsets. God's discipline is not punitive. It's corrective. So as soon as people get it, they confess and they repent, then the disciplines lifted and the promise is yes, you will be restored, you will be healed, God's discipline will be lifted. It's just a promise that God's grace and mercy is always enough.

And then it seems to turn a corner and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven. Suddenly, that makes sense because if this is sickness because of sin, then there's the promise that those sins will be forgiven.

Now. Yes, it's true that we live in a fallen world and all sickness is related to that. You don't want to get an a frame of mind where you get the flu and then you're thinking, what did I do? You know? I really wasn't very nice to the clerk at Walmart a couple of weeks ago and now God's going to get me. You know? You just have to be careful with that kind of thinking. The question would be, how do I know? I would answer it like this, trust me, you'll know. This is not just some little thing that you did and so God's striking you down. This is an issue where someone has been thumbing their nose at God. Someone clearly knows that their behavior's offensive to God and God has convicted their heart and they basically said, God, you can convict me all you want. I'm not going to stop doing it. And this has become an all-out fight. I can absolutely guarantee you if you are sick because of sin, you don't have to guess. You will know. The only real question is whether or not you'll choose to confess and repent or that whether you'll choose to continue to fight and do battle with God.

Verse 16, "Therefore, (what is the therefore return referring to is referring to everything that's preceded.) Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. Confess your sins to one another. Pray for one another. That's what we've talked about. The need to pray for one another, bring in the elders. The idea of confessing is kind of implied, but it certainly comes then with the response that those sins will be forgiven. Obviously, the person has confessed to repented. That's the only basis by which those sins have been forgiven. So, what is he saying here? I think what he's saying is therefore, in light of what we've just talked about, it would be far better to deal with our sin ourselves before God is forced to discipline us. Therefore, the idea of confess your sin to one another does not mean that afterward we should have cookies and coffee and all go out in the hall and tell everybody our sins. You know, that would be a disaster. What it does mean is that we should have people in our lives that we're willing to be open and honest with and say, Hey, I've got a problem. I'm struggling with something. I need to deal with this. I need you to pray for me. The word confession literally means to agree with God. I use that language. God, I agree with you. It was offensive to you that I did that, that I said that once you go that far, it's really hard to justify that behavior. It's really hard to rationalize that behavior. It's really hard to continue to practice that behavior without this overwhelming guilt in this sense, I need to deal with this.

So, the idea of confession, confess your sins to one another is to have people you trust and be able to say, I'm engaged in a behavior. I'm doing something. I'm saying something. I'm thinking something. There's something in my life that I know is offensive to God and I agree with God, it is sin and I need to deal with it, and I need you to help me. I need you to hold me accountable. I need you to pray for me.

“Confess your sin to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed.” I don't think that healed there is limited to physical illness, that you spiritually would be healed, that you would travel down the path of life.

"The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." So right on the tail end of confess your sins to one another is the reminder that this is about walking in righteousness. This is about doing the right thing. This is about walking in obedience. That's the goal - that together we pray for one another. We confess our sins to one another. Together we seek to be righteous people. That's what God wants from us.

And then he uses the example of Elijah. Elijah isn't just some random example out of the Old Testament. It's very strategic. The Hebrew people were living in sin. They were worshiping the gods of Baal. They were living lives that were very offensive to God. So Elijah as a righteous person, asked God to discipline them to get their attention, and for three and a half years they lived without rain as God's discipline upon them. After three and a half years, they repented of their sin. They confessed their sins, so Elijah prayed and asked God to bring rain to lift the discipline and God lifted the discipline and brought forth the rain. It's a perfect illustration of exactly what he's been talking about.

Verses 19 and 20 are just kind of the summary, "My brother, and if any among you strays from the truth, (that's what he's been talking about here) and one turns it back. Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way, we'll save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." What he's saying there is that we should care enough about one another, that if we see someone else headed down a path of destruction, headed down a path of disobedience that we should get involved, that we should roll up our sleeves and do what we can to seek to turn that person back to the path of life. When we choose to do that, we save people that we know from a pathway of heartache. We saved them from destruction. We save them from a multitude of sins that will destroy their lives.

Basically. I think James is saying that this is what it looks like, practically speaking, to be a Christian from chapter one all the way to the end. This is not a book of suggestions. This is a book of commands. It's a very hard-hitting book. But this is the path of life. This is where you'll find joy. This is where you'll find everything you're looking for. If there are those who choose to disobey, our responsibility is to love them enough to try to turn them back, to try to get them back on the path. If they're determined to continue down the path, there is a reminder that God may choose to step in and to discipline them - not because he's mad at them, not because He wants to punish them, but because He loves them and wants to correct them and turn them back to the path of life.

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Arnie: Bryan, the book of James has really given us a lot to process over the last few weeks.

Bryan: Yeah, James is such a great practical letter, so let's do a little summary here. We've talked about how we respond when we encounter trials. We've talked about what it takes to persevere, talked about the right way to respond to temptation. We've talked about taking off the mask and a willingness to be real before God. We've talked about why the sin of partiality is so offensive to God and so contrary to a theology of grace. We've talked about the issue of the tongue. Why we need to be careful about what comes out of our mouth? We've talked about why our faith needs to be a faith that works. We've talked about the difference between the wisdom, which is from above and the wisdom which is from this earth, and the difference of the wisdom and the difference of the consequences in terms of the voices you listen to. We've talked about the importance of stewarding your time and your talents and your treasures for God's purpose.

Now at the end of the book of James, it's kind of a call to righteousness. We need to take seriously the commands of God. But know this, if you choose to thumb your nose at God and continue to offend him, God may choose to step in with his hand of discipline and do whatever's necessary to get your attention in order that you might be turned back to the road of life. So practically speaking, this is what it means to be a Christian. I would agree, James certainly gives us a lot to think about!

Cara: So next week we're going to return to Genesis, and I'm really looking forward to this.

Bryan: Yeah, me too. I love Genesis. So, two hall of Famers - Abraham and Sarah and, and really an amazing life of faith and so much we can learn from them.

Cara: Very cool.