

The Prayer of Faith

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Date: 25 June 2014

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[0 : 00] Anyway, this passage is certainly controversial.

! Well, controversial.! There are differing views of some of the elements in this particular passage.! And I'm giving you the entire passage there in your notes.

But, of course, you can look it up in your Bible as well. But this passage, verses 13 through 16, contains specific instructions on praying for the sick.

Praying for the sick in the church. They're very specific instructions. I think even more specific and focused than many people believe or have understood.

And I'll touch on some of that as we go along. But the passage, let me just go ahead and read it. Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. By the way, let me just stop there.

[1 : 05] Let who pray? The one who's suffering. Is anyone cheerful? This is the opposite end of the spectrum. Let him sing psalms.

That's going to be a little difficult for some of us because we're not good singers. But you can still praise the Lord. Is anyone among you sick?

And here it really kind of leads us into a lengthy, a more expanded treatment of this particular need within the church.

Because that's what we're going to be focusing on here tonight. Any 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. And the prayer of faith will save the sick. That's one of the most controversial parts of the passage. Prayer of faith will save the sick. Maybe a second controversial part would be the anointing of oil.

[2 : 10] But we'll get to that here in a minute. And the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another or your sins to one another.

And pray for one another that you may be healed. The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. So there's the passage that we'll consider here tonight.

The passage contains some elements that really are, in more ways than one, difficult to understand. And are therefore controversial. They're difficult to understand for a couple of reasons.

One, just the way they're written is difficult. And we get into the grammar of it. We're not going to deal with that in here tonight. It's complicated to translate. But maybe more applicable to us is some of the concepts that we find there.

The prayer of faith and so forth. And they're controversial. Let me just list some of them. For example, who are the elders? That's one question. It may not be, well, I don't think it is.

[3 : 21] The biggest, most maybe perplexing part of the passage. But there is a question there. Who are the elders? Let him call for the elders of the church.

Who might that be? We'll talk about that. What is the significance of the anointing with oil? Oil.

That's one part of the passage that there are differing opinions out there about that.

The passage says, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. What is the prayer of faith? The prayer of faith.

And the prayer of faith will save the sick. What does that mean? And what is the connection? And this kind of defines maybe the overall kind of difficulty of the passage.

What is the connection between saving the sick and the forgiveness of sins? Because, you know, I said that this is about, you know, praying for the sick within the church.

[4 : 27] And there seems to be, just at first glance, first reading, you know, just a little set about the sick. And some things to do about that.

And then a lot of it, you know, taken up with the subject of sin and forgiveness and so forth. What's the connection there between praying for the sick and sin and forgiveness?

And we'll hopefully answer that here tonight. It really is not complicated. I'm not going to go into some real in-depth, complex kind of looking at words and internal things about the text.

Try to explain it. I think in the way I put it to you tonight as we go through the passage, you're going to say, well, it's really not that complicated.

It really isn't. We have a tendency to make it complicated. Those passages that we have a hard time understanding or have concepts in there that seem to, you know, in our minds, connect to other things we've heard or things in churches and what other Christians do.

[5 : 38] We try to analyze it too much and make it very complicated. It's really not that complicated. We need to, I think, consider on the front end that, though I'm going to say very clearly that the power of healing is from God alone.

There aren't any healers today, all right? However, the focus of the passage is not on what God can do. That's not the focus here.

The instructions James is giving are very practical, and he's not trying to present, you know, a passage that deals with what God is able to do.

We know that God answers prayer, don't we? And we also know that God answers prayers for the sick. God answers not just prayers, but He answers prayers for the sick.

We know that. And we also know that God sometimes answers those prayers in miraculous ways, unexplainable ways. And, you know, but that's just not what James is delving into here, so we don't need to be looking for that.

[6 : 49] The focus is not on what God can do, but on what God's people should do. When there's someone sick, someone is sick in the church, not sick of the church, but sick in the church, okay?

There are pastors that deal with that other, too, you know, when you've got people who are sick of church. So in these verses, James tells us how God's people should respond to sickness in the church.

Primarily, the instructions are for those who are sick. And we'll talk about that, but secondarily, when we get into the part about the elders, what they are to do, secondarily, these instructions are for those God has called to pray for the sick in this very specific situation that's presented to us here in the text.

So that's the focus. I'm going to divide this into two parts. There's, first of all, kind of a statement about the priority of prayer. And what James does is present, you know, kind of three situations, scenarios for prayer.

And the first one is in times of suffering. Times of suffering. All right, so he's calling, he's emphasizing the need for prayer when there is suffering, when a person is suffering.

[8 : 19] And so he says, is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Verse 13. The Greek word, katapotho, and you knew exactly how that was pronounced.

It's actually two words. Kata means under or down. And potheo is from pathos, passion, from passion.

The word that we get, our word passion. So it's under passion. All right. What does that mean?

Well, it means to come under personal hardship or misfortune.

And refers to various forms of human suffering. It can include sickness, all right, health issues. But it includes nearly every other kind of a source of human affliction, suffering.

It could be a financial difficulty or family or persecution or, you know, just any number of things that a person suffers as a result.

[9 : 30] And so is any among you suffering, having afflictions? And the response called for is prayer.

It's prayer. I said it was very straightforward. So he's just giving one particular scenario. And again, I would note that the one who is suffering is called upon to prayer. And that doesn't mean that others, that we ought not also pray for those who are suffering.

But the emphasis, the focus here is on the one suffering. If you're suffering some affliction, then pray. Then you need to pray.

And the implication is instead of becoming discouraged, you see, or hopeless, reaching a place of hopelessness, which is, you know, I guess just another way of saying discouraged, or even lashing out against others or accusing others or blaming others, you know, for whatever it is you're afflicted with.

Instead of that, pray. That's the implication here. So if you are afflicted, you're suffering, what you should do, number one, is pray.

[10:46] Lay it before the Lord. All right? And he doesn't go into any detail about that, give any specific instructions about that. It's very straightforward. We know God is the one who is going to answer those prayers and accomplish what is needed in your life.

But the focus is not on what God can do. He can do anything, do all things. Nothing is impossible for him. The focus is on what God's people should do when they suffer.

And quite often, by the way, and, you know, I think we could all, if we were honest enough, could give some personal testimony. But quite often when we do suffer some form of affliction, we're tempted not to pray.

We're tempted to get angry. We're tempted to be depressed or discouraged or even blame somebody else or just, you know, just kind of go, woe is me, pitiful me, you know.

And so that's why he says pray. All right, so that's one situation, life situation. The other one is on the opposite end of the spectrum, times of happiness, joy, cheerfulness.

[12:00] In fact, that's how the new King James translates it. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. All right, so both ends of the spectrum there.

The Greek word is euthumeo. Thumeo is from thumos, means fire. In fact, sometimes it's used in very, very, well, I don't know, negative is the right word, but it's used to describe God's wrath, thumos.

It's an outbursting of fire, of wrath. And so it's kind of interesting here that it could be actually used in the opposite sense to describe joy, an outburst of joy and cheerfulness.

And it conveys then the idea of a cheerful heart. Now, it's not just that, you know, long comes just this feeling of happiness. You know, I just feel happy today.

Well, we have reasons for feeling happy. I mean, there are things that happen, you know. And so the cheerful heart is then a result of some blessed situation in life that came from God.

[13:17] So, because all good and perfect gifts come from God, James 1, 17. All right, so God has singularly blessed you, you know, whatever it is, and the result is suddenly, you know, burden is lifted or you feel good, you feel joyful, you feel happy.

And what should you do? Praise the Lord. Praise Him very deliberately. Now, he says that we are to sing psalms and, you know, not all of us are singers.

But don't worry about that. The idea is praising Him, praising the Lord. All right, so those are two situations. And we're to respond in those ways.

Third, and this is the one that he spends much more time on. Third, times of serious physical illness. And I emphasize serious, serious illness, serious physical illness.

I'm not just talking about somebody sick. Someone in the church who's sick. And I think, you know, you can understand that in a number of ways. One, for sure, obviously, if you just simply have a bad cold or you're just kind of feeling under the weather, you don't have to call for the elders to come to your house, you know.

[14:46] And so we know this is something much more serious. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church. Now, the Greek word, here's another one.

Osthenio. And thenio means strength. And when you put an A or alpha in the Greek on the front, that makes it negative.

So it's without strength. That's what the word means. It's without strength. And thus refers to a serious illness. Again, not just simply sick or under the weather, not even a severe case of flu necessarily, though it could get severe enough that would qualify here, where you would be bedridden, confined to your bed or home.

This is serious. The person is feeble. No strength whatsoever. And may even, I think, the implication is a person who is maybe even at the very throes of death, on the, quote, you know, proverbial deathbed, or things are just very, very serious.

Now, the proper response is still prayer. All right, so you see all of these situations, the response to these situations is always prayer. The difference in this situation is in who must do the praying, who is called upon to do the praying, the primary praying.

[16:24] And so this is intercessory prayer, is the idea here, rather than personal prayer. That does not mean, by the way, that if someone is severely sick on the death day, that that person can't also pray for himself or herself, obviously.

But James is getting at something else here, something very, very specialized, very specific. And so the emphasis is on intercessory prayer, the praying of others.

Call for the elders, let them pray over him or her. All right, so that leads to the second main part of this, and that is the procedure.

There's a procedure, there's a set of procedures here for prayer, for this type of praying, that is to be done by the elders.

So James describes then a four-step process of praying for the severely ill of the church. Step one. I think it's very simple.

[17 : 38] I could just come right out of the text, though some of the steps need some explanation. He should call for the elders of the church. That's step number one.

So presumably this person is, and of course, you know, the masculine is here in the text, but it obviously could apply also to a woman, the feminine.

And so he or she, that's step number one. So here's a person, member of the church, and so weak, so sick, that this person cannot even leave the house, cannot come to the church.

And may even be, you know, at the edge of death itself. And so what should that person do?

Call for the elders of the church. Call for the elders of the church. So that's step number one. All right, what about these elders? Well, the Greek word for elders is presbyteros.

[18 : 42] Presbyteros. And we get our word presbytery. Presbytor. You know, it is one of the three words in the Greek New Testament that describes, can describe a particular office in the church.

We'll get to that here in a minute. But it's presbyteros. And it's really in this text, and not just in this text, but other places where the word appears. It's not just real clear what, who this elder is, or these elders are specifically.

So there's several possibilities. Could just be simply the pastor. Many places, several places, I don't know about many, at least two, I think.

It's clear that some of the other words that describe a particular office in the church, that these three words, that they're interchangeable. In presbyteros, you have a word for bishop, the episkopos.

And then poime, that's pastor or shepherd. And the Bible, some places, uses those words interchangeably to speak of me in the church.

[19 : 59] So is it then a reference to the pastor or pastors, plural? Because in the New Testament, you find quite often presbyteros and episkopos and poime in the plural.

So a church has more than one. So is it talking about the pastor? Is it a reference to, and this would also be the technical sense, ordained leadership of the church?

That could include the pastor or elder or elders, as we as a church believe in the plurality of elders.

Or elders could, some would say, could also include deacons in the church, ordained leaders, officers in the church.

That would be a technical sense of the word presbyteros. But it can, and some places in Scripture it is used in this sense, could just simply refer to a group of mature men in the church.

[21 : 11] And I say men because it is in the masculine. It's presbyteros is masculine, not feminine or neuter, meaning it could be men or women. Very specific, masculine.

And call for these men. Could just be mature men in the church. That would be the non-technical sense of the word presbyteros, and it appears that way in Scripture in no many places.

They're just the older men in the church. Not just older as in the sense of age, but older in the sense of maturity. And so, actually the word presbyteros, by definition in the biblical sense of the word, whether we're talking about an official office or we're talking about in the non-official or non-technical sense, elders are those who have the wisdom of years and Christian maturity in both prayer and spiritual discernment.

So they are a group of men in the church who are very mature spiritually, and they're called upon.

So it could be in that sense as well.

What's the answer? Well, I don't know. It could be all of the above. I don't think that it's really crucial that we decide whether we're talking about elders in the official sense or whether we're talking about spiritually mature men in the church who've been called by this one to come.

[22 : 45] All right, now the responsibility to call the elders of the church lies with the one who is sick. Now, this gets a little bit, maybe a little bit dicey because it may, you know, I may be making it sound like, you know, let's say the elders have met, you know, we're meeting on Wednesday night and it's brought up that so-and-so is very sick on his deathbed.

And, you know, should we pray for that one? Absolutely. Should we go and do the prescribed thing in Scripture?

Well, no. It is the one who is sick, and sick even maybe even to the point of death. It is the responsibility of that one to call upon that specific group of men to come to the church, anoint with oil, pray the prayer of faith, and these are the instructions of James.

It doesn't mean that we're cold-hearted. It doesn't mean that we don't care. We should pray. It doesn't mean the pastor can't drop by and pray. Absolutely not. That's not it. This is a particular procedure that is laid out before us in Scripture for a particular situation in the church, and I'll explain a little bit more about that as we go along.

So he or she should call the elders. All right, number two, step two, and let them pray over him. All right, it's a very simple step.

[24 : 30] So this one calls for the elders to come, this group of men in the church, whether official or unofficial. And then when they come, what are they to do?

They're to pray over him. Pray over him. The assumption is that the one who is sick has already been praying, but to no avail.

All right, that's key to understanding here. The person has been praying, and others have been praying. Maybe the entire church has been praying for this one, but to no avail.

And so there's the need then to go this next step. The elders' prayers, this is also, I think, clear in the text, are enhanced by the Holy Spirit through men who are righteous.

Not perfect. And I think we go to verse 16 to see this description, the effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

[25 : 43] That's attached to this process. That's descriptive of these men who've been called, called to the home of this one who's very sick.

They are righteous. They're not just saved. Certainly that, but they're right with God. I mean, they're living according to God's Word.

God has granted them a spiritual maturity and spiritual discernment. And that's key in this situation because very likely, and we'll get to this in a minute, very likely the primary idea is someone who's sick because of sin.

Because of sin in his life or her life. And so this group that comes needs to be very discerning about what the real problem is here. That's something that's much deeper than just simply a physical ailment.

All right, so that's step number two. Step number three, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. Anointing with oil.

[26 : 55] All right, what's all that about? Well, there's several possibilities that have been suggested. And number one, and this is probably the one you've heard, this is probably the typical Baptist answer, that the oil was for medicinal purposes.

And so the idea is, you know, based upon the medical technology of the day, oil was used for a lot of things, for medicine, for medicinal purposes.

And so the anointing of the oil is simply not a cure, but it is some form of remedy for ailment.

But I don't really think that that is the idea here. But they're not calling, I mean, the whole thing here, the whole context of this passage is something that's very spiritual.

So we're not talking about a medical solution. These guys are not doctors, you know. though there may be some properties of the oil that are medicinal, but those properties are not going to cure a person who is deathly ill.

[28 : 17] All right, so that's one possibility, one that's suggested. The oil, second, the oil is only meant to comfort the ill person, just as a kind of a gesture of comfort, to kind of ease them.

And I think this could be very true. I think the oil had that kind of property. It was refreshing and soothing. It doesn't seem like it would be to us, but in those days it was.

In fact, remember Jesus was anointed with oil and it was a thing of, more than just being polite, it was a comfort to him.

And so it could be that that's all there is to this. Anointing with oil is just a matter of comfort. By the way, the example of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10.34, you know, the Bible says, I think there is something to this effect, that he bound his wounds.

That would be a medical kind of solution, binding his wounds. And then he poured oil and wine. It doesn't say he poured the wine in his mouth.

[29 : 30] It's just some medicinal property or some comforting property of those elements. Third, the oil, some have suggested, and strongly suggest, that the oil imparts divine grace or power for healing.

And so actually anointing the oil is used by God to actually heal the person. And, you know, those Pentecostals and other charismatic groups that will do that even in their worship service have anointing oil and they believe that God confers or imparts some grace to the oil that brings about healing.

And so that's what some have suggested. Fourth, the anointing is symbolic only. It's a symbolic act to demonstrate the reality of the faith of those who are praying.

Oil is, quite often in Scripture, is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. And so it's a gesture by those who have come before they've come to pray, but it's a gesture to symbolize, you know, their faith.

That would be encouragement. It would be an encouragement to the one who is sick. It would also be a testimony to God that He is the healer here.

[31 : 08] and so the oil is symbolic. What's the answer? I think it's clear that the anointing of oil is of lesser concern to the whole process.

That's something that a lot of people fail to note. That when you take the whole passage, the passage as a whole, and what is being said here, what the focus is, the emphasis, and the anointing of oil really is of lesser concern.

It's mentioned, but the healing, nowhere in the passage does it attach the healing with the oil. It attaches the healing with the prayer, the prayer of faith.

And so we need to first understand that, that it's of lesser concern or secondary concern in the passage. The passage, again, stresses the prayer of faith, not the anointing of oil.

Certainly, we can make the case, and I've tried to say this, that the oil has some medicinal properties and soothing properties for the sick person. That's certainly true.

[32 : 20] But nothing in the text points to anything supernatural in the anointing or in the oil. The anointing or the oil, or both together. And I just lay that out before you and caution people not to make more of the text than is there.

The oil, then, is simply, I think, a token or a symbol of faith. I really think that's what it is. It's a symbol of faith. And a secondary purpose would be to comfort, to soothe the person who's sick. And it's a humbling reminder that all healing must come from God. The oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, and this is a testimony that the healing will be done by God.

God is the healer. The elders are not healers. There aren't any healers now other than God. God did allow men to heal the apostles and some of the close associates to the apostles early on prior to the completion of the written word of God.

And Jesus healed. His apostles healed. Some deacons healed. Close associates of the apostles healed. But then all that came to an end. We don't have any healers today.

[33 : 45] God is the healer. And so when we're called, if the elders are called to anoint with oil, it's symbolic of God is the healer.

All right, so no power in the elders, no power in the oil, no power really in prayer by itself. It's not the prayer itself that heals. You say, what did they say? The prayer of faith will save the person.

Well, it's the prayer that's offered up in faith. That's what God honors and use it to heal the person. And don't forget that phrase at the latter part of verse 14, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

In the name of the Lord. So the power is in the name of the Lord. The power is in God. Step four. Hurry along here. Prayer of faith will save the sick and the Lord will raise him up.

will save the sick. So this step is the, I think, the expectation of results.

[34 : 54] This is actually part of the process. And so the elders who come, they have an expectation that God will heal. He'll accomplish what he desires in this situation.

And it involves three parts. There's healing. That's the first thing mentioned. Although the word healing is not in the English text. It comes from the word save or save the sick.

I think the New American Standard has restore. But that really is not a good translation because that concept comes a little bit later.

This is the word sozo. it's the same word that is used in the Bible to describe spiritual salvation. But that's not what's going on here.

In this sense, it's used to mean physical healing. So there's physical healing that takes place. That's what we go and in faith we are expecting God to do.

[36 : 03] and so that's the first part in this final step. Healing. By the way, the text says nothing about the people who anoint and pray affecting the healing.

There's nothing in the passage that suggests that the elders have anything to do with the healing. What they do and anointing and their presence there and who they are and maybe if they are in some official capacity as quote elders of the church none of that has anything to do with the healing of the person.

It's all God. It is the prayer and I want to emphasize this the prayer and I know that I'm adding a couple words offered in faith.

That's the idea the prayer of faith. It's not the faith that saves. It's not even in and of itself the prayer that saves.

It's the prayer that is offered in faith. And I think it's an all encompassing idea that number one the elders who have gone to the home to this sick person because they've been called to they go in faith that is they're believers for one thing and mature in their faith and they believe in prayer and they believe that God honors faith and we must always offer everything to God in prayer but faith is the only thing in faith.

[37 : 44] Faith is the only thing that pleases God and so it involves all those things so that when that elder or elders pray they're praying believing that God is able and that God will heal this person.

It's the prayer that's offered in faith that saves that God honors and uses to save or to heal the sick person.

The second part of this is restoration. Restoration and that word means to arouse to cause to rise. So what's the idea? The idea is total healing not just sort of kind of part way healed or just feeling better.

We're talking about a person here's the idea and we know this to be true in life that when a person gets to the point of being so ill that that person cannot get out of the bed and is really on a deathbed we know that it's not just simply the sickness that put them there but many other things begin to happen in there.

[39 : 02] you know a lot of people who eventually die or have cancer and things like that and die they don't normally die of the cancer they die of pneumonia you know other things that are caused by the illness itself and so conceivably whatever the ailment is in that person that could be healed but they might still be weak I mean they've been in bed four months perhaps and there are other complications that have occurred that they may still need to you know to be healed of so that's the idea it's not just so we first we have the healing of whatever the problem is then we also have the recovery a complete recovery and by the way I would interject here that there isn't anything in the text that that suggests that this is instantaneous all the time that that God's going to answer that prayer right then he may not answer it right then now it's not just a disclaimer an easy way out so that you won't be discouraged if you go and pray for someone and they're not healed right away but there is anything here that says that it must be instantaneous now it can be

God can do that not always that way but this is the step or the process in this fourth step there's healing then there's restoration and then third and this seems odd to us forgiveness forgiveness and if he has committed sins he will be forgiven now what does that have to do with sickness I mean not all sickness is caused by sin is it by a particular sin no we have examples in scripture where remember Jesus healed or disciples said it was because of this man's sin or his parents sin and he said it wasn't because of sin but for the glory of God not all sin or rather sickness is the direct result of a particular sin or sinfulness that has gone unrepented of however if it is because sometimes it is and

I would say to you that I believe that that's the primary context here that the person is on his deathbed and he's there because he has sinned and not repented and God is bringing him to the very edge of life itself and what he must do even though it is somewhat implied in the text he must repent call for the elders but he's got to call for the elders and for them to pray for him that's why it's important for these men whomever they may be if it's officially elders or if it's just mature spiritual men in the church that they have discernment and God grants them discernment to know what the real problem is here and so essentially they are not only praying for healing but they're praying for repentance