

Sermon Mark S. Aites  
**CHRISTIANS FACING ILLNESS**  
(Based On Material By J.J. Turner)

**TEXT: JAMES 5:12-18**

**INTRODUCTION:**

1. All of us, at one time or another, face hardships. These hardships may manifest themselves in a variety of ways:
  - 1) A personal loss -- loss of a loved one.
  - 2) The loss of a job: affecting our income.
  - 3) The loss of a limb, appendage, or one of the 5 senses.
  - 4) It can manifest itself in being ostracized by your family for Christ's sake.  
**Matt.10:36** *"And a mans foes shall be they of his own household."*
  - 5) Or it can be some illness which lingers and is discouraging.
2. Early in James, the Lord's half brother records:  
**James 1:2-3** *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;*  
**1:3** *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.*
  - 1) It is indeed difficult to count the various trials which Christians face as joy.
  - 2) The late bro. Andrew Conally said of this passage, "The Christian life to the faithful brother or sister is just one trial, temptation, provocation, and exasperation after another! But, my beloved ones, it should always be considered an occasion of utter joy."
  - 3) The reason is that because our trials become the proving ground of our faith.
  - 4) Paul wrote the church at Rome:  
**Rom. 5:3-5** *And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;*  
**5:4** *And patience, experience; and experience, hope:*  
**5:5** *And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*
3. As we come to the fifth chapter of this marvelous letter:  
**James 5:8** *Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*
4. Beginning then with **vs 11**, he reminds us of those from long ago: *Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.*
5. With these background thoughts in mind, we turn to our first point:

**DISCUSSION:**

**I. SUFFERING.**

- A. **5:13** *Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.*
- B. The word **suffer** is a rather broad term, used here, it literally means, "to suffer evil."
  1. The term is inclusive of afflictions both from without and within (mental anguish).
  2. It is the same word used of the prophets:  
**James 5:10:** *Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.*
  2. Christians of the 1st century were suffering for their faith in Christ, as the prophets suffered before them.
- C. Suffering was a major challenge to those 1st century Christians.
  1. But in every generation; even today, it remains a challenge to our faith.

2. Pain and sorrow and suffering afflict us at one time or another. Not a one of us is immune.
  3. While it is true, that like the Psalmist we can say that we are fearfully and wonderfully made (**Psa. 139:14**); we none the less face the frailties of the human body and spirit.
- D. What solution does the writer offer?
1. When suffering is faced -- *“Let him pray.”*
  2. Literally, present middle imperative --let him “keep on praying.”
  3. God is there to support us thru our trials and tribulations, and therefore we should turn to Him for help.
  4. **Psa. 46:1** *“God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.”*
- E. When trials arise, may we like the apostle Paul accept the judgment of God.
1. When Paul was facing his *“thorn in the flesh”* in **2 Cor. 12**, he asked the Lord 3 times to have it depart from him.
  2. **2 Cor. 12:9** God responded to him: *My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*
  3. Listen then to the attitude of Paul:  
**2 Cor. 12:9b-10** *Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*  
**12:10** *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*
4. Here is a great challenge to our faith; learning to accept things as they are.
- F. But then James asks, *“Is anyone cheerful?”*
1. The original word describes a disposition; it refers to one that is friendly, joyful, pleasant, agreeable; literally one in good spirits; one who is free from anxiety and problems.
  2. This is the same term used of Paul in **Acts 27** in his journey to Rome, during the tempest of the sea; when he told his traveling companions *“to be of good cheer.”*
  3. A cheerful mind or attitude is placed here in contrast to suffering.
  4. We must realize that not everyone in the 1st century allowed their trials and tribulations to get the better of them, for some counted them as *“all joy.”*
  5. Paul wrote to the brethren at Philippi:  
**Phil. 4:4** *“Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.”*
  6. **1 Thess. 5:16** *“Rejoice always.”*
  7. As Christians, we must learn to handle our trials and every day problems with a joyful spirit. This comes through a great level of faith and trust in the Lord.
- G. For those who are cheerful, James admonishes: *“Let him sing psalms.”*
1. Other translations say, *“sing praises.”*
  2. A phrase which means, *“to sing a hymn, to celebrate the praises of God in song.”*
  3. The verb is in the present active imperative, literally meaning, *“Let him keep on singing.”*
  4. It is a natural outgrowth of a cheerful heart or attitude.
  5. It reminds me of the song, “Sing and Be Happy.”
  6. **Illus.** Man painter --would sing hymns; man inquired; led to conversion.
  7. When we are cheerful and lifting our voices in song, we indeed praise God:  
**Eph. 5:19** *“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,*

*singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”*

- H. As Christians, our goal should be to develop a positive cheerful attitude as we face our daily problems and trials.

## **II. SICKNESS.**

- A. **James 5:14-15** *Is any sick among you? 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:  
5:15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.*
- B. The term translated *sick* in this passage has been the source of some disagreement as to what James has reference to.
1. The word defined simply means, “to be weak,” to be “without strength.”
  2. It is the same term used in **Matt. 10:8**: *“Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.”*
  3. It should be noted that this is more of a general or generic term for sickness.
- C. Brethren have struggled with this passage because they see two possible interpretations:
1. That of physical sickness because it is mentioned in connection with suffering, praying, cheerfulness, and singing.
  2. Spiritual sickness based upon Paul’s usage of the term in **1 Cor. 11:30** *For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.*
  3. And also because the book addresses spiritual weaknesses among the brethren.
  4. The context of the discussion in chapter 5 would seem better to support the notion that he is speaking of physical illness. And that is because he speaks of those who are sick in addition to the spiritual shortcomings mentioned at the end of **vs 15**: *if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.*
- D. If one is sick: *“Let him call for the elders of the church.”*
1. The tense of the verb suggests that it is something which must be done “at once.”
  2. But why the elders? Bro. J.J. Turner in his book on James suggests these reasons:
    1. “They have the rule over you spiritually, and watch for your souls (**Heb. 13:17**).
    2. They tend and feed you spiritual food (**1 Pet 5:1-4; Acts 20:28**).
    3. They are qualified men (**1 Tim. 3:1-7**).
    4. They are mature and spiritual men that can help in time of trouble (**Titus 1:9-10**).
    5. They are in most churches, and thus are available.
    6. Considering this then, it is only appropriate to call for the men ordained by God to care for your welfare when you have a problem.”
- E. The instruction is, *“let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”*
1. Olive oil was used both medicinally and symbolically in scripture.
  2. Symbolically it was used for example in the anointing of a would be king.
    - 1) Saul was anointed by Samuel with oil:  
**1 Sam. 10:1** *Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the LORD hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?*

- 2) And also in the anointing of David:  
**1 Sam. 16:13** *Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.*
3. In **Mark 6:13**, when Jesus sent out His disciples; it states, *And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.*
4. Medicinally, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, it was poured into the wounds of a man who fell among the thieves (**Luke 10:34**).
5. In the culture of that day it was commonly used medicinally.
- F. From the context it appears that the use was not medicinal.
  1. We surmise this because elders were to be called for and not physicians.
  2. Further, the means for healing was with the emphasis on the prayer of faith (**vs 15**).
  3. And also, if it was intended medicinally it would seem that the elders would have been instructed to rub the oil in.
  4. The obvious conclusion then is that its use was symbolic.
  5. Further, the emphasis is really not on the elders, and not on the oil, but on the prayer of faith.
  6. When that prayer of faith is offered, *“the Lord will raise him up.”*
- G. This is not an ordinary faith we are speaking of, but one which is miraculous.
  1. Even today, we offer prayers on behalf of the sick, but those who are sick may not get better. We don't possess the gift of healing.
  2. In the 1st century, it was a different situation:  
**Mark 16:17-18** *And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;*  
**16:18** *They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.*
  3. In **1 Cor. 12** Paul informs us that there were 9 spiritual gifts which the Spirit bestowed upon Christians in the 1st century.
  4. Among those gifts, was the gift of faith -- not an ordinary faith, but a miraculous one that enabled the one who possessed this gift to perform miracles.
  5. When Jesus encountered the man who had a son who was suffering seizures, He was told that the disciples were unable to cure him.
    - 1) Jesus rebuked the demon and he came out of him.
    - 2) **Matt. 17:20** *And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.*
  6. When Jesus was teaching regarding the withered fig tree, He said, *... Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. (Matt. 21:21).*
  7. And in **Acts 3**, at the healing of the lame man at the temple gate, Peter and John taught regarding Jesus:  
**Acts 3:16** *"And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect*

*soundness in the presence of you all.*

- H. It should be noted that no one today has the miraculous gift of faith; no one has the gift of healings or the ability to perform miracles.
  - 1. Those things have ceased (**1 Cor. 13:8-10**), and did so with the completed revelation of the perfect law of liberty (**James 1:25**).
  - 2. And because the apostles are dead, there is no longer anyone to lay hands upon others to impart spiritual or miraculous gifts.
- I. **James 5:15b** *...and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.*
  - 1. Bro. Turner notes: "Prayer and repentance are the keys to obtaining forgiveness."
  - 2. Even though the text does not mention repentance, we know that forgiveness is conditional:
    - 1 John 1:9** *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
- J. Because we do not possess the miraculous gift of faith, should we discount the importance of what is being taught?
  - 1. Not at all, for we still firmly teach and uphold the power of prayer.
  - 2. The only difference is that today God works providentially rather than miraculously.
  - 3. As a reminder: that which is miraculous involves the breaking of a natural law. It is that which is clearly extraordinary.
  - 4. Providence involves God working through the natural order of things.
  - 5. God can still cause all things to *work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose* (**Rom. 8:28**).

### **III. STRENGTH. (which comes thru prayer)**

- A. **James 5:16-18** *Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*  
**5:17** *Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.*  
**5:18** *And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.*
- B. We must pray for one another in matters which pertain to sin, as well as sickness.
  - 1. In fact the tense of the verbs are such that the statement literally can be rendered: *"Keep on confessing your sins to one another and keep on prayer for one another."*
  - 2. Paul in his writings often remembered the brethren:
    - Phil. 1:3-4** *I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,*  
**1:4** *Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy.*
  - 3. Even he himself desired the prayers of the brethren:
    - 2 Thess. 3:1** *Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you.*
- C. This leads us then to the affirmation of the effectiveness of prayer. The late Guy N Woods informs us that there are 3 things which we can understand from James' statement:
  - 1. Prayer is effectual.
  - 2. It is right to pray, and if our prayers are properly uttered, they will be heard.
  - 3. We must keep the commandments of the Lord if we are to expect answers to our

- prayers. (that of course is based upon the reference being to a righteous man.)
- D. To help us understand, he affords us with the example of Elijah.
1. Elijah was not unlike others; he had the same human passions and nature as do other children of God.
  2. The fact that God answered his prayer, is an affirmation that he will hear ours as well; provisionally.
    - 1) That we are Christians, for God will not hear the prayers of the unrighteous (**John 9:31**).
    - 2) That we are walking in the light (**1 John 1:7**).
    - 3) If we ask in faith. **James 1:6** *But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.*
  3. Elijah's prayer was offered fervently, with great intensity that it not rain for 3 1/2 yrs.
    - 1) Jesus affirmed that the prayer was answered and there was a great famine as a result of going 3 1/2 yrs without rain.
    - 2) **Luke 4:25** *But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land.*
    - 3) As Elijah again prayed for rain, we remember the story from **1 Kings 18:41-45**, where Elijah went to the top of Mt Carmel and prayed for the rain to come, and it did.
  4. Of this, again I would cite the comments of bro. Woods:

"...It was not James' intention to affirm that God answers prayer in the same way that Elijah's prayers, on that occasion, were answered. The purpose for which it was introduced was to show that God *answers prayer* and not to demonstrate how He does it. It is enough for us to know that He does; we may properly leave to Him the providential operations by which it is accomplished. The lesson simply is this: *Elijah was a mere man; God answered his prayer; he will, therefore answer ours as well.*"

#### CONCLUSION:

1. If you will carefully observe in our reading, you will notice that all of these thoughts are interrelated.
2. When one is suffering, when one is cheerful, when one is sick, when one is troubled by sin, we have an avenue between us and God -- prayer -- and James affirms that it is a great source of strength for God's children.
3. It is marvelous to be a Christian, and to have the blessing of prayer.
4. **1 John 5:14** *And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.*
5. **1 Pet. 3:12** *For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.*
6. It may be that you don't enjoy the blessings of prayer because you are still lost in your sins.
7. Remember that it is the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous person that can make a difference.
8. Plan of salvation.