

James 5:13-20 Sermon

This morning we come to the close of our study in the book of James. My hope is that you not merely understand the book of James better but that your commitment to living the Christian life has become more resolute and your relationship with God has deepened as a result of our time spent in James.

As you're no doubt aware, James' letter is very intentionally designed to take your faith and commitment to God and make it very practical not just theoretical or internal. Early on James, the author, boldly proclaimed "*your faith if is not evidenced by outward actions is dead.*" (2:17) or worthless or ridiculous or not really faith. Quite frankly, we have a whole lot of self-professing Christian who easily fall into that dead faith category today. Looking at them you can't tell any difference between them and their atheist co-worker and in fact their atheist neighbor might actually look more like Christ outwardly than they do.

On our recent vacation, Connie and I went out for breakfast with some good friends that used to attend Knollwood but have moved to Tucson, **Mike and Deb Kewin.** (picture) When our waitress came to take our order Connie asked for a "soda" and immediately our waitress picked up on Connie's strong Minnesota accent and went off into all the typical Minnesota colloquialisms ("*you betcha*", "*uff-da*", "*dontcha know*"). At one point she rapidly read me various options for my own order and when I didn't respond right away she asked if I'd like her to repeat the options slower – because that's what Minnesotans like. Come to find out, she'd lived for several years in North Dakota and had the Midwestern talk down to a tea. She made our time together extra enjoyable. That's what James is saying throughout his letter. That Christians should be easy to pick out of a crowd by how they live their lives. And throughout this letter he mentions several specific ways we have opportunities to demonstrate our faith in the way we live our lives. Things such as: **Faith Evidenced By:**

- How we handle trials and difficulties in our lives
- How we handle success
- How we handle temptations
- In the way that we use our words and if we speak more than listen
- In the level of concern you have for widows and orphans
- In the prejudices you have and demonstrate through your words and actions
- How you help those in need.
- How you approach plans for the future – do you ask God to rubber stamp your plans or do you seek to know His plans for your life.

In today's text James closes out this letter by writing 5:13-16.

Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

He's saying – all of your life, every part of your life ought to flow out of the richness of your relationship with God and back to God.

- If you're in trouble pray to God about it
- If you're happy – pray praise to God about it
- If you're sick (on any level: physical psychological, emotional, spiritual) call the elders and have them pray over you and God will heal you, He will set you free.

As I mentioned earlier, Connie and I just returned yesterday from a 10 day trip driving to Arizona and back. It was a great time, especially the trip home – because it was just Connie and I together in

the car witnessing God's incredible creation. When we're on a road trip it's never really about getting to a destination, it's much more about the process of getting there which is the most enjoyable. Even when we got lost for over an hour in the Badlands of South Dakota as the sun was quickly setting we were able to laugh about it and thank God because in that hour of lostness we were able to see 2 large herd of buffalo and a mountain lion standing on top of a hill, or when, after finally figuring out where we were and finally getting to the highway we decided to rush to get to Wall Drug, only to arrive just as they were locking the doors for the night. Or the night before we drove for many hours and pulled into the town that we'd pre-booked for the night in Torrington, Wyoming, only to discover that we'd accidentally booked the room instead in the town of Morrill, Nebraska (about 20 minutes away). However, by staying in Nebraska instead we were able to add one more state the list of states we visited and I was able to have a wonderful chat with Tracy, the night desk clerk at this hotel and encouraged her as a mother of 4 young children (ages 5, 4, 3, 2) and has their birthdays tattooed on her arm. I was able to offer her words of encouragement as a hard working and very loving mother. You see what made the trip great was not that everything went perfectly (much like life) but that I was spending one on one time with the woman I love the most in this world and together we are of like mind and heart in praising God and recognizing His greatness and goodness in every situation.

And that's what James is talking about here as the foundation for every situation in life. Our relationship with God is not primarily about the destination (spending eternity with Him in heaven) but it's more about the process of getting there. He wants to walk with you in and through every situation in this life as preparation for all of eternity spent with Him.

What's your first response when you're in trouble or sick or happy? Is it God? God ought to be our first response and not our last resort.

James instructs us to call the elders, if you're sick, and have them come and anoint you with oil and pray over you and the prayer "offered in faith" will make the person well. I want you to know that we do practice that here in this church. But the initiative is placed not on the elders to hunt down the sick and pray for them, but on the person who is sick to contact the elders. And if you call any one of the elders they will make arrangements to come and pray over you. The oil, throughout Scripture, is symbolic of God's presence. Our elders are men with great faith and a deep commitment to God. However, I would add that not everyone they have prayed over has been immediately healed. Although many have been healed or their life has been extended beyond the life span the doctors gave them and then they received the greatest healing and ultimate release through death and being united with God at their final destination. Others have received the healing of a profound sense of peace with God in the midst of their sickness.

In the context of this instruction on healing James mentions confessing our sins to one another. The importance of that is threefold.

1. **First**, sometimes your sickness may be the result of God's discipline on your life because of an ongoing or unresolved sin. And until you repent and confess it you won't receive God's forgiveness.
2. **Secondly**, Scripture states in several places that our unconfessed and ongoing sins can block our prayers from being heard by God.
3. **Thirdly**, there's something powerful and effective about telling someone else about your struggle with sin and then having them hold you accountable for it. Through the years I've been in accountability relationships with other guys and it's a powerful deterrent for sinning when you know that someone is going to be asking you about that areas of you life when you see them next.

Read **James 5:17-18**

Then as an illustration of the potential power of our prayers, James points out the effectiveness of Elijah the prophet's prayers. Elijah, at one point, in his ministry prayed for it not to rain and it didn't for 3 ½ years. And then once He demonstrated God's power and superiority over the pagan god, Baal, he prayed again and God opened up the heavens and it began to rain once again. This is just one example of an extraordinary life filled with incredible miracles and yet James says that Elijah is "*just like us*". Just like you and me.

God is claiming, through James' words, that you have the same potential power and effectiveness to your prayers that Elijah had in his prayers. Because it's really not about you and me – it's always about God. But the key is the phrase "*he prayed earnestly*."

Fascinatingly, the original Greek text doesn't have the word "*earnestly*" in it. It simply says that "*in prayer Elijah prayed*." The word prayer is repeated twice to indicate how intense and serious Elijah was about praying for the rain to stop and for it to begin again.

When Elijah prayed, he prayed with confidence. Let me read for you this account of Elijah praying for the rain to resume.

1 Kings 18:41-46 (NIV) *And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain." 42 So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.*

43 "Go and look toward the sea," he told his servant. And he went up and looked.

"There is nothing there," he said.

Seven times Elijah said, "Go back."

44 The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea." So Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'"

45 Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain started falling and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. 46 The power of the Lord came on Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.

If God would describe our prayer life what description would he choose? Would it be *fervent* or *lackadaisical* or somewhere in between there? You see it's not about the flowery words that Elijah used that James is describing here. It's the fervency, the intensity the commitment that Elijah had to praying that James is highlighting here. It's the type of enthusiasm that many football fans will be displaying today in cheering on their favorite team, but there's a big difference. Me cheering on my favorite team from the comfort of my living room is not going to change the outcome of that game one bit. But you praying fervently for someone in need can change everything.

James ends this letter by mentioning a most important and yet difficult thing to do within the body of Christ. That's recognizing a fellow believer who is slowly turning their back on God and our responsibility to bring them back.

James 5:19-20 (NIV) *My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*

Now let me warn you here – our tendency is to not do anything in this type of situation. We aren't generally people who like to confront or be confronted about something we've been doing in our lives or a direction we've been headed. But the stakes are too high not to do anything.

Another warning, make sure if you see a friend in Christ wandering away from the faith, don't go tell others about it – that's called gossip and condemned in Scripture. Rather pray intensely about it first, ask God to help you examine your motives for confronting the sinful lifestyle and then ask God for the right timing and words to communicate your concern and love. I've needed to do this on a number of occasions and it's never been easy. But it's necessary because of what's at stake.