

1) INTRO

- We find ourselves today closing out the book of James
- We’ve spent the past 2 ½ months – 10 weeks now – walking through this practical and applicable little book in the Bible
 - And, I pray you’ve been blessed and challenged and spurred on to look to JC, our Savior and Lord
 - And, I pray you’ve been encouraged to lean on the HS’s work to live in a way that walks in love and obedience to our great God
 - I know I have, and I’m grateful for these clear words that God’s given in this “Proverbs of the NT”
- Today, we come reading this text on prayer
 - And, in this text we see the themes of prayer, faith, and spiritual health
 - And, specifically we see that our endurance in our faith – our perseverance in our walk with Jesus – is dependent upon prayer (and relying on God’s work in us)

[PRAY]

2) CONTEXT

- The example’s been given that if I were to say to you “I went up and I went down”, you wouldn’t know what I was talking about
 - I could be referring to a ton of possible scenarios, right?
 - I could be referring to my temperature, my weight, a ride on a roller coaster, my emotional state, a trip in an airplane, driving up and down a hill, climbing Mt. Arrowsmith, etc
- This is why context is so important, isn’t it?
- Context fits the phrase “I went up and I went down” into the whole so that you know exactly what what I’m talking about
- And, so we come to these 8 verses today needing to look at the context of this whole letter so that we rightly know and apply the Word of God
- So, we remember first that James is writing this letter to the Jews who’re scattered abroad – “the 12 tribes in the Dispersion” (v1)
- They’re a church of genuine believers who’re seeking to lift up and exalt Christ
 - And, in their doing so, they’re coming up against persecution and difficulty
 - They’re walking through some intense struggle
 - And, the struggles they’re walking through have caused some pressure from within the body of believers as well
 - Which is why James seeks to write down a reminder of how followers of Christ are to practically and faithfully live
 - And, specifically it’s a call of how to practically and faithfully live in the midst of struggles
- We’ve seen that...
 - We’re to be joyful that trials come into our lives b/c our faith will be tested and make us cling to Jesus and his saving work
 - As followers of Christ, we’re to work to do what the Bible says
 - Genuine faith means we’ll strive to love everyone without distinction
 - True saving faith produces good works
 - Our tongues are powerful and we’re to use them to worship God and encourage each other
 - That Godly wisdom produces peace with each other as we pursue living to exalt God

- We live in a battle with the world (what it offers) and also with ourselves (our own sin that we're born with)
- We're to fight independence and pursue God-dependence
- Patience and steadfastness are marks of the genuine believer (last week)
 - We saw the call to be faithful in persecution and trials last week
- We've seen all throughout this letter that right doctrine – right understanding of who God is – should lead to Godly living that's fueled by the power of the HS
- So, we've seen the call to look beyond the struggle/trials/persecutions/suffering and look to JC who grants us eternity/eternal life
 - And, with eternity in mind, we're able to endure/faithful in struggles b/c JC is our delight & b/c the HS spurs us on to holy living & b/c God is our refuge and strength
- And, so, w/ these bookends of suffering from chaps 1 & 5, we come to our text today with the themes of prayer, faith, and spiritual health
 - And, in ending his letter this way, James is showing us that the heart of our endurance is prayer
 - God wants us to clearly see and know that prayer – calling out to God/resting in him/clinging to him/seeking him's what makes us endure
 - If we simply bear down and try on our own, we're gonna fail...we're gonna fall flat
 - But, by going to God in prayer, we tap into the greatest power in the universe – the greatest power that's ever existed
- So, we see four aspects of prayer in our passage today
 - 1) Prayer in our struggles
 - 2) Prayer for our spiritual health
 - 3) Prayer for each other
 - 4) Prayer for restoration

3) PRAYER IN OUR STRUGGLES (v13)

- "Is anyone among you suffering?" (v13)
 - It makes sense why that's there after looking at the context of this whole letter, doesn't it?
- Are you suffering? Hurting? Struggling? Walking through difficulties? Enduring trials? Bearing persecution?
 - Is this you?
 - I think as we come here this morning and reflect on all that's going on in our lives, in our families, in our jobs...we can think of something – or many things – that're weighing us down
 - Maybe you're feeling uncertainty/worry about the future
 - Parents about your children
 - Singles about who you'll marry
 - Husbands/wives about conflict
 - Career change...or struggling to make ends meet
 - Maybe you're feeling weighed down by poor health
 - Maybe you've had chronic pain for years & you're fighting discouragement
 - Maybe you've recently injured yourself and you realize how much you've idolized your independence
 - Maybe you have a simple cold and feel run down now
 - Maybe you're suffering at the hands of classmates or coworkers or neighbors or friends b/c they're throwing jabs at you for your commitment to Christ
 - Maybe you feel tension between another brother or sister in Christ b/c of different viewpoints
 - Maybe you're discouraged b/c you feel defeated by besetting sin...or haunted by past sin
- To answer the question, "Is anyone among you suffering?" ...I think we can say, "yeah, we are"

- And, we're given the theme of our passage right away
- We're told what to do right away here when we're suffering
 - Pray...we're to pray
- We're told here in our text to run to our God in prayer...to God who holds us in his hands
 - Who sovereignly determines and plans everything...for our good and for his glory
 - Who can make anything happen whenever he wants
- So, all that we're going through – all the different sufferings/persecutions/struggles – we're to bring it to God in prayer
 - As the old hymn says:
 - Have we trials and temptations?
 - Is there trouble anywhere?
 - We should never be discouraged
 - Take it to the Lord in prayer
 - Take it to the Lord in prayer...give it all to God...rest in him, cling to him, seek him
- Matthew Henry – “Time of affliction should be praying times. To this end God sends afflictions, that we may be engaged to seek him early; and that those who at other times have neglected him may be wrought to enquire after him.”
 - The reality's that God – who's sovereign over absolutely everything – brings suffering and persecution into our lives so that we'll seek him/look to him in a way that we maybe never did before
 - It's often when we're hurting or at the end of ourselves that we're finally willing to look to God
 - It's in those moments when our human weaknesses shine forth that we're aware of how much we need God's strength
 - So, we pray asking God that he'll help us to look to him
- When difficult circumstances/situations come up in life, we're to submit to God's working in it
 - So, we submit to God's working in times of suffering...but we're to also submit to God's working in times of joy as well
 - Suffering and joy draw us closer to God in diff ways
- “Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.” (v13)
- Suffering makes us humble before God as we're “made” to seek his face b/c we're aware that our circumstances are out of our hands
- Praise is a response of joyful worship to God that sees his hand in all the good in our lives
 - Praise is when we can't help but worship the sovereign God who's the giver of all good things – “every good and perfect gift is from above” (1:17)
- In suffering we look to God in prayer and in joy we look to God in songs of praise
 - St. Augustine of Hippo – “He who sings prays twice”
 - There's a sweet connection that happens with God when we sing praises to him acknowledging his hand in it all
- What's interesting too is the Grk word for “cheerful” doesn't have to do with anything external/physical things
 - It has to do with “being in good spirits”
 - Cheerfulness is an inward heart attitude regardless of circumstances
 - And, we have much to be thankful for and to praise God for
 - B/c God promised long ago to send us a Savior and he did that in JC
 - And, now we have forgiveness of sins, salvation in Christ, and the hope of eternity
 - We have much to be thankful for
 - We have much (in JC) to cheer our spirits/attitudes
 - We have much to bring us comfort regardless of the gunk in life we have going on

- MacArthur – “Praise is basic to spiritual comfort. Prayer is basic to spiritual comfort. The two are closely related.”

- Prayer is pleading to God
- Praise is thankfulness to God

- So, in the midst of struggles and trials, God’s telling us here to pray that God’ll give us eyes and hearts that praise him and worship him and glorify him as the good and sovereign God that he is

4) PRAYER FOR OUR SPIRITUAL HEALTH (vv14-15)

- We continue on with the need to pray in a different sense in these two verses
- We’re told here to ask the elders to pray over those who’re sick...and to anoint them with oil
- We see here to call on your elders/your pastors/your church leaders to come and pray for you in those times of sickness

- The sick are to be prayed for and prayed over by the church

- Now, how does discussion of sickness fit in here?

- What’s interesting is that the Grk word for “sick” is primarily as “weak” or feeble

- There are times when this Grk word used in terms of physical sickness
- But, the primary use in the Bible’s in reference to spiritual sickness/spiritual weakness
 - Which really seems to fit the context best, doesn’t it?
 - The context of suffering and persecution

- So, the point (contextually) here’s this:

- MacArthur – “if you don’t have the strength to pray yourself and to deal with your struggle, and you find yourself spiritually weak, then go to the spiritually strong and let them pray for you.”

- In other words, if you’re at the end and you’re not even able to pray for yourself, you’re feeling so spiritually dry and weak and helpless...ask the elders of the church to come and pray for you

- To anoint you with oil in the name of the Father, Son, and HS
 - Not that there’s anything healing or magical about the oil
 - It’s not the power of the oil that heals us
 - Instead it the power of the prayer of faith

- There’s no special prayer that labeled the “prayer of faith”

- RC Sproul – “the power of trusting and faithful prayer is accented here”
 - It’s faithful, constant prayer that trusts that God can heal if he chooses
 - This prayer’s what saves the one who’s “sick”
 - Diff Grk word here that only means weary

- “And if he has committed sin, he will be forgiven”

- That seems interesting put here, doesn’t it?
- How does this connect?

- Mark 2:1-12

- What does Jesus say when they bring the paralytic to him? (v5)

- Jesus is placing emphasis on the reason he came
 - Jesus didn’t come just to help people out or make their lives more comfortable...free of poor health

- Jesus is showing that he came to forgive sins...he came to restore us back to God...he came to cleanse us of our sinful record...he came to wash us white as snow

- Jesus came to forgive us of our sins
 - That’s the greatest thing we need

- Why does Jesus heal the paralytic? (vv10-11)

- He did so to prove that he has authority to forgive sins
- It’s impossible for us to heal anybody

- Not even the greatest physician in the world can make a paralytic rise up in an instant and walk
 - But, Jesus healed him in order to prove that he has the power to forgive sins
- Physical healing's secondary; spiritual healing's primary
- It's the spiritual healing that's first
 - Jesus focuses on the spiritual over the physical
- God cares most about our spiritual health
 - God desires that we're not spiritually sick people
 - God desires that we're not weak/feeble spiritually
- And, in the midst of persecution and suffering we can feel spiritually weak at times, don't we?
 - We can go through periods of self-pity
 - We can fall into despair
 - We can often try to find our comfort in people or things other than God
 - We can wonder why God brought this person or this event into our lives
- But, we're not to stay there in despair and lack of faith, are we?
 - Instead, we're to fight to take our eyes off our circumstances and place our eyes on our gracious God and Savior, JC, who forgives us of our sins
 - We've been redeemed by the blood of JC, who went to the cross in our place to pay the penalty of sin that we deserve to pay
 - Jesus bore the wrath of God that we should bear for our sin
 - And, when the HS helps us to see JC and his work once again – in the midst of struggle and suffering – God raises us up out of our despair and forgives us of all our sins...and also our sin of not trusting in God/resting in God as we're called to
- And, as the family of God, we're to constantly be urging each other on to keep our eyes on Jesus
 - To find our hope and joy and satisfaction in him alone
 - We're to constantly be preaching the Gospel – the good news – to each other so that our walk with the Lord's where it should be

5) PRAYER FOR EACH OTHER (vv16-18)

- The elders were called for in v14, but here the call's to confess our sins to each other
 - The call here's to be open and honest with each other of where we're spiritually weak so that we can build each other up and encourage each other to fix our attention on Jesus
 - We're told to confess our sins to each other so that we can be praying for each other
 - And, specifically for our spiritual health
 - That our hearts and souls and walks will be healthy
- And, this can only happen when there's sweet and deep fellowship with each other
 - It takes a deep level of intimacy and trust to confess your sins and weaknesses and struggles to another brother or sister, doesn't it?
 - It's not something that's easy to do
 - But...it should be easy in the family of God
 - We should feel comfortable with each other to the point where we can share anything and everything
 - There should be a sense of community where no one thinks they're better than anyone else
 - There should be harmony and love for each other that allows such confession, forgiveness, and prayer to be commonplace
 - In his book, "Gospel-Centered Discipleship" Pastor Jonathan Dodson talks about small groups they've developed for this purpose

- He calls them ‘fight clubs’ and they’re small groups of 3-4 for the purpose of battling sin with each other
- Maybe that’s a great step for you if you don’t have this happening in your life at all
 - To get together with a few other brothers or sisters for the purpose of battling sin
- One of the works of the HS’s to empower us to resist sin
 - And, that’s one of the ways he empowers us to resist sin...is through our confession of sin to each other and through the prayers of others
- And, there’s great power in praying for each other
 - The prayers of those who’re made righteous in Christ have power
 - B/c we know that we’re all equally dependent on God’s saving work each and every day
 - We’re aware that God has saved us, he is saving us today, and he will ultimately save us
 - We’re aware of how to pray in accord with God and his Word – knowing that the state of our souls/our spiritual health is what matters
 - And, we’re given the example of Elijah here
 - David Platt – “James’s example of Elijah in 5:17 points out that our faith must always be in accordance with God’s promises.”
 - Elijah was someone just like us
 - An OT prophet, but he was a person just like us – w/ sin, w/ weakness
 - So, like Elijah, our prayers too must always be in accord with God’s promises
 - Our prayers for each other must always be in line with God’s Word and his promises
 - And, we know that God’s promised to redeem us and save us in Christ and that he’s given us the HS
 - We have God himself – the HS – dwelling in us to help us fight sin, to fight despair, and to know that he’s working in us to make us spiritually healthy people
 - So, we’re to pray for each other trusting that God will keep his promises to work in the hearts and lives of our brothers and sisters

6) PRAYER FOR RESTORATION (vv19-20)

- We see in the last two verses of our passage that we’re to pray for each other b/c we love each other
- Loving each other’s seeking to bring others back to the rule of the Gospel in their lives
 - Loving each other mean we’ll do anything we can to help them not wander from the truth – i.e. Jesus, the gospel of Christ
 - We’ll willingly do whatever it takes “to turn a sinner from the error of his ways” (Matthew Henry)
 - We’ll consistently share the gospel with each other, constantly praying for heart transformation
- As we know that God is sovereign over the salvation of each and every person, we strive to be faithful in pointing others to Jesus and we pray that God will change their hearts
 - Henry – “if we can do no more towards the conversion of sinners, yet we may do this – pray for the grace and Spirit of God to convert and change them.”
 - That’s what we do, isn’t it?
 - We pray
 - We pray for each other
 - We plead to God on behalf of each other
 - That we’ll all know God’s mercy and grace in JC, our Lord and Savior

7) CONCLUSION

- May we pray for each other in these ways that we’ve seen here today

- May we pray for each other so that we're constantly growing in our walk with Lord, so that we're battling sin, so that we're spiritually healthy followers of Christ

- Psalm 32

2016-06-12

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