

Sunday Morning Message

January 30, 2022

Putting Your Faith to Work – Study of The General Epistle of James

Concluding Thoughts

Text – James 5:12 - 20

Congregational Reading – James 5:12 - 20

Introduction

As we conclude this Letter of James, let's remember that the main thrust of this writing was to exhort believers to live out their faith. Both James and Paul agree that faith alone is what saves and justifies a person, but genuine saving faith is never where the process stops. If a person is truly saved, they will also manifest works also. Works follow salvation, and as James puts it, *faith without works is dead*. It is a faith that is not genuine, it is also a faith that accomplishes nothing for the Lord. Our faith is supposed to impact the world around us, and a faith that is not accompanied by works will have no impact.

This is the same idea that Jesus had in mind when he told the disciples:

"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 5:13-16)

Transition

Here in these concluding nine verses of the letter, James will remind of three very basic and practical applications of faith.

I. Faith Will Cause You to Keep Your Word (v. 12)

"Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." (Matthew 5:33-37)

James and Jesus are both teaching us that we should not have to use these elaborate and wordy oaths in order to convince people that we will do what we say we will do. We should just be people who keep their word. Christians ought to follow through with their promises; they ought to be people who are always truthful.

Illustrate – There was a time in America when a person’s word was his bond. A handshake was all that was necessary in order to conduct a business transaction. People are much too quick nowadays to go back on their promises. We should be very slow to make promises, but once they are made, we should keep them.

This does not mean that we should never make an oath or swear at all. Sometimes believers will be forced to participate in some sort of an oath because of the overall trustworthiness of people today. In a courtroom, they will ask you to swear with your hand on a Bible, that you will tell the truth.

II. Faith Will Cause You to Pray (vs. 13 – 18)

Note on v. 14 – “anointing him with oil” – this could be a reference to medicinal treatment in addition to prayer. The word translated, “anoint” here (ἀλείφω – *aleiphō*) is the word commonly associated with beatifying or healing.

Most likely, however, it is a reference to a public ceremony of sorts that was done in the church and by the leaders of the church in order to direct specific prayer by the church corporately for the serious sickness of the church member. It would take a great deal of humility for a person to come forward in front of the church for something like this. This type of person is no longer trusting anything else to get well; he is placing his complete dependence on God. And the church is also doing the same thing. They are praying specifically for this person. The anointing with oil is merely a public demonstration of the inward dependence. Oil is symbol of the Holy Spirit; it represents the presence of God. Just as the oil touches the sick believer, we are asking God to touch the sick believer and heal him. This is the same kind of contrition and faith that will forgive sins as well. Remember when Jesus healed the man that was sick of the palsy, he actually said to the man “thy sins be forgiven thee,” which according to Jesus was the same thing as saying, “rise up and walk.” The faith that it takes to believe God for forgiveness, is the same faith that will receive the forgiveness of sins.

Of course, God will only heal when it is within His will to heal. He does not always heal.

"And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." (1 John 5:14-15)

Illustrate – Paul was not healed of his thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7 – 9).

Notice the illustration of Elijah in vs. 17 and 18. This comes from the Old Testament story found in 1 Kings 17 and 18. Because of the wickedness of King Ahab and Israel, Elijah prayed that it would not rain for three years, but after the three years was up, God sent Elijah back to Ahab, and after he called down fire from heaven on Mt. Carmel, he prayed that it might rain, and God answered the prayer and brought the much needed rain.

Prayer is a great topic to end this letter with. Prayer is one of the most basic and foundational practices of faith that we have. People of faith pray. Private prayer is the best demonstration of faith there can be. It is our declaration of dependence upon the Lord.

*"Prayer - secret, fervent, believing prayer - lies at the root of all personal godliness."
(William Carey)*

"The church that is not jealously protected by mighty intercession and sacrificial labors will before long become the abode of every evil bird and the hiding place for unsuspected corruption. The creeping wilderness will soon take over that church that trusts in its own strength and forgets to watch and pray." (A. W. Tozer)

"Prayer is not so much an act as it is an attitude - an attitude of dependency, dependency upon God." (A.W. Pink)

"Prayer is the way and means God has appointed for the communication of the blessings of His goodness to His people." (A. W. Pink)

"The idea that everything would happen exactly as it does regardless of whether we pray or not is a specter that haunts the minds of many who sincerely profess belief in God. It makes prayer psychologically impossible, replacing it with dead ritual at best." (David Brainerd)

"I live in the spirit of prayer. I pray as I walk about, when I lie down and when I rise up. And the answers are always coming. Thousands and tens of thousands of times have my prayers been answered. When once I am persuaded that a thing is right and for the glory

of God, I go on praying for it until the answer comes. George Mueller never gives up!"
(George Mueller)

"Prayer is of transcendent importance. Prayer is the mightiest agent to advance God's work. Praying hearts and hands only can do God's work. Prayer succeeds when all else fails." (E. M. Bounds)

"We can do nothing without prayer. All things can be done by importunate prayer. It surmounts or removes all obstacles, overcomes every resisting force and gains its ends in the face of invincible hindrances." (E. M. Bounds)

Prayer is absolutely crucial to the work of God, so if we are going to abound in the work, we are going to also have to learn to abound in prayer.

Turn to 1 Chronicles 4:9 – 10 - In our text, we see one of the more famous prayers in the Bible – The Prayer of Jabez.

"And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow. And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested." (1 Chronicles 4:9-10)

When we look at this prayer on the surface, we can easily see the things that most people pray for, and they represent the basic need of all people.

1 He prayed that God would prosper him. He depended on God for that prosperity. He recognized that God was the source of all blessing. His prayer required a great deal of faith which we know is pleasing to God.

2 He prayed for protection. Again, he knew that anything could happen to him; but he also knew that nothing could happen to him without God's permission. He asked God to put an hedge of protection about him.

3 He prayed for peace of mind (happiness). Not every situation we face in life will be pleasant to us; but God's people should be a very happy people. We have a lot to be happy about.

On the surface, this prayer almost looks selfish, however this simple prayer is a demonstration of Jabez' complete dependence upon God.

Jabez' prayer contains the three basic elements of prayer:

1. **Praise** – which includes worship for who God is, and praise for what God has done.
2. **Penitence** – a humble attitude along with a complete confession of all sins.

Notice also from v. 16 of James 5 that the believer should also be transparent about their faults to one another. We should definitely confess our sins to God, but according to James, we should also confess our sins to one another. Don't try to portray yourself as a person who always has it all together and never does anything wrong.

3. **Petition** – asking – God's power, protection, provision for God's people first, then provision for myself.

Carve out some time this week to talk to God.

Get a prayer journal for you to record your prayer requests, praises, and answers to prayer.

Stay in an attitude of prayer throughout the day. *"Pray without ceasing"*

Illustration (Charles Spurgeon preached to over 10,000,000 people) Five young college students were spending a Sunday in London, so they went to hear the famed C.H. Spurgeon preach. While waiting for the doors to open, the students were greeted by a man who asked, "Gentlemen, let me show you around. Would you like to see the heating plant of this church?" They were not particularly interested, for it was a hot day in July. But they didn't want to offend the stranger, so they consented. The young men were taken down a stairway, a door was quietly opened, and their guide whispered, "This is our heating plant." Surprised, the students saw 700 people bowed in prayer, seeking a blessing on the service that was soon to begin in the auditorium above. Softly closing the door, the gentleman then introduced himself. It was none other than Charles Spurgeon. (*Our Daily Bread*, April 24.)

III. Faith Will Cause You to Win Souls (vs. 19 – 20)

I think there is both a temporal as well as an eternal application to these last two verses. A person that has wandered (the word "err" [πλανάω – *planaō*] here is sometimes translated "wander" or "gone astray") out of the will of God and continues down the path of sin may be judged by God even to death if he does not repent. If we help that person to see the error of his ways, and get him to confess and repent, God may spare him the judgment.

However, we can also apply this truth to the ternal salvation of a soul. When we share Christ with someone and they repent and turn to God in faith, then God will deliver that person from an eternal spiritual death, and a lifetime's worth, a multitude of sins, will be forgiven.

Both in the temporal sense as well as in the eternal sense, we as believers have the responsibility of bringing others into a right relationship with the Lord.

Let's work to reconcile the wandering saints back to the Lord, and then let's labour to reach lost sinners with the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." (Luke 14:23)

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15)

1. Carry Gospel Tracts With You and pass them out to everyone you meet.
2. Pray specifically for the lost people that you know.
3. Pray that God would put one specific person on your heart that you can work with.

Remember, Lydia was a person who God had already worked on – he opened her heart (Acts 16:14). The Holy Spirit of God led Paul to Lydia. You need to ask the Holy Spirit of God who lives within you to work on the people you know and love, and then to reveal to you which one that He wants you to work on.

4. Take advantage of corporate soul winning opportunities.

Illustrate – the soul winning blitz.