

LESSON TEN – JAMES & JUDE

JAMES 5:13-20

- 1) The gift of speech is a marvelous blessing if it is used to the glory of God.
 - a) We have seen that James has had a great deal to say about the tongue and this chapter is no exception
 - b) James has mentioned some of the lowest uses of the tongue:
 - i) Complaining. 5:9.
 - ii) Swearing. 5:12.
 - c) James also mentioned some of the highest uses of the tongue.
 - i) Proclaiming God's word. 5:10.
 - ii) Praying and praising God. 5:13.
- 2) Prayer is a high and holy privilege.
 - a) Just think that as God's children we can come freely and boldly to His throne and share with Him our needs.
 - b) Seven times in this section James mentions prayer.
 - i) The mature Christian is prayerful in the troubles of life; instead of complaining about his situation, he talks to God about it.
 - ii) Taking it to the Lord in prayer is a mark of spiritual maturity.
 - c) In this section James encourages us to pray and assures us that God will hear and answer.
- 3) The individual at prayer: a basic principle. V. 13.
 - a) James has encouraged steadfastness in suffering; he now encourages prayer in suffering and song in joy.
 - i) In these two words are all of life's experiences, and each of them in turn can be the cause of spiritual upset.
 - (1) Trouble can give rise to an attitude of surly rebellion against God and the abandonment of spiritual practices.
 - (2) Times of ease and affluence beget complacency, laziness, and the assumption that we are able of ourselves to cope with life, and God is forgotten.
 - ii) James is fully aware of all of this: his persistent treatment throughout his letter of the themes of trial and allowing the heart to stray after riches indicates his acquaintance with the full run of life, and his concern to prepare us against its varied assaults.

- (1) His insistence is that none of these things should move us: neither suffering nor ease should find us without a suitable Christian response in prayer and song.
 - (2) Our faith should cover all of the experiences of life finding expression in prayer and song as the occasion may demand.
 - (3) More importantly, that faith must be based on a firm belief that we have a God for all seasons; in periods of suffering and times of joy, prayer and praise alike acknowledge that God is sufficient.
- iii) James would not be content with the bare proposition that God is our sufficiency; he wants to be certain that we are finding Him to be sufficient.
 - iv) Our whole life should be so angled toward God that whatever strikes us, whether joy or sorrow, should be deflected up into His presence.
 - v) This is the common denominator between joy and sorrow, and demonstrates glad acceptance of the will of God.
 - (1) In praise we say to Him, “Your will is good, perfect, and acceptable; this is what you have done for me and I will rejoice.”
 - (2) In time of trouble, it attempts – however poorly we succeed – to follow Jesus’ Gethsemane prayer, “Not my will but thine be done.”
 - (a) When Jesus was in agony wrestling with the forces of evil at the moment of their strongest attack, he prayed most earnestly.
 - (b) Prayer may not remove the affliction, but it most certainly can transform it.
 - b) This, then, is the individual at prayer; he is reflecting all of his life upward, acknowledging the sufficiency and sovereignty of God, practicing the grace of acceptance and rejecting the disgrace of stubbornness.
- 4) The elders at prayer: a call answered. Vv. 14-15.
- a) This is one of the most fascinating passages not only in the book of James, but also in the Bible.
 - i) It has been much discussed and generated a great deal of controversy.
 - ii) In it James discusses one of life’s great afflictions – illness.
 - iii) He postulates a sick person summoning the elders of the congregation to do two things – anoint with oil and pray.

- iv) Two promises are attached – healing, and if sin is involved, forgiveness.
- b) Three observations will help to set the scene.
 - i) James associates the ministry of anointing and prayer with the elders.
 - (1) Since no other leadership in the local congregation is even hinted at in the New Testament, it is reasonable to conclude that James considered this ministry as part of the ongoing life of the church.
 - (a) James does not speak of one with the gift of healing (1 Cor. 12:30), nor does he mention apostles with whom miracles are associated.
 - (b) It is true that miracles clustered around the apostles as a God-given sign to authenticate their mission. 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4.
 - (c) But the truth is that miraculous happenings, be they cures or otherwise, are not evenly scattered throughout the scripture.
 - (d) As a general rule, the scripture is more concerned with the providential than with the extraordinary acts of God; miracles cluster around the major turning points of the Bible.
 - (i) Creation.
 - (ii) Moses and the time of deliverance from Egypt and to the Promised Land.
 - (iii) Elijah and Elisha and the inception of the work of the prophets.
 - (iv) The ministry of Jesus and the period of the founding of the church.
 - (v) But we cannot limit the praying for the sick by saying that there must have been someone present with the gift of healing.
 - (vi) It is a ministry of those whom James and scripture envisaged as always being present at the helm of the local church.
 - (vii) It is true that some congregations do not have elders, but that does not change the fact that elders should be appointed in every church; it just delays it until there are those qualified.
 - (viii) Whatever is the meaning of these verses, they seem to continue to apply to the local church.

- ii) The second general observation is more controversial than the first – that the sick person is to be anointed with oil.
 - (1) It is clear from historians that anointing with oil was commonly practiced in the third century church with oil consecrated by the “bishop” of the area; by the 10th century it was increasingly the practice to insist that the “anointing” be carried out by a priest; by the 12th century the terms “extreme unction” and “sacrament of the dying” are found and the anointing is restricted to those whose imminent death seemed certain; in the 13th century the ceremony of anointing was declared to be one of the “seven sacraments” instituted by Christ himself, so that the Council of Trent (1545 onward) can pronounce an anathema on anyone who denies that extreme unction is properly a sacrament instituted by Christ, promulgated by James, or who denies that the sacred unction confers grace and remits sin, or who thinks that the ceremony is repugnant to the sentiment of James, or that the elders to whom James refers are not priests who have been ordained by a bishop.
 - (2) All we can say as gently as we know how is that this has nothing at all to do with James 5:14-15.
 - (a) There is no suggestion that the oil used had been previously or simultaneously consecrated, either by the elders or by anyone else.
 - (b) The emphasis that has come to be placed on the anointing as carrying with it a spiritual efficacy, conferring grace and remitting sins, is not only astray from the scriptural understanding of sin and forgiveness, but also reverses the priorities that James sets out.
 - (c) James primary emphasis is on healing the sickness, and he refers to sin as something that on occasion may also be present.
 - (d) Even then there is no indication that the anointing has anything to do with or confers the forgiveness of sins.
 - (e) Finally, extreme unction for the dying in preparation for death is the opposite of healing and restoration to health.
- iii) The third observation is that we must not approach the special things that God does in such a way as to think little or to think less of his general and providential blessings.

- (1) It is not only the special and remarkable, the unique and the miraculous that are the works of God: we have already learned that every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.
 - (2) There may be those who will say that these provisions of James were intended only for their day, but that in this day the Lord has given us medical and surgical doctors, and that now we should call the G.P. or the Internist and not the elders.
 - (a) At least this much is true – the medical advances that we enjoy are the gift of our God.
 - (b) But there were physicians in Jesus' and James' day; Luke was a beloved physician.
 - (c) They as well as others used that which they had to help the sick and wounded.
 - (d) The Good Samaritan used wine and oil, most likely to soothe and sanitize.
 - (e) In our day the availability and effectiveness of medical care is a marvelous illustration of the goodness of God.
 - (3) When James set out his basic attitude to the trials and joys of life in v. 13, he insisted that we should deliberately refer all life's experiences to the God from whom they come, for praise in a time of well-being, and prayer in a time of difficulty, are alike acknowledging that one sovereign hand is over all.
 - (a) Even when we go to the doctor our eyes should be on the Lord; he alone can heal.
 - (b) When our headache responds to an aspirin it is God who made it work.
 - (c) When the surgeon sets a broken bone and it knits, it is the Lord whom makes it knit.
 - (4) It is this aspect of things that James isolates when he tells the sick to call for the elders.
 - (a) He does not tell us whether he is offering a supplement or an alternative to the healing arts, and we must not assume that he disapproves of what he simply does not mention.
 - (b) There is always a spiritual dimension to healing, and here it is in all of its glory.
 - (c) On no occasion should a Christian approach the doctor without also approaching God, but there are those times when a notable and special approach to God will seem right and it is for this that James here makes provision.
- c) Now let's look at the picture in detail.

- i) The sick person and his request.
 - (1) There are indications in the passage that there is more than a minor illness present.
 - (a) First, the elders are called to the sick man rather than the sick man going to the elders.
 - (b) Second, the elders do all the praying, notwithstanding that v. 13 urges the one who is in trouble to pray for himself.
 - (c) Third, he is called the “weary, worn out one” (lit. to be weak, feeble, without strength, powerless).
 - (d) Fourth, the condition may account for the fact that the “sick one” is not called upon to exercise faith; the call for faith (prayer of faith) is on the part of the elders.
 - (e) Fifth, the elders are said to “pray over him”. This may mean no more than that the elders stand while the sick one kneels or lies in bed, but it could imply that the sick one is confined to bed. By itself it may not mean much, but with the other observations its weight must be added.
 - (2) Ill though he may be, he has sufficient strength to call for the elders to come to him.
 - (a) James is not thinking about the modern so-called “healing services.”
 - (b) James is not prescribing a rite that could be used for a semi-conscious or unconscious person.
 - (c) There is certainly a sufficient degree of alertness to call for the elders.
 - (d) If sin is involved, he also has enough wits about him to be aware of them (v. 15).
 - (3) With these facts in mind, there are three possibilities.
 - (a) One, On his sick bed he recognizes that his illness is the result of some sin.
 - (i) The Bible does not teach that all suffering is the result of personal sin.
 - (ii) It does teach that the consequences of sin may be visited upon the sinner.
 - (b) Two, without excluding the first possibility, it may be that the illness is taken as a time of introspection and a person recalls sins that have been forgotten or ignored. They may have no relation to the illness, but the illness is the occasion of remembering and repenting.

- (c) Three, as the person lies ill the sick one may recognize that being whole with God involves more than the body and there is a desire to be fully reconciled with God and so lays his whole life open before God that it may be put right.
- ii) The elders and their ministry.
 - (1) Two things are specified for the elders – anointing with oil and praying over the sick person.
 - (a) Anointing with oil.
 - (i) The word translated “anoint” is a general term that is commonly used for the application of oil. Thayer argues that it is limited to the mundane and profane, as opposed to sacred and religious use, which, he says, is commonly another Greek word. W.E. Vine responds that such a distinction is not consistent with daily usage since the word used for sacred anointing is used in one papyrus document to refer to “lotion for a sick horse.”
 - (ii) Lenski translates the expression “oiling with oil” to avoid the religious and sacred connotation of “anoint.” It is participial and should be rendered, “having oiled with oil,” which is then followed by prayer. The oil, he argues, was used medicinally to mollify the person and/or his body or wounds.
 - (iii) Some argue that the oil had to be used for sacred anointing or James would be making the elders physicians.
 - 1. This, however, is a faulty dilemma – it poses two alternatives to create a dilemma, but it is faulty because it does not exhaust the possibilities – non-physicians could and did apply oil.
 - 2. The Good Samaritan certainly applied oil, and Paul gave Timothy advice for stomach trouble.
 - (iv) In New Testament times oil was used medicinally.
 - 1. The Good Samaritan used it in that manner. Luke 10:34.
 - 2. Isaiah 1:6 takes the practice back even further.
 - 3. Mark 6:13 speaks of anointing the sick with oil.
 - (v) The medicinal and the spiritual use of the oil may have been in James mind and well as the minds of the elders when the practice was used.

1. The anointing was connected to the name of the Lord and was a visible expression of the healing authority and efficacy of that Name.
 2. As the elders pronounced the name of Jesus over the sick, it was in the faith that power resided in the name of Jesus to heal.
- (b) Praying over the sick person.
- (i) Note that we are told that the healing efficacy resides in the prayer of faith and not in the anointing (v. 15).
 - (ii) James does not say the prayer and the oil; he does not even say the oil used in the name of the Lord.
 - (iii) However, this is far from a problem free statement.
 1. What can we say about situations where elders have faithfully carried out their duty in prayer for the sick and no healing has followed?
 2. The easy response is that there was a lack of faith, but that must be a lack of faith on the part of the elders because the faith of the sick person is nowhere mentioned in the text.
 3. That would be a superficial and simple response, but perhaps we need to approach the issue in greater depth, taking into consideration the key expression, *the prayer of faith*, the other significant words that are used – *save, raise up* – and the setting of this passage on healing within a context of wide-ranging teaching on prayer.
 - a. First, in speaking of *the prayer of faith* we note that James uses an expression not found elsewhere in the New Testament and departs from the usual Greek word for prayer in favor of a word rarely used with that meaning; it is not the word used in verse 16.
 - b. James is usually careful in his Greek and such a departure may have been intended to signal his readers that what he was saying here was special and needed special attention.
 - c. Though James here has a different emphasis, the words are in line with what we learned in James 1:5-8 where James stressed that the faith that expresses itself in effective prayer is the product of

- a clear and absolute commitment to the Lord. He contrasted faith with “wavering” and defined “wavering” as being “double-minded.”
- d. He again stressed this truth in 4:2b-4 where he said that where prayer sought self-gratification there was not an uncompromising commitment to the Lord or to the life that He demands.
 4. But isn't the bottom line for the lack of healing when such prayer takes place the fact that the prayer of faith is always prayed subject to the will of God.
 - a. The will of God has already been mentioned by James in 4:15 in connection with our planning.
 - b. All true prayer for earthly blessings is based on the spoken or unspoken condition “if the Lord wills”; James does not need to repeat it here.
 5. Finally, we need to remember that James was writing to many people scattered through many congregations and, as Lenski writes: “. . . it is preposterous to think that the elders of all these churches were able to work miracles. The New Testament tells us very much about the elders of the apostolic churches, but nowhere does it ascribe miraculous powers to them.”
 - a. If James was teaching that no prayer under the teaching of this verse would ever fail to heal, then the healing must be miraculous in nature, for only God's miraculous power never fails.
 - b. Additionally, every church would have to have at least one elder who had the gift of healing.
 - c. Yet we know that is not true; Paul left Titus behind to “appoint elders in every church” and:
 - i. Titus did not have the power to give those appointed miraculous gifts of any kind, including healing, and
 - ii. The gift of healing was not among the qualifications that Paul gave Titus to guide him in the appointment (Titus 1:5-9).
- 5) Brothers join in prayer: a spirit of reconciliation. V. 16a.
- a) If we learned nothing else from vv. 14-15, we should have learned that prayer is powerful.

- i) James certainly intended us to learn that lesson, because he carries the same thought into this text: *the prayer of faith will save the sick . . . (15). Therefore, pray for one another that you may be healed.*”
 - ii) Prayer is not the sole prerogative of the elders; rather, it is the privilege of all believers, and one in which they should rejoice in fellowship one with another.
- b) Two questions are important:
- i) What is the *confession* James has in view?
 - (1) Some have used this verse to bring about personal confession to another or to some appointed leader and, while it is true that Christians sometime find spiritual help in confiding personal weakness to a friend and spiritual brother or sister, that does not seem to be what James has in mind here.
 - (a) The Greek word used here (*exomologeō*) is an intensive form of the word (*homologeō*) and accordingly is stronger.
 - (b) It is used of the public rather than private acknowledgement or confession of sins, or to confess and acknowledge openly.
 - (c) It can mean “to affirm,” but only in the sense of “acclaim” – as of affirming loyalty to God or acclaiming him – but the sense of “affirm to each other that you are sinners” does not comport with the use of the word in the New Testament.
 - (2) Therefore, James is not speaking of the gathering of groups, or the holding of a meeting in which Christians tell one another about their sins, nor can such a practice be justified on the basis of this passage.
 - (3) The Biblical concept of confessing sins can be summed up:
 - (a) There is a secret confession to God because there are secret sins committed against God alone.
 - (b) There is private confession because there are sins against an individual, or two or three, and must be confessed to the offended party or parties.
 - (c) There is public confession because some sins are committed against the community or the whole local congregation.
 - (4) Whatever the confession in view, the Greek indicates that it is to be an habitual practice – “make a practice of confessing your sins one to another and make a practice of praying one for another.”
 - (5) Why does James enjoin such a practice?
 - (a) Throughout his letter he has connected full undoubting unquestioning prayer with the efficacy of prayer.

- (b) We are to “pray without ceasing” and, in the same manner, we should make a practice of confessing sins and that we are sinners, for such continuing confession indicates a continuing reliance upon God and a recognition that all good and perfect gifts come down from him.
 - (c) Lack of confession indicates a lack of dependence upon God and that separation closes the storehouse of heaven. Isa. 59:2.
- ii) What is the *healing* that James connects with confession and prayer?
- (1) Some suggest that, since confession of sin is a prerequisite, James must be speaking of spiritual healing.
 - (2) However, the word “therefore” does not permit this understanding; it clearly connects this section to the immediately preceding verses.
 - (a) The KJV does not contain the “therefore” because it is not contained in the Byzantine tradition that the KJV primarily follows.
 - (b) It appears in the margin of the NKJ with the note that it is contained in the best recognized of the modern Greek texts [Note: The Nestle text.] which relies on the ancient manuscripts considered to be the most accurate.
 - (c) It is contained in the best of the manuscripts that were discovered after the KJV was translated and in the Vaticanus which, though it had been discovered when the KJV was translated (It has been in the Vatican Library in Rome since before 1475 A.D.), it was basically ignored by the KJV translators.
 - (3) One commentator stated that the word translated “healed” is always used in reference to physical healing in the New Testament. Another states that it is consistently applied to physical healings, but additionally acknowledges that there are exceptions to that use when Old Testament passages are being cited.
 - (a) These are apparent exceptions because, while such uses clearly refer to spiritual healings, they are only apparent exceptions because in such passages a physical healing is used figuratively to apply to spiritual healings. Matthew 13:15 is an example of that use.

- (b) Thus, it is clear that James is referring to physical healing because there is nothing that demands that its use here be taken figuratively.
- (4) This conclusion leads some to assert that James fell heir to the ancient belief that a physical illness was the result of sin.
 - (a) If that conclusion is not justified, why is it not?
 - (b) Does not James say that if one confesses and prays that he will be healed; what other reason could have caused James to connect confessed sin with healing?
 - (i) First, note that James did not connect healing directly with confession; he placed confession precedent to prayer, as he did anointing in v. 15.
 - (ii) Second, it is not only reasonable but also necessary to confess sins prior to such prayer, because sin is a hindrance to faith and one's ability to fully rely on the precious promises of God, and thus a hindrance to prayer.
 - (iii) Moreover, the command to "make a practice of confessing your sins one to another" is not to be postponed until one is on the sick-bed, but if one has not confessed before then it is surely time to do so.
- 6) The prophet at prayer: an example of its power. Vv. 16b-18.
 - a) James continues his discussion of prayer; before he gets to the example of Elijah, he reminds his readers of the power of prayer as a basis for his exhortations to pray.
 - i) The power of prayer is not limited to some kind of super saint.
 - (1) In fact, no saint in the Catholic sense is even mentioned.
 - (2) It is a righteous man – one who is wholly committed to God and sincerely seeking to do his will.
 - (3) James now uses the third word for prayer found in his letter – "petition" or "beg" are good translations.
 - (a) Simple straightforward begging accomplishes a great deal; it sometimes brings us what we want and often brings us more than what we want – what we really need.
 - (b) James says that a "righteous one's begging" has great power in its effects.
 - (i) The word used points to inherent strength, the strength that makes a person or thing sufficient to the task; it means potency, power waiting to be released.
 - (ii) So it is with prayer – it looks weak and helpless and is easy to overlook or even despise, but it has great

resources waiting to be released, a huge potency to be tapped.

- (iii) “In its effects” speaks of effective power, the ability to get things done.
- (iv) It is used of the Lord’s ability to subdue all things to him (Phil. 3:21).
 - 1. The term may be either middle (God’s power is that which is working) or participial (the power of prayer is working); commentators have argued its meaning; translators have rendered it both ways.
 - 2. The truth is that it is much ado about nothing; even if it is the power of prayer at work (and this is the consensus opinion), it is still God who has put the power in prayer.
- b) James has now cleared the ground by revealing the power of prayer and our God-given right to this power; now with the example of Elijah he moves on to discuss the results of prayer.
 - i) Despite having “human frailties like our own” (NEB), or “a nature like ours,” (ESV), when he prayed there was a result that only God could bring about.
 - ii) In prayer a mere man can move God – he prayed and it did not rain; he prayed again and the heaven gave rain and the earth brought forth its fruit.
 - iii) Man prayed – God acted.
 - iv) James says he” in prayer he prayed.”
 - (1) Some argue that this is a Hebraism meaning that Elijah prayed fervently.
 - (2) Others argue that it is an intensification, but because it is used with the dative it is not an intensification of Elijah’s praying, but is an intensification of the concept of prayer, *i.e.* it is the power of prayer and not the power of the prayer (Elijah in this case) that is uppermost.
 - (3) Based on the context, both are true.
 - (a) The nature of the prayer makes a difference – he must be righteous.
 - (b) For a righteous prayer, the power of prayer makes a difference; God hears him.
 - (4) One lesson we could learn from “in prayer he prayed” is that too often we do not pray in our prayers.
 - (a) We tell God what is in His word when He gave it to us.

- (b) We fill our prayers with all the right prayer words and say the same thing in four different ways, pouring out our words instead of our hearts.
- 7) The fellowship of concern; the ministry of reconciliation. Vv. 19-20.
- a) “My brothers” begins James conclusion which is a gentle assurance with which James encourages every brother to restore every other brother who wanders from the saving truth into sin and spiritual death.
- i) A brother may not only sin and need to confess his sins, he may also wander away from the truth.
 - ii) How one can say that James’ letter does not touch doctrine and that, therefore, no one should try to change another’s opinion or way of thinking, is difficult to understand.
 - iii) James touches doctrine at almost every point; he is not just a moralist, he is a true believer; he demands both orthodoxy and orthopraxis!
 - iv) To him, “the truth” is the whole Word, not just an ethical abstract of it.
 - v) Doctrine and faith are never mere “opinions” or just “ways of thinking.”
 - vi) Behind and beneath all wrong morals is wrong doctrine.
 - vii) What James means by “erring from the truth” is apparent from what he says about turning such an erring one back to the truth; such an erring person is in death and in a multitude of sins.
- b) Both subjunctives are aorists of actuality; they designate an actual wandering from the truth so that it and its saving power are lost and an actual turning such a lost one back to this saving truth.
- i) When a Christian loses the truth it is notoriously difficult to turn him back to it.
 - ii) It is not easy to revive a lost faith.
 - iii) James’ heart goes out to each of his readers in the dispersion and he wants none of them to ever be lost; he seeks to enroll his readers in the same purpose so that they will also seek to avoid such a calamity.
 - iv) They must keep on confessing to one another, praying for one another, and coming to each other’s rescue in the hour of mortal danger.
- c) His imperative is strong in v. 20: “let him realize that he who turns a sinner back from the error of his way shall save a soul from death.

- i) How highly we regard those who save an individual from physical death; how much more wonderful it is to save a soul from spiritual death.
- ii) James states his imperative in the third person: “he that turns a sinner back”; his statement is objective and general for every case of this kind.
- iii) There is only one objective means to save a sinner; he must be brought back by the same truth from which he has wandered.
- d) Death is produced by sin so that to save a soul from death is to rid the sinner of his sins is to hide or cover a multitude of sins.
 - i) “To hide sins” does not mean to keep them secret.
 - ii) It means to have them covered by the blood of Christ and thus hidden.
 - iii) The idea urged by some that by rescuing a sinner from his sin covers sins of the rescuer is foreign to Scripture.
- e) James closes by discussing saving a sinner’s soul and freeing him from his sin.
 - i) We might expect no final greetings in this frank straight-talking epistle.
 - ii) He might have included a closing wish as Paul usually does and as Peter did in his first epistle.
 - iii) James chose to close as John did in his first epistle: his final “my brethren” is enough.