

Introduction

1. Our passage today is really an extension of 5:7-12 which we covered last week
2. After rebuking those in the church who were pursuing their wealth at the expense of those who worked for them in 5:1-6, James encouraged the less fortunate in 7-12 to be patient, not grumble or complain against one another, and let the Lord judge those who were abusing them
3. In our passage today, he gave them some additional instruction on what to do depending on their situation or disposition and he did so by addressing three different groups:
  - a. Those who were suffering
  - b. Those who were encouraged
  - c. Those who were weary or physically sick

A. The first group is those who are suffering and they should pray (RE-READ 5:13a)

1. This refers to those who are experiencing hardship, distress or affliction
2. We know there were those who were suffering among James's readers:
  - a. He began his letter by talking about trials
  - b. In the beginning of chapter 4 he addressed the "**quarrels and conflicts**" among them, including the possibility that someone might have been murdered
  - c. In chapter 5 he chastised the rich for taking advantage of their workers by withholding their wages, condemning and even putting to death the ones who didn't resist them
  - d. Then, as we saw last week, he called on his readers to be patient and not judge one another
3. When James told those suffering to pray I wonder if he had some of the Old Testament saints in mind who prayed in their times of distress:
  - a. David (READ Psalm 3)

- b. Jonah (2:1-2): "**Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish, and he said, 'I called out of my distress to the LORD, and He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice.'**"
  - c. Israel's (READ Exodus 2:23-25)
  - d. Jesus (READ Luke 22:41-43)
  - e. We even have the examples in Acts when Paul, Silas, and Peter all prayed when they were in prison and God answered their prayers (Acts 12:7; 16:25-26)
4. Takeaway: the Bible commands us to pray for a host of reasons, but two apply directly to when we are suffering or in distress:
  - a. We are to pray so that we don't lose heart (READ Luke 18:1-8)
  - b. We are to pray so that we can experience peace (READ Philippians 4:5-6)

B. The second group is those who are cheerful and they should sing praises (RE-READ 5:13b)

1. The Greek word for cheerful here refers to encouragement; so, James has in mind those who feel encouraged
2. These he wrote are to "**sing praises**"—likely songs of praise and thanksgiving like the ones we see throughout the Bible:
  - a. Moses and the Israelites sang praises to God in Exodus 15 when God delivered them from the Egyptians through the Red Sea
  - b. In Judges 5, Deborah the Judge and Barak sang praises to God after He delivered them from the Canaanites
  - c. In 2 Samuel 22, David penned a lengthy song of praise to God after He delivered Israel from the Philistines
  - d. We have an entire OT book of just songs—150 psalms—which contain over 190 references to praising or giving thanks to God; 33 of the Psalms are completely dedicated to praise or thanksgiving
3. Takeaway: we are often quick to pray when we are suffering or in distress, but are we just as quick to praise and thank God when we are encouraged?

- a. Under the OT Law, when Israel wanted to thank the LORD for something they could bring a sacrifice (offering) of thanksgiving which consisted of cakes and wafers made with unleavened flour and oil
- b. As Christians, we don't offer up physical sacrifices, but instead the author of Hebrews wrote that our praise is a form of sacrifice: he wrote we are to "**continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name**" (Hebrews 13:15)

C. The third group is those who are weary or sick and they should call for the elders of the church (READ 5:14-18)

1. James asks another question, "**Is anyone among you sick?**"
  - a. James uses the Greek word *astheneo* here which at its root means to be weak, without strength, or powerless and it's used in a variety of ways in the NT:
    - 1) In the Gospels and Acts it's used mostly to refer to being physically sick (Luke 4:40)
    - 2) However, in the Epistles it has a much broader usage:
      - a) Physical sickness (Philippians 2:26-27; 2 Timothy 4:20)
      - b) Spiritual helplessness (Romans 5:6)
      - c) Spiritual immaturity (Romans 14:1-2; 1 Corinthians 8:9-12)
      - d) Humble stature or disposition (2 Corinthians 12:10; 13:3-9)
  - b. Most English translations render it as "**sick**" here, but v. 15 suggests James has in mind those who have grown weary:
    - 1) The English word "**sick**" is used again but the Greek word is different (*kamno*) and refers to being worn out or weary (also used in Hebrews 12:3 and Revelation 2:3)
    - 2) In light of the context and James's encouragement to those who were being mistreated (vs. 5:7-11), it appears James is addressing those who were worn out or weary result of the trials and mistreatment, possibly to the point of physical sickness

2. James instructs those in such a condition to call for the elders (RE-READ 5:14):
  - a. Why call for the elders rather than a doctor?
    - 1) Elders are the spiritual leaders which suggests the cause of the weariness or sickness was spiritual
    - 2) This is supported by the fact that sin is mentioned in vs. 15, 19, & 20
  - b. The elders are to pray over him and anoint him with oil:
    - 1) While oil was used to heal some ailments, James likely had in mind how oil was used to anoint in the OT—as a means of consecrating someone or something to God, especially since they are to anoint him "**in the name of the Lord**"
    - 2) It's possible he also had in mind the cultural practice of anointing with oil as a means of encouragement (Luke 7:46)
  - c. When this occurs, James promised two things will happen:
    - 1) The individual will be restored (*sodzo*) and raised up (RE-READ 5:15a)
    - 2) If he had committed sins (e.g. the cause of the weariness), they will be forgiven him (RE-READ 5:15b)
3. The obvious question: does this mean that everyone who is sick and prayed over by the elders will be healed?
  - a. The context suggests that James is referring to those who are weary and/or sick as a result of sin
  - b. So, the promise of restoration and being raised up applies to this specific circumstance
  - c. That James is referring to weariness and sickness caused by sin is supported by the next few verses (RE-READ 5:16-20):
    - 1) We are to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another when we are weary or sick so that we can be healed
    - 2) The prayers of the righteous can accomplish much in this regard
    - 3) The purpose of confession and prayer is to turn sinners from the error of their way and save their souls from death

4. The purpose of calling the elders is to facilitate confession of sin and prayer for restoration and healing
5. Takeaway—sin can lead to weariness and even physical sickness, and when it does hope is found in confession and prayer:
  - a. Bible Examples:
    - 1) In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul wrote that some were sick and others had died because of their sin (divisions, abuse of the Lord's supper)
    - 2) Jesus's words to the paralytic after He healed him in John 5:12 suggests that his condition may have been a result of his sin: "**Behold you have become well; do not sin anymore so that nothing worse happens to you**"
    - 3) David experienced physical sickness because of his sin, but found healing in confession and prayer (READ Psalm 32:1-5)
  - b. Real life example:

Elders praying for John and Vicki—struggled for years to have a child but couldn't; became bitter and angry at God; called for the elders, confessed the sin, and soon afterward became pregnant and gave birth to two sons

- c. When we are weary and sick, sometimes it's just part of living in fallen body in a fallen world; but it might also be a result of sin that needs to be addressed by confessing to others, asking for their prayer, or even calling for the elders