**POWERFUL AND EFFECTIVE PRAYER**

James 5:12-20

Key Verse: 5:16 **Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.**

Through all the previous lessons, we have learned about: the meaning of our trials, how to deal with them, the Word and our life should match, and our faith and our deeds work together. We have also learned: mercy for the needy, the danger of showing favoritism, the importance of taming our tongues, and the futility of boasting, and the warnings against the greed for money.

Today we study the last portion of this book. James gives us three practical lessons: the teaching about swearing, powerful prayer, and turning back those who are wandering from the truth.

**I. Do not swear**

Look at verse 12. **12 Above all, my brothers, do not swear--not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.**At that time many believers made oaths to others and God. When you take out a loan, you have to prove that you can repay the amount. If it is not enough, your property may be taken as collateral or the guarantor must provide the guarantee for you in case you can't pay it back. It is very common in the world for many to suffer bankruptcy from uncertain contractual promises or loans. Swearing is similar because it's an act to make others believe you. They swore by heaven or earth. If this is not trustworthy, they swore by the Temple and the name of God as collateral. Such oaths were sometimes made deliberately to deceive others, or even if it was made with good intentions, it turned out a false oath that cannot be kept.

James says that God’s children must not swear by anything. We don't even know whether we will keep the oaths or not. What if you fail to keep the oaths? You not only lose personal credit but also cause the faith of brothers and sisters to stumble. Furthermore, it dishonors God's name in the world. Whether by the laws of the world or by the laws of God, you will be condemned. Therefore, we must speak the truth as if we were answering before God. We must not lie, exaggerate, add or subtract in any trials, or everyday conversations. Let your yes be yes, No be No. This is one of the Sermons on the Mount that Jesus taught his disciples.

**Mt5:33-37 33"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' 34 But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. 36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. 37 Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.**

**II. Pray in trouble and praise in happiness**

Look at verse 13. **13 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.**James says if any of you are in trouble, he/she should pray. No one wants trouble. But it is inevitable for Christians as long as we live by the truth and follow Jesus Christ. When we meet trials and hardship, we are in trouble and we despair or grumble to others. But at this time we should come to God in prayer. In trouble, we meet God personally. God refines our faith like pure gold. Our self-pride and self-righteousness are broken and we are formed into men and women of God. The psalmist confessed in 119:71. **“It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn Your decrees.”**

On the other hand, what if any of you are happy in life? Do they need to boast and brag? Or should they be silent? We should praise God and give glory to God for giving us joy. We should praise God's mercy and God's grace of salvation. Prayer is essential in times of trouble, and so is praise in times of happiness. Here James teaches us to come to God in all circumstances. Ecclesiastes 7:14 says: **“When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future.”** God is the Sovereign Lord of our lives. He properly places troubles and joys in our lives to make us humbly come near to Him. The life of King David was like a roller coaster of troubles and joys. His characteristic was that he responded with prayers and praises to God, not to men, in all situations. At the moment of his hardships in fear of death, he prayed to God. When he committed a serious sin and God rebuked and punished him, he prayed with tears, and after receiving the forgiveness of his sins, he sang songs of praise. Later his prayers became praises, and his praises also became prayers. We pray that we may humbly come to the Lord in times of trouble to pray and praise God in times of happiness.

**III. Powerful and effective prayer**

Look at verse 14. **Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.**Here, the sick are those who cannot participate in gatherings or fellowship due to their illness. James tells the sick to actively invite the elders of the church to receive prayer support. Here, the elders refer to the spiritual leaders of the church, who provide intercessory prayers for brothers and sisters day and night. They should pray over them in faith to God, who made a body. Some believers are not willing to ask for prayer supports. But it is not right faith and attitude. Just as the whole body reacts when your finger is injured, just as the whole immune system of the body defends when a virus penetrates, we should ask for prayer supports and must believe in the power of prayers. Therefore, the faith of the whole church grows and it becomes bound in love.

A few days ago Jonathan had to go to SickKids hospital because his finger got stuck in the door frame of a store, his fingertip bone was broken and his nail was pulled off. I remembered these words, so I asked Pastor Joshua Lee to pray, and he prayed for Jonathan. After treatment, Jonathan surprisingly said to me, Thank God.

Back in 2005, I received a call from emergency room that my father was about to pass away after a long race of chemotherapy. When I was there, I desperately needed someone's intercessory prayer at the last minute. At the crossroads of eternal life and eternal death, I could understand Jairus, the chief of the synagogue who had a dying daughter and petitioned to Jesus. God helped me to hold on to Jesus' word: Don't be afraid; just believe. When I prayed for my father’s eternal life with the nurses of faith over my father, God gave all of us rest. What a moment it was! We just have a few days for 2022. I pray that we may learn prayers.

Look at verse 15. **15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven**. The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well because the Lord hears the prayer offered in faith and heals the sick. James emphasized the prayer of faith in 1:6. He asked us to pray in faith but no doubt. Let's look at verse 15 again. **If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.** The prayer offered in faith not only enables us to experience Jesus’ healing power but also helps us to receive the forgiveness of sins. In the Bible, a man with paralysis was brought to Jesus by his friends. But it was too crowded to take the man to Jesus. So they dug down through the roof of the house where Jesus was and lowered the sick man's mat. People blamed their mess, but Jesus saw their faith. And he said, Son, your sins are forgiven. Jesus healed him as well as forgave his sins. Sickness makes people humble and brings them closer to God and makes them repent of their sins before God. The prayer offered in faith moves sinners' hearts, leads them to repentance before God, and also moves God’s hearts to grant them the forgiveness of their sins and salvation.

Look at verse 16. **16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.**Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. In verse 16, we can see the early Church’s prayers. In the early church, not only intercessory prayers for the sick but also confession of sins, repentance, and forgiveness of sins were carried out altogether. This is an important part of our Christian life. It shows how each member of the church was protected from sin and the church became a healthy godly church. We study the Bible on a 1:1 basis every week, worship God with the Word, and write and share a reflection, constantly practicing confession and repentance of our sins and experiencing the work of the HS. This is a good model which is similar to the early church’s practice.

Look at verse 16b. **The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective**. The reason these words have power is that James himself was a man of prayer. It is said that he prayed so much that his knees were like camel's knees. **The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.**God accepts the prayers of the righteous who live by faith and works powerfully and effectively.

**Look at verses 17-18. 17 Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. 18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.**Elijah is one of the greatest prophets representing the Old Testament. He defeated 450 prophets of idol Baal on Mount Carmel with his zeal for God. He was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire. According to his faith and zeal, Elijah seems to be a born-to-be prophet, different from us. However, James said that Elijah was an ordinary person like us. The reason comes from 1 Kings chapter 17. In his exhaustion, Elijah was fed with each meal by birds, ravens. He was served and supported by the poor widow of Zarephath for three and a half years. He was afraid of Jezebel and fled to the wilderness, and asked God to kill him because of the hardship. He was a man just like us. But what happened when he prayed earnestly? It has not rained for three years and a half years, and the crops have dried up. He prayed again, and the heavens were opened to rain, and the earth produced its crops. By praying earnestly to God, he served the great work of repentance and revival that led Israel to return to God. And he raised the disciples like Elisha in the difficult times. When the righteous pray, the heaven gates close and then open and rainfalls. If we pray like Elijah, we can also experience the power of God even in the times of Covid-19 and we can raise disciples of Jesus.

**IV. Turn a sinner from the error**

 Let’s look at verses 19-20. **My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.**

Then and now, there is someone who turns to the error of sinful lives even after receiving Christ. They are wandering from the truth, but they do have not enough strength to come back to God by themselves. Therefore, there must also be someone who can bring them back to the truth. I remember when I had been wandering so many nights and days, away from God. But there was someone, my spiritual friends and seniors, who didn't stop visiting me and praying for me and waiting for me until I come back to God with sincere repentance. I knew God sent them to me. I do remember this: whoever turns a sinner from the error will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins. Many people are suffering under the power of sin and death not knowing the way to their salvation. We must offer prayers in faith as Elijah prayed for the wicked and adulterous generation. When we purify ourselves with sincere repentance and offer intercessory prayers in faith, God will surely forgive their sins and raise sick people and dead people. Nothing is impossible with God and he will bless our prayers to be powerful and effective. Daniel 12:3 says, **“Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”** I pray that we may be the ‘someone’ who brings wandering souls back to God this dark generation.

**In conclusion**, we should let our yes be yes, no be no. We must pray in times of trouble, and sing songs of praise in times of happiness. We must offer prayers in faith with sincere repentance and look forward to powerful and effective answers from God. We must pray for the wandering souls to come back to Christ.