

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Theme: "The Testing of Your Faith"

Lesson: 38 Text: 5:13-16a

Date: 12-17-23

Trinity Lutheran Church

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TEXT AND STUDY NOTES

(13) Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

(Ps 50:15; 2 Cor 9:7; Col 3:16)

(14) Is anyone among you sick?

Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him,
anointing him with oil in **the name of the Lord**.

(Ex 19:7; 24:1; 30:22-31; Ps 23:5; Is 1:6;

Mt 16:18; Mk 6:13; 16:18; Lk 10:34; Ac 11:30; 1 Tim 3:1; 5:17; Titus 1:5)

(15) And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and **the Lord** will raise him up.

And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

(Dt 28:58-62; Ps 30:2; Is 33:24; Mt 9:2; Mk 2:5-9; Lk 5:20; 7:14; Jn 9:1-13; Ac 3:1 – 4:22; James 1:6)

(16a) Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

**(Gen 18:23-32; 20:17; Num 11:2; 1 Ki 13:6; 17:22; 2 Ki 4:33; 19:15-20; Job 42:8; Prov 15:29; Ps 145:18;
Mt 3:6; 7:7; 18:15,16; Mk 1:5; Jn 9:31; Ac 19:18; Heb 12:13; 1 Pet 2:24; 1 Jn 1:9)**

Commentary on James – "The Epistle of Faith" – Dr. David Scaer - CPH

James also has a word for those who were enduring the persecution with some success: "Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise (*psalletō*)." This advice is the same given by Paul to the charismatics in Corinth. There some Christians had limited their faith to their emotions so that their minds or intellects had become dead. Paul's solution was to pray and sing (*psalō*) with the mind and emotions (1 Cor. 14:15). There is no suggestion that the Palestinian congregations and their pastors knew of any charismatic problem as faced by Paul in Corinth; nevertheless, the emotions are an essential part of a human being, especially of the Christian. The religious use of the emotions is not equivalent to faith, but the emotions affect faith and cannot be disregarded. The depressed Christian finds his release in prayer, and the euphoric Christian in singing. In the early church such singing expressed itself in psalms which, as for Jesus, remained its hymn book.

The problem of physical illness, unlike emotional problems, requires the attention of the church elders (*tous presbuteros tēs ekklesiās*). Such a phrase indicates a highly developed form of church government at a very early period. James here does not use "synagogue," which is more the equivalent of a local congregation, but "church," which may also refer to a wider body of Christians, as in Acts 9:31. It cannot be determined when the church adopted the term "elder," but it appears very early. On his return to Ephesus, Paul calls the elders together, and James at the Council of Jerusalem supervises the elders gathered as a group. Elders were simply pastors and were probably a carryover from the synagogues, from which the early Christians naturally patterned their congregations. The office had nothing to do with their age. One congregation may have had several pastors, or several congregations together may have been supervised by a group of clergymen together.

As the clergy are called (*proskalesasthō*) to the bed of the sick person, a more formal and solemn meeting is intended. Such a solemn gathering is intended by Matthew when Jesus commissioned His disciples (10:1) and when the child is called into their midst (18:2). James has in mind something more than a casual visit. The ill is so sick he cannot leave his bed, and the clergy are called as a group and not as individuals.

The saving efficacy is attached to the prayer rather than to the oil, as James says “and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise (*egerei*) him up” (5:15).

There is no solid agreement over the meaning of the phrase “anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord,” an action which accompanies the prayer of the clergy. In the Roman Catholic Church this passage was traditionally, but now less frequently, cited to support the doctrine of extreme unction, a sacrament provided as a salvific benefit in the afterlife for those who are on the verge of dying. It became for them a necessary sacrament.⁹ An opposite point of view sees in the application of the oil only a medicinal purpose, without religious significance. Some see the pouring of oil as symbolic of God’s healing power or the presence of the Holy Spirit. Such views are not necessarily foreign to James, as he does have a doctrine of the Spirit’s indwelling (4:5) and the next verse speaks of the Lord’s raising up the ill person. As this pouring of oil takes place in the name of the Lord, it may be viewed as an activity of Jesus, the exalted Lord, in the congregation. Since Jesus is the One who is primarily acting in His church, it is in this sense a sacramental act, a continuation of His earthly ministry of healing.

Also forgiveness of sins is spoken of in the future tense: “And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven (*aphethēsetai*).” Certainly James is not speaking to the question of whether the justified person is now forgiven by God. Rather he is speaking of the Last Day, when God will find the righteous to be innocent of all sins. The same futuristic idea is present in the Lord’s Prayer, in which the petitioner asks God to forgive sins (Matt. 6:12). Jesus provides His own explanation that the Father *will* forgive (*aphēsei*) their sins to those who forgive others (Matt. 5:14-15). The Father’s forgiveness is the eschatological forgiveness of the Last Day.

The admonition to pray and confess sins seems to apply to the entire Christian life and not merely to one life-threatening moment: “Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed (*iathēte*)” (5:16). The Greek word for “confess” (*exomologeō*), is used of those who confessing their sins come to John the Baptist (Matt. 3:6) in order to avoid the final display of God’s wrath. The prayer offered for others asks for God’s forgiveness after the confession. It matters little whether the sins confessed are against God or against others, especially fellow Christians. Essential for James is that the offense of disregarding the poor expresses contempt for Christ. The problem for these Christians lies in recognizing that God is offended by disregarding others. The promise of healing coming after a confession of sins is best understood as a reference to the forgiveness wrought through Christ’s atonement.

LIFE APPLICATION

“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.”
When we are either discouraged or encouraged, how do we then cope every day?