

## James 5:13-18

Pentecost 10; July 24 & 25, 2016

Have you ever been disappointed in life? Next week the Wisconsin State Fair begins. Every year there are certain things that you can count on – cream puffs, competitions from animals to painting to baking, entertainment and vendors trying to sell their products to you. How many people have *miracle blades* in your drawers or on your counter. How about the mops that are to clean up anything on your floor? Then you take the product home, and it doesn't quite work the way they made it work at the Fair. Have you ever been disappointed? Have you ever been disappointed with people? Have you ever been disappointed with the decisions your son or daughter might have made? Have you ever been disappointed with God? If you have ever been, you are not alone.

James, the author of the letter from which our text is taken was. James was in a really unique position. You see, James was the half-brother of Jesus. God was his brother. During Jesus' public ministry, it appears that James did not believe that his brother, Jesus, was God. The Apostle John tells us: **"For even his own brothers did not believe in him."** (John 7:5). Later something changed. That "something" was the Resurrection of Jesus. When Paul speaks about the resurrection in 1 Corinthians, he specifically says that one of the people that Jesus appeared to was James. (1 Cor. 15:7)

James becomes a leader in the Christian church. As James writes this letter, he writes little about basic Christian doctrine. He assumes that his readers already know of the power deeds that God had done for his people. He is writing to believers. Now treasuring the faith that he had in Jesus, he expected Jesus' believers to treasure it as well. James could not stand *phony faith*. God wants to see people's faith in action.

James challenges his reader to show that faith in their lives. He urges believers to listen and DO God's will. There should be no favoritism between believers, regardless of their wealth or power. Even if someone doesn't deserve your help, he encourages believers to give it anyway. He tells them to tame their tongues. He tells people not to boast in their arrogant schemes. Have patience in suffering. He is clear and blunt.

People like to think that they are in charge of their own lives, their own emotions, and their own destiny. Yet, there are so many things that happen in our lives that are way beyond us and our capability to handle. We don't like that. We do not like asking for help. So, the two year old child learns to say: *"me do!"* The 82 year old says, *"I don't need your help."* All the ages between there and beyond there say the same thing. It is in our human nature to put ourselves first and everyone else second. It started in the Garden of Eden as Adam and Eve put their desires above God's desires. If we rely on ourselves to do God's will in our lives, we will always be disappointed. So, we need help. There is only one person that can give us the power to do to do them. There is one person who will always listen to our prayers. The answer God gives to those prayers is always the answer of a wise and loving Father. Why wouldn't we want to pray to that Father?

James says in our text: **"Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray."** Nowhere in the Bible does God say that we will not go through hardships. We will endure afflictions. We will find ourselves in difficult circumstances. Yet, even though we know these words of James, **"Let them pray,"** it's hard to do, isn't it? It is no longer part of our human nature to pray to God. We want to do everything but that. When we are in trouble, and we will be in trouble, we need to get down on our knees and pray to God. Sometimes, God may bring us to our knees so that we have to look up to him.

But praying when we are in trouble, isn't James only encouragement. **"Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise."** You look at this one and think: *"this should be an easy one."* Yet, we don't always do this one. Somewhere I recently read: *"Perhaps the two greatest weaknesses in the average church today are the areas of prayer and praise."* We don't always go to God in prayer first. We often don't celebrate our joys, do we? Maybe, we need to do that a little more as well.

James continues: **"Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up."** Wouldn't this be cool if this worked with every sickness, every pain and every stiff knee we have? We wouldn't need health insurance any more. Church attendance would spike through the roof if we called the elders to pray over them and the prayer would make the sick person well. The clue to understand the **"sickness"** that James is

talking about here is found in the words: **“If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”** When we are spiritually “sick,” we become spiritually weak. Spiritually weak hearts cause sinful words, complaining words come out of our mouths in our homes, in our workplaces, in our families and every other relationship that we have. When people are consumed with bitterness, hatred, anger it can bring a real weakness to them. It crushes us.

We can’t lift that weight off of ourselves. But Jesus can. His Word can. Jesus says to us: **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”** So, we come to God’s house to hear your pastors assure you that Jesus makes your soul well. We come to God’s house to hear people comfort one another. That’s really the purpose of our congregation, isn’t it? **“If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”** When we are sick, we go to our doctor. When we are spiritual sick, we go to the Great Physician in prayer.

Yet, none of this matters if God is not powerful and cannot answer those prayers. **“The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.”** The prayer is powerful not because of the person praying it, but because of the One hearing it. James is saying to each of us here today: *God likes to hear your voice!* He listens. He listened to Elijah.

God called Elijah to speak words of Judgment against Israel’s wicked King Ahab. The people of Israel no longer had little time for God. They followed the false gods of Baal and Asherah – the god of rain and the goddess of fertility. Through Elijah’s prayer, God would show his people who really was the God who provided the rain and the growth of crops in their fields. For 3 ½ years, God showed that he had the real power to answer prayer. After the 3 ½ years of no rain, the rain would once again come down. But God wasn’t done showing his power. He would then show Israel who really had the power, as he sends down fire from heaven to consume the altar of Baal on Mt. Carmel. 450 false prophets of Baal would be seized and put to death by Elijah. The God of the Bible doesn’t disappoint or give his power to anyone else.

May you and I continue to join the hymn writer in saying: *“Amen, that is, it shall be so. Make strong our faith that we may know That we may doubt not but believe What here we ask we shall receive. Thus in your name and at your Word We say, “Amen. Oh, hear us, Lord!”*