

DAVID JEWELL Sun 6 Sept, 14:35 (2 days ago)

to drfjjewell@gmail.com

James 5 v12-20: 'Healing'

James may appear a tough talker to us, but he had a passion for the early church and knew that unless they grew fast, they would be swallowed up by persecution and temptation. How will we support new believers in their stand against prevailing culture? How will they benefit from this fellowship and what are our weaknesses? James challenges us individually and as a church as to how we do things and why.

- 1. The power of prayer. We notice that James is fully imbued with the teaching of Jesus, his brother and Lord. James focuses on prayer-the prayer of individual Christians, praying Elders, praying friends, the praying prophet Elijah, and praying fellowships. In everything, James proclaims that the positive way forward in every situation that demands perseverance is the way of prayer: are you being persecuted, are you oppressed by those who have power, are you sick, are you faced with a backsliding friend? PRAY, PRAY, PRAY! You may recall Tony Blair's slogan: 'Education, education, education'? Well, the Christian's first instinct should be to pray. It may not bring a resolution in the way you would have wished, but it will transform the situation and you. In the worst time in His life, in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, oh, how keenly did He pray! Even in the good times, praise God. We know that God is there for us in every season of your life, everything can and should be brought to Him.**
- 2. What about healing? Let's look at possibly the most difficult part of this passage: the prayers for healing of the sick. Why is this apparently controversial? Well, it seems to say that each time prayers are given for the sick they are healed and this is clearly not our experience as a church and not my experience as a believer and church leader. Are we doing something wrong? Is James calling us into a form of 'prosperity doctrine'- all you have to do is believe enough and you will receive all that you ask for? As always, we are called to look deeper and to understand the context of James words. Remember the**

words of Jesus in Mark 11: 'I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours'.

Jesus lived only to serve and glorify His Father, whilst I live to serve myself as well as God, there's a battle of wills in my divided nature. This is the main reason that those I pray for do not consistently receive healing. I often anoint people and I have seen physical, mental and spiritual healing. I have also observed some who have got sicker and some have died. I have said identical prayers for both, and I believe that God has answered those prayers most of all in spiritual healing, the strength to remain as a person despite long hours receiving cancer treatment and perhaps lacking the personal energy to stay afloat with our own human strength. Thinking of Pauline, I went with her and some others from this Chapel to attend a service of healing at Bath city church. The leader was a good man and said that he was only obeying the dictum in this verse in James 5 by praying for the healing of others. Healing belongs to God and His mysterious will. So, many of our prayers are said when we don't know what God's will is, God often keeps His purposes hidden. However, there are people in the Bible whom He called friends and revealed so much more to. Just a side note here: this does not mean that we forget our prescribed tablets or cancel the Doctors; Paul almost certainly received practical medical help from Dr Luke! God has provided us with so much, the skills of the surgeon and things like aspirin, made from the bark of the willow tree.

First, let us look at the arrangement given here: The sick person contacts the church leaders-notice that this isn't a one-man ministry by someone who has 'the gift', it seems that the person is too ill to leave their sickbed because the Elders go to them, they bring oil and anoint them with it (there is nothing said here about specific laying on of hands) and then they pray. We note that the person's healing is not dependent on their prayer or their faith, apart from the fact that they have had enough to call the elders to pray! No, it is the prayer of faith in the name of the Lord spoken by the Elders that heals them. There is a sense of order, quietness and time here- no rush, but waiting on God with the sick person. This is a

reliance on the maturity and awareness of the elders – they are to seek God’s will for this person-is it His will that he should be made well physically or is there some better way.

James also includes the possibility that the sick person’s illness may have been the result of sin, as Jesus perceived in John 5v14. Perhaps, God has decided to lay this person aside for a while so that certain matters could be reflected upon that would be impossible in a busy life. We nowadays readily divide ourselves into body, mind and spirit, we have specialists for every part of our body and our mind-those who have perhaps spent a lifetime studying the eye, or even just a small part of it; the Bible tends to see humans as a whole, holistically, and recognises that when we go wrong in some part of our lives, then this upsets another part of us. The implication here is that as the church leaders spend time with the sick person, the Lord reveals either to them or the invalid some issue and when that is recognised and confessed the healing takes place. However, to counterbalance this, in John 9, Jesus states that the man who was born blind wasn’t afflicted because of his or his parent’s sin, it was to glorify God through his healing. There isn’t one cause for sickness, and the sick person mustn’t ever be blamed, through ‘not having enough faith’ or whatever. In my experience there have been times when church leaders have been so caught up in events, that it takes a wise member of the church to speak the words God wants the fellowship or the sick person to hear. When does your prayer for a sick person, become a prayer for a good death?’

Throughout this letter, James has given us some principles of church life with the understanding that God moves and works as He chooses. The faith we have is most definitely not an act of will, of gearing ourselves up, to almost be trying to bully God so that we get our way! True faith is exercised knowing that our God is supreme, He chooses to do as He wills, it is a gift from God and in praying for healing He gives us the faith to pray when it is His will to heal. Now, you may say that this is fatalistic and gives us a get out clause with God, but we are praying not to some capricious Hindi or Moslem deity, but to the loving, gracious, consistent living God and as we pray, we can rely on His promises to us.

James urges us to be open and honest as a fellowship: where we have wronged someone, to go and say sorry for the good of all.

Healing comes from within a unified church! He reminds us that God does far more than we expect. Elijah had his ups and downs, but he was wholly God's and the Lord did amazing things through him. You have been chosen by the Almighty God and He wants to do great things in and through you! 'God the Creator orders the life of the world in the light of the prayers of His people': what an absolutely staggering thought!

- 1. The call to stick with people. Then, just as we are expecting a few greetings and a signing off like many of the letters, James hits us with the last words of his letter. One of the fantastic things about being a Christian is that we all have the Spirit of God in us. We can all support and show mercy to those who are in backsliding-you may find yourself being in the position of being the only Christian contact that a person has left, the only one able to intercede before Christ, the only one able to give wise advice. God's first desire is not to judge, but to reach out in grace to those who are falling away. Surely, we have that wonderful parable of the shepherd rescuing the one hundredth sheep to remind us not to let go, not to judge, but to hang in there, to be Jesus to that person who has temporarily rejected God!**

**In everything, James proclaims that the positive way forward in every situation that demands perseverance is the way of prayer
God bless, David**