

The Priority of Prayer

James 5:13-20

Steve Zeisler



Background

The longing to be known and loved is universal, going back to the banishment of our first parents from Eden. But surely we live in an especially lonely time. Social media offers us innumerable opportunities for connection which have mostly resulted in deformed 'communities', and 'friendships' without content. The church, God's plan for human belonging, is seen by many (too often with good reason) as unwelcoming and self-important. We turn to scripture for a better word. The final verses of James contain practical instruction on healthy church life - describing believers who pray with and for one another, are honest about sin and suffering, and sing praises from the heart.

Sermon Texts: James 5:13-20 (ESV)

¹³ Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. 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. 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. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

¹⁹ My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰ let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Discussion Questions

1. Preparation

- a. What is one thing you hoped to talk about today/tonight?
- b. What question(s) did you come away with from the sermon?
- c. As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out to you the most?

2. Sunday questions

- a. The sermon began with Steve recognizing Brian as a model for Steve's own prayer life. Do you have someone who you look up to as a model for prayer? The person could be someone you know personally or maybe a saint from the past. For instance, I love reading Thomas Cranmer's prayers (collects) so I would consider Cranmer a model for how to pray. If your example is someone you know personally, maybe you can tell them this week?
- b. **Suffering:** James expects the community of faith to share each other's burdens, especially of those who are suffering. If you are suffering right now, do you feel supported by the church? If you are not suffering right now, are you holding others up in prayer? Share where you are right now.
- c. **Praise:** James expects the community of faith to also share in each other's cheerfulness. If you are in a period of blessing right now, are you praising the Lord? Are you praising the Lord for others (not being jealous, but being delighted for them)?
- d. **Extreme suffering** When someone is in extreme suffering, Steve said, "We are as Elijah-like as we need to be ... with attention to the presence of God, and the collection of the church and our hearts in it together and the prayer of faith... And, what will God do? We don't know for sure... But, we believe he knows what he's doing." Respond to this teaching.
- e. Much of what Steve talked about today is group intercessory prayer. Are you involved in an intercessory prayer group? It could be your small group if it regularly prays. We also have several intercessory prayer groups throughout the week. For instance, I (Shawn) lead one on Wednesday mornings at 6:30 AM on Zoom. If you would like to check us out, please let me know (it's ok to simply come to observe too).