

## **Faith Works: Living What We Claim to Believe**

Faith Lasts  
Dr. David Platt  
October 18, 2009



### **FAITH LASTS James 4:13-5:20**

Well if you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to James 4. We come this morning to our last Sunday in this series from the book of James. A brother told me the other day... Just was sharing how thankful he was for how this book has spoken into his life and the life of our church over the last couple of months. And then he closed and he said, "But what I'm most thankful for is that James only has five chapters."

And so today we're going to be in the end of chapter 4, and then in chapter 5, and yes, James has pretty much messed us up, but for good, the good of God's people, for the glory of God's name. You just think about what the Word has done to affect people around the world over the last couple of months to the glory of God's name. The Word is good.

To be honest, this sermon is going to be all over the place because this text is all over the place. The way I understand preaching is that our study in the Word, sermon on the Word should reflect the text, and so this sermon is going to be all over the place, but it is totally James' fault. This whole series is James' fault, for that matter. And I say that kind of kiddingly, but this is good. It's good news that the Word of God directs our study as a community of faith. We go week by week, month by month, year by year and let the Word do the work. Then different books in this Word are going to do different things.

Books like Ruth are going to comfort us and books like James are going to challenge us and they're going to keep us in balance so that we're focused on what God has said is most important. God is going to take His Word and He's going to form our lives and our families and this faith family into what is best for us, what is best for people around us who don't know Christ and ultimately what is best for His glory in the world.

### **Faith that Perseveres...**

So, thankfully, the Word does the work. Unfortunately, this morning that means we're going to be all over the place. So, if I have one unifying thought that really persists throughout this text, it's a picture of faith that perseveres, faith that lasts. And so what I want us to do is I want us to read this text and then I want us to think about seven characteristics of faith that perseveres to the end, faith that lasts for all of eternity and let that lead us to conclude our study in James.

So look with me at James 4:13. James writes:

*Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is*

*the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.' As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*

*Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you. Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!*

*Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.*

*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.*

*Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. 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. 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. 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.*

*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. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.*

*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 (Jas. 4:13-5:20).*

Father, we know that your Word is good, and we thank you for speaking to us, for giving us this Word and then even now in this moment for the work that your Spirit does to open our minds and our hearts to understand it. So, we pray that you would do just that.

Father, I pray for brothers and sisters in this room who are hurting and walking through trouble, through suffering. I pray that your Word would comfort this morning. I pray that in any of our struggles with sin that your Word would convict us this morning. And I pray that

you would open our eyes to the shortness of our lives, you would help us to realize that we are a mist, a vapor. You'd take our lives then, and you make them count for the glory of your name on the landscape of human history. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Okay, characteristic number one. I want to show you a picture of faith that lasts, and we're going to walk pretty swiftly through some of these things. So just be ready, we'll go from one to the next to the next to the next.

### **Is Humble Before the Sovereignty of God**

First, faith that perseveres is humble before the sovereignty of God, humble before the sovereignty of God. Business travel was actually fairly common in the first century, and typical business language would say things like verse 13, "*Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.*" And people would talk about business affairs and business plans like they were certainties. And what James is warning us here is that we can become so consumed with the material realm, so consumed with thinking about our plans and our plots and our strategies, our career moves for what we're going to do and how we're going to make money, that if we're not careful, we will become blind to spiritual realities. So consumed with the material realm that we become blind to spiritual realities.

The problem here is not planning in and of itself; the problem is planning in such a way that God is not a part of those plans. James says, "You're planning to do this in the next year? This is how you're going to make money? The reality is you're not guaranteed breath for the next moment. You are in submission to the sovereign will of God. You're acting like," to use contemporary terms, "you're acting like Wall Street and business plans are laid in stone and are going to happen, when the reality is you're not guaranteed life to the end of this day."

This is the picture. And it sounds a bit morbid, but the reality of the text demands that we confront this reality. There is no guarantee that any one of us in this room will lay our head on our pillow tonight alive. No matter how young or old you are, the reality is you are not guaranteed to make it through the day. God is sovereign over our life and our death. And our lives are mist, smoke, literally a vapor. Here one second, gone the next, and we're only here tomorrow if the Lord wills.

God is sovereign over our life and our death and over our activities and our accomplishments. If it is the Lord's will, we will live and we will do this and that. Everything we do, everything we accomplish, everything we attain in this life is ultimately under the sovereign will of God.

Now the intent here is not to create some passive fatalism that says, "Well I'm just not going to do anything, God's got it in control and so I'll just wait and see what He decides." No, that's not at all what James is talking about. All throughout this book he's given us commands, actions, practical instructions to obey and to follow. So this is an active, humble submission to the sovereign will of God that says, "Okay, may have these plans, but the reality is, it's only going to happen if the Lord wills. I'm only going to live if the Lord wills."

And it's not that we necessarily have to say that statement before every single plan we make, although it wouldn't hurt for us to say that out loud, reflection of what is in our hearts. But it's a mind set that is continually submissive to God. This is a radically different way to think and to live in this world. We live in a world that tries to convince us every day, businessmen and businesswomen and busyness and the business of our lives. This world tries to convince us that we're going to be here forever. So live like you're going to be here forever and James says, "No, submit to God." And yes, work, plan and live, but live knowing

that your every single breath is dependent on God. Do not live in the self-sufficiency of American culture. Live in the God dependency of Scripture.

It's a very different way to live. Everything in our culture says live self-sufficient, Scripture says live God-dependent in every single thing. Faith that lasts is humble before the sovereignty of God. Here's the reality, every single of one of our lives in this room is a mist. We are here at this moment and in that quick of an instant, we'll be gone. So, how is your life here going to count under the sovereignty of God for the glory of God? Faith that lasts is humble before the sovereignty of God.

### **Is Obedient to the Will of God**

Second, related to that, faith that lasts is obedient to the will of God. Verse 17, "*Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*" Humble submission to God's will means humble obedience to God's will. Now this is where James gives us a needed perspective, and really a counter perspective on how we oftentimes think about sin. We oftentimes think about sin in terms of sins of commission, and by that I mean doing what God has said not to do, sins of commission. God says don't lie, so to lie is sin. God says don't covet, so to covet is sin. God says don't do these things and we know when we do them, we have disobeyed God.

But that is not the only picture of sin scripture gives us. And James is explicitly reminding us here that there are sins of omission. Which may not involve doing what God has said not to do; sins of omission are disregarding what God has said to do, hearing the Word and the will of God, and choosing not to do it. When Heather or I tell Caleb or Joshua, "Don't throw that at your brother," if they do it, they are disobedient. At the same time, if we say, "Josh," or "Caleb, clean up. It's time to clean up." If they don't clean up, is that disobedience? Absolutely that is disobedience. The picture is, when told to do something by the one who is in authority—God—we choose to disregard that.

And James has shown us both in this book... He has told us, "Don't show favoritism." So to show favoritism is what? Sin. He's also told us to care for the needy, so to not care for the needy is what? Sin. This is why I've used the illustration before that if someone claims to be a Christian and yet is indulgent day after day after day in sexual immorality and given themselves to that which God has said don't do, "Don't give yourself to sexual immorality." Even when shown in the Word that this is against what God has said—God has said not to do this—they indulge in sexual immorality day after day after day after day. This is very serious sin. I would say eternally serious sin, when you look at Scripture that says, "The sexually immoral will not inherit the kingdom of God." It's extremely dangerous.

Now it's easy for us to see that but take this picture of sins of omission over here. When God says to care for the needy, when we see that in the Word, and yet day after day after day we continue indulging ourselves while ignoring the poor. This is serious, eternally serious, sin. Remember Matthew 25? This is how Jesus talked about sins of omission when it comes to care for the needy.

He says, "To those who did not feed the hungry, clothe the naked, help the poor, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Don't miss it; they are sentenced to hell, not because of what they did, but because of what they did not do.

Brook Hills, we have seen it in the Word. We have seen it for far too long. We in contemporary Christianity have ignored it in the Word. But God has shown us in the Word that it is a premium, a priority; it's a command for us to care particularly for our poor brothers and sisters in the world. Therefore, to walk away from this series on James, to

walk away from what we've see in the Word over and over again, and continue to live our lives in a 280 culture just as we have always lived is to sin. It's to sin. It doesn't last. It's eternally serious. Faith that lasts is obedient to the will of God.

### **Is Confident in the Justice of God**

That leads us to the third characteristic. Faith that lasts is confident in the justice of God. This emphasis on the poor in James leads to the harshest language, I think, in the entire book. In James 5:1-6, and I want you to see a background for this language. What James is emphasizing is that the Judge of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ, is coming, the judgment of God is coming.

Look at it in the language. In verse 1, he says, "Misery is coming." verse 3, "*You have hoarded wealth in the last days.*" These are the last days. Verse 5, "*You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter,*" the day when judgment is coming. Verse 7, "*Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming.*" Verse 8, end of verse 8, "*Be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.*" Then in verse 9 he says, "*The Judge is standing at the door.*" This is the tone that permeates the background of these verses.

It takes us back to the end of James 4. Our lives are a mist. They could be gone the next moment, but because the Judge is standing in the door and the judgment of God is coming and when He comes, He will do two things that James is emphasizing here.

Number one, He is coming to judge the sinful. He's coming to judge the sinful. Now I want to point out something extremely important here in James 5. These first six verses are most likely addressed to rich unbelievers. He never calls them brothers, he only tells them to weep and to wail. The language is similar to that which we would see in a prophet pronouncing doom and judgment on pagan nations.

Every indication we have, these first six verses are written specifically to the rich non-Christians. And it's not even – it's not even an indictment of wealth in and of itself. But it's an indictment of their sinful use of wealth. Now, you might ask, "Well why in the midst of a letter written to Christians and churches, why would James go off on the unbelieving rich?" I think the purpose is twofold. One, we're going to see this in a second; he's reminding the church that the justice of God is going to be played out. Especially those who are being oppressed under the rich, they could trust that even though injustice was playing out in their lives day by day by day, the justice of God was coming.

Second, we know there were some in the community of faith who were wealthy and I'm convinced, here in verses 1-6, though it's addressed explicitly and intentionally toward the unbelieving rich, there are implicit warnings to the believing rich, Christians who had wealth, that their lives were to look very, very different from this picture right here, that God's people would not be living like this.

And so I want us to hear it this way, I want us to hear it from the perspective in one sense of a weak, impoverished, probably persecuted and oppressed Christian in the first century. At the same time I want us to hear this, because we identify more with wealthy in the church, and we've talked about it over and over again that our church is incredibly wealthy compared to the rest of the world. And therefore we need to hear are there any implicit warnings for us in this text?

He's coming to judge the sinful for four things they had done that he lists here. Number one, He's coming to judge the sinful for hoarding wealth, they were hoarding wealth. "*Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded.*

*Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days” (Jas. 5:2-3).*

Again, it's not indicting them for wealth in and of itself, but for what they were doing with it, they were hoarding it. They were storing up stuff in barns, to use Jesus' analogy in Luke 12. They were storing up their possessions and their clothes and their money, saving it away, hoarding it, and it was rotting. "Moths are eating your clothes, all this stuff you have that you do not need, while others around you are in great need, all the stuff you have is wasting away. It's corroding." He says, "Your gold and silver are corroded." And some say, "Well, maybe James meant to use a different word there because gold really doesn't corrode like metal does." But that's the whole point, even that which we think will last, that we pour our lives into in this world, even that which they think it will last in this world, even the most precious thing we think will last will burn up and corrode.

And James says, "You will burn up with it. You've hoarded, you've built bigger barns for yourselves and when the Judge comes it's going to burn up in the fire and you with it. Your hoarded wealth will testify against you." This was the picture. Their treasures on earth would bring about their torment in eternity. Do you remember? Just write this down, Luke 12, that parable that Jesus told. A man said, a rich man said, "This is what I'll do." Follow along here. "*This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry'*" (Luke 12:18-19). Is this not a portrait of the American Dream?

Store it up; store it up so that you are set. Eat, drink and be merry because you've got all that you need. That's what we're after in our culture. And Jesus said, "*You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God*" (Luke 12:20-21).

Oh, brothers and sisters, be wary, be very wary of storing up treasures on earth. "For moth and rust destroy or thieves break in and steal. Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust cannot destroy and where thieves can never break in and steal."

He's coming to judge the sinful for hoarding wealth. Second, for cheating workers. In that day, the concentration of land was in the hands of the few landowners who would, in satisfying themselves, oftentimes neglect their worker's wages. Now, for a worker who is oppressed and poor to be neglected of wages would mean possibly to go without daily sustenance, food and bread, water. He says to them, "Your possessions are accumulating while people are dying."

"You're cheating workers, you're living," third, "You'll be judged for living in self-indulgence." Catch the imagery here. "*You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter*" (Jas. 5:5). Let that soak in. Like a cow who is gorging himself on food moments before he goes to the slaughter. This is the picture of people who gorge themselves on luxury and self-indulgence, he says, enjoying it all when the reality is in an instant you're going to be slaughtered. What a picture. If this is not a stern enough warning against the luxury self-indulgent inherent in our culture's ideals and values.

And it all leads to the stinging indictment of the end. They would be judged for condemning men. In their luxury and self-indulgence they were condemning, murdering, innocent men (Jas. 5:6). I was so struck by one commentator who said about verse 6, "In the Jewish world, to deprive a person of their support was the same as murdering them." To deprive

the poor, to hold back from the poor, equivalent to murder. I was so struck because I could not help to think about the wealthy culture that we live in while thousands die daily because they don't have food or water. And the picture is you're condemning men, and your oppression of others will lead to your own damnation.

Now I remind you, this was a word to the unbelieving rich. This condemnation, those who've trusted in Christ, there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. So take heart, find strength in that. At the same time, pause, church, pause for a minute and just ask if there's evidence of hoarding wealth, cheating workers, and living in luxury and self-indulgence, and while not explicitly putting it in this way, by ignoring the poor, murdering them. Oh brothers and sisters in this faith family, press in and press on in the days ahead. The days ahead, as we talk about and we think about, sacrificing luxuries for the sake of urgent spiritual, physical need around the world. There will be temptations at every turn to fold back into the culture around us. I urge you to press in and press on. Don't give up, don't give up, don't give up.

Let's store up treasures in heaven. Let's store up treasures in heaven. Let's not be worried that we're not going to have enough for ourselves. Let's live for the sake of those who are in need and let's trust God. Let's trust God, that's the whole point.

God is coming, the Judge is coming to judge the sinful and He's coming to deliver the faithful. I love this, chapter 5:4, second half, "*The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.*" Now this is where I want to remind you to step into the shoes of an oppressed, persecuted, impoverished, struggling believer who is persecuted by this oppressive rich. And what God is saying, is, "I know you're surrounded by injustice, but trust God. Your cries have been heard by the Lord of hosts," literally the Lord of armies on high. This is the picture. God delights in showing His power and His greatness by hearing the poor and coming to their aid, by defending those who are needy, and that's the point. He's saying He's coming to deliver you. The King is coming, be patient until the Lord's coming. Be patient, the Lord's coming is near.

Verse 8, oh this changes the way we live in this world. When we started talking about this radical experiment picture to the staff, I remember one day we were thinking through, "All right, what would this look like in the church budget?" And one staff member said, "So, it sounds like we're going to act in this next year as if Jesus is coming back before the end of the year." Yes, yes, yeah, you don't store up more stuff in barns if He's coming back. You spend it on making sure people around the world are ready when He comes back. It changes how you live and how you spend. Oh, this is so different, this is so different. God help us to be confident in the justice of God, to look toward His coming and to await His coming, to live eager for His coming.

### **Is Patient in Suffering**

Okay, faith that lasts is confident in the justice of God. Now this leads to, next picture, faith that lasts is patient in suffering. This is the clear theme in the next part of this letter in verse 7 all the way down to verse 11. Just circle it every time you see patience or perseverance. Listen to this, "*Be patient,*" circle it there in verse 7. Verse 8, "*You too, be patient and stand firm.*" Verse 10, "*Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering.*" Verse 11, "*We consider blessed those who persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance.*" Patience. Perseverance.

And what it does is James gives us three incredible, beautiful pictures of patience and perseverance. He said, "Be patient like a farmer that is waiting for the harvest." In an agricultural society in a context where weather is not just something that happens, where

weather determines whether or not you live or die, where you are dependent on the rains. If there's not enough rain, there's drought, if there's too much rain, there's rot, if there's frost on the crops... All of these things that the farmer has to be patient, because the farmer cannot control them. Talk about needing patience, and this is such a beautiful picture.

Follow with me here, like a farmer trusting God with what you cannot control. The farmer can't determine when it rains and when it doesn't. So, James says, "The way it is with the Lord's coming and the way it is when injustice surrounds you. You're walking through suffering and trouble. Be patient, there are things you cannot control, so trust in God like the farmer. Trust in God with what you cannot control."

But then, second, honor God with what you can control. In verse 9, James mentions they were grumbling against one another, they were complaining to another and there was temptation to speak in ways that did not honor God in the midst of their struggle. And James says, "You can control that. Remember, the Judge is standing at the door. You want to be found faithful when He comes back." Is this not a strong Word?

Think about this. Maybe today you're walking through struggle, suffering. Are there not so many things that just feel completely out of control? Out of your control? You can't do anything to change it. Whenever we walk through struggle, there are handfuls of things that we cannot do anything about. So the word here is, like a farmer, be patient, trust in God with what you can't control. Now it doesn't mean the farmer just sits back and doesn't plant the crop, doesn't do the work. No, he's out there doing it. He's honoring God with what he can control and there are things in every context we walk through of suffering or struggle or trial, there are things we can control.

We can control our response; we can control our thoughts and our words and our actions. And so when you walk... If you, brother, sister, if you are walking through struggle or suffering this morning, I want to urge you, you will go nuts trying to control that which is out of your control. So trust in a good God, a wise God who is in control of those things. And then identify, clearly identify, what you can control and honor God with that. And trust that just like the farmer, the Lord of the harvest will bring about the harvest in due time. Trust Him, Honor Him, trust the Lord of the harvest, honor the Lord of the harvest. That's the picture, kind of like a farmer waiting for the harvest.

Then like a prophet, speaking the truth. Yes, the prophet was being persecuted, surrounded by injustice, what was he doing in the middle of that? This is not a passive patience that just sits back and does nothing. Prophet on the front line speaking the truth of God, speaking out against injustice, speaking the mercy of God and the judgment of God in the midst of struggle.

Oh, I look across this room, I know that in this faith family we could go down the list, there's brothers and sisters, families who are walking through very difficult struggles. And praise God for how He is giving grace in these families' lives in the middle of struggle, to speak the goodness of God and to speak about the greatness of God, and to speak about the mercy of God in the middle of struggle.

Like a prophet speaking the truth and like Job, hoping in God's purpose. I love verse 11. "*You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.*" Is that not an understatement? 42 grueling chapters—"When is this going to end? Why is this happening?" For 42 chapters, and he gets to the end and he says, "My ears have heard of you but now my eyes have seen you." The whole point in the story of Job is that the Lord is full of compassion and mercy. That's the end that Job gets to. Now it takes forty-two

chapters to get there. When you are walking through suffering, I urge you, brothers and sisters, to remember this is not the end, this is not the end. You're in the valley, but it's not the end, it's not the end, it's not the end.

The end, the purpose of God, He will show Himself compassionate and merciful. He will show Himself compassionate and merciful. Even when darkness surrounds, He will show Himself in the end compassion and merciful. So like a farmer, trust in the harvest, honor God in what you can control. Like a prophet, speak the truth of God and like Job, hope in His purpose.

Now, you get to verse 12 and it just feels, I'm just going to be honest, it feels like James takes a left turn. Like, "Oh I meant to mention this a few chapters ago but I forgot, and so I'm going to bring it in here." And I know that on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that somehow these connect, I just can't figure it out.

### **Is Trustworthy in Speech**

So, on another note, faith that lasts is trustworthy in speech. And we're not going to spend a ton of time here because we really camped out here in James 3. It's a recurring theme, motif, throughout this book, but the words from our mouths should be so consistent, so dependable, that they guarantee reliability in and of themselves. Faith that lasts is trustworthy in speech.

### **Is Prayerful in Sorrow**

Now, back to what I think makes a little more sense in this context, but submit to the sovereign will of God and the Word of the Holy Spirit. Faith that lasts is prayerful in sorrow. You see this picture, much like we saw with patience and the verses that led up to this point, now we see with prayer. Circle it, verse 13. "*Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray.*" Circle prayer there. Verse 14, "*Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray.*" Circle it there. Verse 15, "*The prayer,*" circle it there, "*offered in faith will make the sick person well.*" Verse 16, "*Confess your sins to each other and pray.*" Circle it there. Later in verse 16, "*The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*" Verse 17, "*[Elijah] prayed earnestly that it would not rain.*" Verse 18, "*Again he prayed.*" Every single verse has prayer at least mentioned once pray, pray, pray, pray, prayerful in sorrow.

Again this is not a passive patience, this is an active patience. How do you grow in patience in the middle of suffering? James says you pray. God alone can give you the patience you need to walk through suffering and sorrow and the avenue through which you receive that patience is prayer. And this is the beauty, even going back to the farmer trusting God in what you cannot control. You and I have the privilege of communing with the God who is in control. Wow, prayerful in sorrow.

Pray when you are hurting, all kinds of hurt that James has talked about. Physical hurt, spiritual hurt and temptation, emotional hurt, financial hurt that he's addressed and I know all of those are problems across this room, even as we talk about sacrificing our wealth for the needs of the world. There are people who are financially struggling; there are people who are emotionally struggling, spiritually struggling. Pray when you're hurting and pray when you're happy.

*"Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise"* (Jas. 5:13). Pray and praise, pray and praise, that's a great way to live. Pray and praise, pray and praise. "Pray," he says, "with the elders." Verse 14, "*Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him.*" Now the implication here is that someone is so sick in the church that

they're most likely bedridden, unable to gather with the church and so the elders, at the invitation of that brother or sister would come to them and pray over them in their sickness.

And the elders and I have had the privilege, the joy, of doing this on various occasions when a brother or sister who is unable to gather with the church has said, "Will you come and pray over me?" And so we'll come and have special time in prayer over a brother or sister in that context.

Now, James mentions, "*He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord*" (Jas. 5:14). Now, there's been about 2000 years worth of discussion over exactly what is involved, why anointing in the name of the Lord. And so, 2000 years condensed to two minutes. Are you ready? Here we go.

Some have said the oil is medicinal. That oil was a common medicinal salve that would be used and so this is basically saying, pray and give medicine. So, as you pray trust that God has ordained means to bring about healing. So we use medicine.

Now, there's a couple question marks at least with this picture, because, first of all, there's all kinds of different medicinal salves that could be used for different kinds of sicknesses and this is one that's pointed out. It's really not a very common picture that we see, although it was common in the first century, it's not a common picture we see all over Scripture.

And second, if someone is sick and there's medicine for that sickness, I don't think the implication here is that the elders are the one's who are supposed to bring the medicine by. If, in your sickness, you are dependent on me or other elders to prescribe the right medicine, this is not a good situation. I don't think that that's what James is necessarily alluding to. If someone's sick and someone's got medicine give the medicine.

So, is oil medicinal? I don't lean toward that. Some have said that oil is sacramental and this is where this anointing of the sick turned into a sacrament of the church, particularly the Catholic Church, and this is something that priests would administer oftentimes to someone who is very sick and in preparation for their soul for death.

There's a sacrament in this picture of the oil that covers over sins and prepares a soul for death. Now amidst a variety of things that I would have questions about that, that I don't think in any way fits in with the context. The whole point is to pray for healing, not to pray for preparation for death. So it doesn't seem to be what James is talking about here.

So, in my humble opinion I would lean to the oil not being medicinal or sacramental, but the oil being symbolic. I think there's a picture all over Scripture, particularly the Greek translation of the Old Testament, that uses this same word to talk about consecrating, setting apart, some thing or someone for a special purpose. And the picture is not that there's some power in oil, the picture is that oil is a representation of something or someone that is set apart for a special purpose. And I think the picture here, when you get down to it is a picture of elders coming and the emphasis here is on prayer, anointing with oil is secondary.

And the picture is an illustration of someone being set apart under the care of God and saying, "God we want to show your provision in a powerful way in this person's life." And this picture of the oil being a representation of that.

Regardless, this is not really an extremely significant sticking point. The point is to pray. This is the only place in the New Testament letters where anointing the sick is even

mentioned. And there are other occurrences where people are praying for healing and healing occurs apart from oil. So, it's not a non-negotiable in this picture, but it is a picture that James gives us here.

The emphasis on praying with the elders, but, don't miss this, not just praying with the elders, we're praying with the church. This kind of prayer for healing, according to verse 16 is not just the elders, but the church. Yes, the elders play a special role as shepherds, overseers, pastors in the context of a brother or sister who is unable to gather together with the church, but the reality is, praying like this is not just something that elders have some special power to do. Praying like this is something that is available, and we all have the privilege, power to participate in, in praying for each other. This is good news right here.

That God has not chosen for His power to be relegated to a certain elite group of people, you bring them in to pray, now you got something real powerful coming. Instead, God has made His power in prayer available to all of His people so that any saint, any follower of Christ, any brother or sister in this room can pray like Elijah, just like one of us, powerfully, effectively. Isn't that good news? Like now when it comes to hurts and needs in the church, it doesn't require a special group of leaders to address hurts and needs.

Now it's interesting, this is the only verse in the New Testament, verse 16, where we're commanded as believers to confess our sins to each other. And this command is given in the context of praying for healing for one another. So I want us to think about the relationship between praying for healing and confession of sins. Follow with me here.

Sin directly causes some sickness, and that's certainly the implication here. It's also a picture in the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 11:30, when people are taking the Lord's Supper, and sinning in doing so. Paul says, "This is the reason some of you are sick. Some of you have gone to sleep because your sin." Now, obviously we have to be careful here not to take this too far, to think that sickness is always associated with direct sin in someone's life. "Well, if someone has cancer, then obviously there must be sin in their life." That's not the conclusion here. That's why James says, "If he has sinned, he will be forgiven." So, here's the picture, there is context in which sickness is a result of sin.

And as a result, follow with me here; as a result sickness should always involve, yes, prayer for physical healing. But sickness should always involve spiritual examination before God. In the same way that we need to spiritually examine ourselves before God all the time, but this context where we say, "God, I want to be clean before you, I want to be pure in body and in spirit." So sin directly causes some sickness, but sin indirectly causes all sickness. What I want to emphasize there is, that sickness and death all goes back to where? Genesis 3 and the Fall of man. If there was no Fall, if there was no sin, there's no picture of death and sickness in the world. And so, part of the picture in sickness is for us and our response to sickness, even if there is nothing in us... Same picture with Job, righteous man, boils all over his body, not a result of his sin.

So don't in any way think, "Okay, if someone is sick they must have sin." That's not the picture. James, Jesus, the whole picture of Scripture counters that. At the same time, in sickness, we should be driven to hate sin all the more, to despise sin, to hate sin all the more because there's an indirect cause from the very beginning in that.

And when we walk through illness in our struggle, part of the purpose in that is for us to hate sin and love righteousness and to guard ourselves. There's no question that when we are struggling in sickness there are temptations to sin. There's a weakness there that we need the strength of God. And so, James says, "Confess your sin to each other."

This is a picture, "Confess your sins to each other, and intercede on behalf of each other." Both of these together, this is what the community of faith does with one another and this is where I want to say, yet again, to every brother or sister in this faith family, if you are not involved in a small group of believers that you are sharing life with, I want to urge you to get involved with a small group of believers that you're sharing life with. Because, this kind of stuff, praying for each other, confessing your sins to each other, interceding on behalf of each other. This kind of stuff doesn't happen when this many people gather together in a room. I mean how would you like it if I said, "Okay, now, it's time for confession. You can turn to the person on your right and confess all your sins to them. And then when you're finished, turn to the person on your left." Like, do you even know the person to your right or left? This would be awkward, to say the least.

But we're supposed to do this, so where do we do this? We do it in the context of walking with brothers and sisters through this life so that we have brothers and sisters we confess our struggles and our sins to and we pray for one another. God intends for this kind of community for every one of us. And it doesn't happen sitting anonymously in a 2000 person room, it happens in the context of really sharing life with one another. Intercede on behalf of each other.

Now the glaring question that we've not addressed in this passage is the first part of verse 15. "*And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up.*" Does this mean that if you pray with enough faith, that someone will be healed? Some have concluded that if someone is not healed, then therefore, we did not pray with enough faith. So, is that the case?

Well, practically I don't think that holds water at all, practically. I, the elders, we have prayed over brothers and sisters who have been very sick and some who have lived and some who have not. And I would not in any way say to those family members of those who did not live, "Well, apparently you or we did not have enough faith in our praying." So practically, I don't think that holds water, but what is Scripture saying here, though? Okay that's experience, but Scripture is the authority here, what is Scripture saying? And this is where James gives us an example in Elijah, oh I wish we had time to really dive in deep into 1 Kings 17 and 18, you might write that down.

But if you go to those two chapters and you see what James is talking about here, what you'll find is there is an intricate relationship in 1 Kings 17 and 18, an intricate relationship between Elijah's praying and the Word of God.

You'll see the author, 1 Kings, over and over again talking about how Elijah was led by, directed by, guided by, empowered by the Word of God. "The Word of the Lord, the Word of the Lord, the Word of the Lord." "And the Word of the Lord came to Elijah and he spoke the Word of the Lord, saying, 'There's going to be neither dew no rain until I say so.' This is the Word of God." And then God says a few years later, "There's going to be rain. Go tell King Ahab there's going to be rain." By the end of chapter 18, Elijah's on his face, praying, "God, bring the rain." But God had already said he was going to bring the rain.

So the picture is there's a relationship between prayer to God and the Word of God. And the beauty is, God had said, "This is what I'm going to do." And yet, in His sovereign grace, He was using the prayers of Elijah to accomplish His Word. So the picture here, prayer of a righteous man, this is a picture of praying in alignment with God. The desires, the will, the wants of God.

Now, bring that over into praying for, say, a brother or sister who has cancer. Do we have a Word from God that they're going to live? Most likely not. Not, "Most likely they're not going to live," but most likely we don't have a Word from God for sure that we can lean on the same way we have this Word that we can lean on.

So, how do we pray? We pray in faith. We pray believing that God is going to do what we know He wants to do. We pray in accordance with His Word, the same thing Jesus talks about. "If you ask anything in my name, according to my will, it will be given to you."

So here is this... Bring this back from Luke 11 because we saw this in Jesus' teaching on prayer. I want to bring it back here into James 5, the picture of Elijah, the secret to power and effectiveness in prayer. Step one, make your wants God's wants. As you grow in righteousness, as you grow in the likeness of Christ, you begin to want more and more what Christ wants. Make your wants God's wants.

And then number two, ask for whatever you want. That's the key. Now, that is not a satisfying answer in some of our hearts and lives because we want to know, "Is God going to heal?" But think about it, when you're praying for this brother or sister with cancer, what do you know that God wants? You know that God wants glory to be made known. You know that God wants His servants strengthened and comforted and helped in their time of weakness. You know that God wants His gospel advanced throughout this Scripture. You know this, and so pray for those things. Pray earnestly for those things and know that you have what you've asked for. Now obviously there are things that we don't know in this picture and there's a freedom to express our desires to God, but don't miss it, it's not a picture of us trying to twist God's arm, and if we do a good enough job then we're able to accomplish that.

Remember, there are times when God in His sovereign wisdom and grace chooses not to heal for a reason. It's Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:8-9 when he says I prayed three times for God to take away this thorn from my flesh. Three times and all three times, God said what? No. No. And Paul does include, "And so I realized that I was not praying with enough faith, so I prayed again." He doesn't say that. Instead, God said, "No, I want to show my grace is sufficient for you in your weakness and this is going to stay, this is going to stay, I've experienced glory and it's staying."

And God does that sometimes, and He's good and He's sovereign and He's wise and He has an eternal perspective. And so, yes, we express our desires to God. But we also submit our desires to God to say, "I know that you are trustworthy and you're good and you're wise. I know you have the power to heal but my ultimate desire is that you would get glory, that you would strengthen this brother or sister. We would uphold them and you would do whatever is best for the advancement of your gospel in their life. And I'm confident any day, in the end, you're going to raise this brother or sister up for all of eternity." Now that—that's praying with faith. That's praying with faith.

### **Is Loving Toward Sinners**

All this leads to last picture of faith that lasts, faith that lasts is loving toward sinners. Love this. We've come to the end of this book, filled with all kinds of commands and instructions, and James says, "In light of all these things, look out for each other." Brook Hills, the point of our studying the book of James is not just so that we would know what to do, how to live in a way that honors God. The point of the Book of James is to show us how to also help one another live in a way that honors and glorifies God.

He talks about turning a brother back, "*Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins*" (Jas. 5:20). James is talking here about earthly restoration, restoring your brother or sister from their sin and he says, "This saves souls." Literally saves them from death and it covers sins.

Now, all of that obviously leads to the question, "Does this mean that the Christian is in danger of eternal death, the Christian's in danger of spiritual death, that there's a Christian in danger of not being saved from their sins in the end?"

I want you to follow with me here; this is where we realize the beauty of eternal security. Follow with me here. The whole of the New Testament teaches that eternal security is always a certainty. Eternal security is the doctrine, the truth, that a Christian salvation is secure for all of eternity, that when you trust in Christ as your Savior and your Lord, and when He opens your eyes to your need for Him and you are born again the Spirit of Christ comes in to you and is a promise guaranteeing your inheritance.

So, you are eternally secure. "*Those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified*" (Rom. 8:30). This is the picture. I can tell you, text after text after text teaches that in the New Testament. But here's the question, God preserves His people, God brings their salvation to completion. How? How does God preserve His people? How does God keep His people faithful to the end? How does God keep them from wandering away? And the answer is, eternal security is accomplished through community. This is beautiful. God is sovereign over this whole picture. He will preserve you. How will He preserve you? He'll put you in the context of the church filled with brothers and sisters, who will keep you from erring, keep you from wandering, keep you close to Christ.

This is why Christianity cannot be lived in the context of isolation, because we need one another. You and I need each other to keep one another faithful to the end. Will God keep us faithful? Yes. How will He do it? He will do it through the church. Eternal security is a community project and you need other brothers and sisters to keep you faithful to the end. And here's the deal, if not even for your own sake, other brothers and sisters need you to keep them faithful to the end.

So again, get involved in a small group of believers where you're sharing life like this, where you're loving one another enough to spur one another on toward obedience, and keep one another faithful. For your own sake and for the sake of the glory of Christ in other people's lives, for the sake of their salvation and the covering of their sins.

## **Faith that Works...**

### **Is Only Possible by the Gracious Gospel of Christ**

All that leads to faith that works in the book of James this is just a summary, but it is an important summary. Faith that works is only possible by the gracious gospel of Christ. Just bring all this together, all that we've seen.

Yesterday I was working on this sermon, Caleb gets up from nap, he comes and climbs in my lap and he says, "What are you doing?" and I said, "I'm working on the sermon." He says, "You going to preach tomorrow?" and I said, "Yes." I said, "What should I preach on?" He said, "Hmm, Jesus." I said, "Good call." I said, "What should I tell people about Jesus?" And he said, "Tell people to be kind to each other, to their friends." I said, "Okay, how can

they be kind?" And he said, "Tell them to share with each other." I said, "What should they share?" And he began to give a list of things. He'd think for a minute and, "They should share their toys and they should share their Mac trucks and their cars and puzzles and their books." And then he said, "They should share their vegetables."

Like yeah, "Like that's a real stretch for you, buddy." Like you'd gladly, like show the Christ life with your vegetables. So, he got finished with the list and I said, "Well, how do they share like that?" And he said, "Well, because Jesus died on the cross to take away our sins." And I said, "Yes, you preach the sermon, buddy."

This is gospel obedience. We live like this, it's the overflow of the one that lives in us, the one who died for us and rose again on our behalf and we are united with His life. Faith that works is the overflow possible only by the gracious gospel of Christ.

### **Is Played Out in the Context of the Body of Christ**

Is played out in the context of the body of Christ. James, over and over again, "Brothers, brothers, brothers, dear brothers, brothers, brothers, dear brothers." Faith is lived out together, not in isolation, whether it's walking through trials, seeking after wisdom, caring for the poor, this is what it means to be a part of the body of Christ.

### **Is Ultimately Aimed Toward Great Glory to Christ**

And ultimately, faith that works is aimed toward great glory to Christ. Oh, what would it look like, brothers and sisters, if in contemporary Christianity the world no longer saw a picture of people praying a prayer and then living like the rest of the world? What if the world saw that there's a people whose lives look radically different, because they've been transformed through faith in Christ?

**Permissions:** You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material provided that you do not alter it in any way, use the material in its entirety, and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to the media on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Radical.

**Please include the following statement on any distributed copy:** By David Platt. © David Platt & Radical. Website: [Radical.net](http://Radical.net)