

Sermon August 10 2025 Littlebourne James 5 13-20

This sermon is entitled 'Prayer of faith' and encourages us to pray to God in all situations and circumstances.

In verses 13 and 14 James exhorts those who are in trouble and suffering to pray and those who are happy to sing songs of praise. In other words whatever our circumstances we should take it all to the Lord in prayer. He then encourages those who are sick to ask the Elders of the church for prayer and for the anointing of oil in the name of the Lord. James puts the initiative on the person who is in need to call on the Elders. It could well be difficult for some people to ask the Elders for prayer. The matter may be something that is difficult to share for whatever reason. So courage is needed. In our church we have a prayer chain so that not just the Elders but all those who receive the prayer chain messages can pray for those who are in need.

At the time this passage was written, anointing with oil was considered be a medicinal practice and the benefit of olive oil whether for external use and also for use in cooking and medicine is well known. But if one is anointed with oil in the name of the Lord, it is a symbol of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

In verse 15 James says that a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick and the Lord will raise him or her up. Probably all of us have prayed for healing for those who are sick, but there are times when our prayers do not seem to be answered. However, the healing is much more than physical healing but also includes spiritual healing. The reference to sins being forgiven also points to spiritual healing and not necessarily physical healing. We should pray for others in faith, praying that God will heal them and then leave the matter in God's hands. It is all too easy to fret and worry, but we must trust in the Lord, leave our prayers in his hands and believe that he will answer them. It is important to note that God's idea of time is not the same as ours: for God a thousand years is like one day and one day is like a thousand years. You will find this verse in 2 Peter, ch 3 v8.

James encourages us to confess our sins to one another. He reminds us that mutual confession and prayer brings healing both physically and spiritually. Confession can free us from the heavy burdens (physically and spiritually) of unresolved sin, and also removes hindrances to the work of the Holy Spirit. In our church we have prayer ministry after the service on Sunday mornings and

on Friday afternoons by appointment. Please speak to our minister Bernard in this respect.

In writing about the need for prayer for the suffering, for the sick, and for the those who confess to having said or done something wrong, James points to the effective nature of prayer – when it is fervent, powerful and offered by those who are righteous or right with God and who put their trust in God.

James gives the example of the prophet Elijah in verses 17 and 18. Elijah is a model of earnest prayer and this was answered by God. His effectiveness in prayer extended even to the weather! Yet this shows that Elijah's heart was in tune with God's. He prayed for the rain to stop and then to start only because he sensed it was in the heart of God in His dealings with Israel.

In the final two verses James gives a warning about the dangers of wandering away from the truth, the risk of backsliding. Having introduced the topics of sin and confession, James reminds us of the need to speak to those who have wandered from the truth. Wandering from the truth is a good picture. Most people don't wander deliberately – it just sort of happens. Nevertheless, it still gets them off track and possibly in danger. So more courage will be needed to speak to someone who is wandering away from their faith.

This shows us that God can use ordinary people to turn others back from the errors of their ways. God does not need to use such human instruments, and sometimes He does not. For example, the Apostle Paul – or rather, Saul of Tarsus – was not converted through any human instrument, apart perhaps the prayers of the dying martyr Stephen for him. No one preached to him, but Jesus decided to meet him directly on the road to Damascus. In verse 20 James finishes his letter with these words: "Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins."

This is where the letter ends. It finishes suddenly and there are no words of farewell. James encourages us not only to hear the word, but to do it, to act on it. In these few verses James encourages us to pray in all circumstances, to ask Elders for prayer, to pray fervently and to believe that God will hear our prayers but then to leave our prayers with God. We are also encouraged to bring those who have turned away back to faith.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for the words of your disciple James. We thank you Lord that you have promised never to leave us or abandon us. Please help us to hold on to you, to trust in you and believe that you hear us when we pray. In Jesus name. Amen