

James 5

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Preacher: Iain A MacDonald

[0 : 00] I'm focusing particularly on that passage from verse 13 to the end of the chapter, the prayer of faith. And probably the verse that we will be focusing on most of the time would be the 16th verse and certainly the latter part of that verse.

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.

But as the authorised version says regarding the last part of that verse, the effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

Now those of us who are Christians in church this morning know from experience that prayer changes things. Surely this is clearly the message of the Bible and surely that is the experience of God's people through the ages.

The God of the Bible has great things stored up for his people. He has so planned it that these blessings can be realised by the Lord's people through their prayers.

[1 : 20] Now as many of you know, for the past four years, or five years in fact, I've been working with the Lord's Day Observance Society. A great privilege.

I had the opportunity of going into many different denominations. I also had the opportunity on lobbying Parliament on a number of issues, including Sunday Working, and also the Gender Recognition Bill and various other bills.

And going into Parliament and just listening to debate, I must say that I am deeply saddened by the direction our country seems to be going in.

What we have seen over these past number of years is one good law after another being taken from our statute books, and man's law replacing God's law in our nation.

There was a day when our country was called Great Britain. We can no longer, I don't think, use that title.

[2 : 27] The Lord's Day has become like any other day. Our churches are being emptied. And if we listen to the popular press, within 20 years, our churches will really be empty.

What we are seeing in place of many of our churches are mosques and various other temples of worship replacing them. What is being worshipped, I would suggest, by the majority of the people in our country is the body beautiful.

All we have to do is look at our newsstands, and the majority of our magazines point to that. Sexual immorality is openly rife.

And the one thing, sadly, that is being ridiculed in our nation today is through Christianity. All we had to do was read the press yesterday regarding the statement by our Prime Minister when he mentioned that he had spoken to God.

That really appalled me. The reaction of the nation regarding that statement. I think that clearly shows us how far our nation has gone.

[3 : 42] We have no longer the right to call ourselves a Christian nation. My friends, what we see is a remarkable parallel to what was going on in the prophet Elijah's day.

Those of you who are familiar with the history of Elijah, go back to 1 Kings chapter 16 and 17. I suggest you go and read that this afternoon. And there you will see a remarkable parallel to the situation in our nation today.

But let me say this. In much of the developing world today, you know Christianity is flourishing. Whilst in our country, sadly, it is withering.

Perhaps, if we listen to the statistics that are given to us regarding church attendance today, we are told that only 7.5% of our nation will be in church on the Lord's Day.

My friends, this might be bad news for the church. But let me tell you, it is a tragedy for those who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. And the key issue for us as Christians today, surely, is not the survival of this historical institution, but the destiny of the 59 million people in our nation who are heading for our lost eternity.

[5 : 01] So the question for you and I today as Christians is, can we make a difference? Again, if we were reading the press over the past two or three days, we will see that this country has rarely been so depressed and directionless.

There are now, we are reading 12 million people on antidepressants. That is more than a quarter of our adult population.

And it is now becoming a major problem among young people in our day. You see, the individualistic values that are driving our society are not satisfying or are not delivering the satisfaction that our people are craving for today.

This is what our Prime Minister said in 1995 before he came into office. We enjoy a thousand material advantages over any previous generation, yet we suffer a depth of insecurity and spiritual doubt that they never knew.

Can I ask you, has this situation changed in the past ten years since he came into office? I say no. Now that being the case, a society that cannot meet its people's needs, surely, my friends, is ready to hear the good news of the Gospel.

[6 : 31] The question for you and I again, can we make a difference? Well, the Lord, as we read Scripture, leaves us in no doubt as to the part prayer has in visionary, missionary enterprise.

Have we lost our sense of mission as a church? That is a question that we must answer for ourselves. And as we read history, we see that when prayer has prevailed in the church, the Gospel has prospered.

Where prayer has been lukewarm, it has languished. Now, I'm with Sazer on these days, and I've been asking if I can come and speak in meetings during the week. And you know the response I'm getting for some preachers or ministers?

They're embarrassed to call me because of the low numbers attending the weekly prayer meeting. My friends, the weekly prayer meeting, as Spurgeon said, is the engine room of the church.

Do we need to be awakened out of our lethargy when it comes to prayer? Where prayer has been lukewarm, the Gospel has languished.

[7 : 39] Now, I want to look very briefly this morning at the power of prayer. And I want to look at it in three ways. I want to look at it, first of all, by seeing a principle that we need to recognize.

A principle we need to recognize. Secondly, a picture we need to visualize. Thirdly, a practice we need to utilize.

Oh my friends, do we really appreciate the power of prayer as Christians? It's time we stop and thought about the power of prayer.

Now, as we look at this epistle, we see that there are certainly two key issues where James is dealing with. One is the tongue. The second is prayer.

As we read the Word of God, we read that prayer is to be a fact in the Christian's life.

[8 : 52] Prayer is to be a custom. Prayer is to be a habit in our daily experience as Christians. But not only is it to be a fact, but it also ought to be a force.

What a testimony that godly man, George Muller, has left the church. He was a man who at the height of his power had over 2,000 orphans in his orphanage.

He never asked for a single penny. He made his needs known to God in prayer. Many of you, I'm sure, have read his biography.

If you haven't read it, it will certainly encourage you to pray. For Muller, prayer was more than a fact in his life. It was a mighty force.

He knew something of the tremendous power of prayer. Many a morning, there was no food to feed the children. Within an hour, people were knocking at the door. For some reason, they felt compelled to come with food to the orphanage.

[10 : 01] God answers prayer. So, for today, I want to focus on the power of prayer. The Amplified Bible puts this verse 16 like this.

The earnest, the earnest, heartfelt, continued prayer of a righteous man makes tremendous power available, dynamic, in his working.

That's powerful language. Now, this is the hub around which the whole of this section from verse 13 evolves. And the picture that we see here is of a man humbly praying before God.

Not ordering God to do something, but humbly praying before God. Humbly pleading with God. The kind of humble praying that is approached with integrity.

Now, notice what he says about the prayer of a righteous man. Now, that word righteous can be used in two senses, can't it?

[11:12] Can be used in two senses. Now, each one of us who is a Christian here today has the imputed righteousness of Christ. If you are a Christian here today, you are righteous.

For you, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. You are called to be saints. That's the situation. You find yourself in Christ.

United to Christ. But is that the righteousness that the apostle is speaking about here? I say no. Not at all.

James is using this righteousness here, not in a spiritual sense, but in a moral sense. You see, it's not enough for you to say today, I know I'm a Christian.

I'm right with God. But a Christian must be righteous morally as well. Christian must be righteous practically as well.

[12:16] If you want your prayers to be heard at the throne of grace. Is that not what the psalmist says? Is that not what the psalmist says?

That if we regard sin in our heart, the Lord will not hear our prayers. This is a statement of Robert Murray McChain, that godly minister.

What a man is in his clear cross it is what he is. Oh my friends, that humbles me. What a man is in his prayer closet is what he is.

You see, no Christian is greater than his prayer life. And his prayer life is no greater than his personal life. You see, you cannot divorce your Christian living from your praying.

You know, it's possible for me to preach the gospel and not be right with God. I confess that's happened and I confess it to my shame. I'm sure there are many of you who have taught Sunday school and not been right with God.

[13:30] You have been witnessing to others and not have been right with God. But remember my friends, that is a person-to-person relationships. But when we come to prayer, we're talking about a person-to-God relationship.

And you cannot take it with God. Because He knows the very depths of your hearts. He knows everything about you.

So what you are, when we are alone with God, is what we are. It is the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man.

You see, this kind of prayer is approached with integrity. And you will notice that it's asked with intensity. energy. The Greek meaning there is energy.

And that helps us to understand this whole phrase. You see, prayer doesn't have to be crouched in certain language. Nor do our prayers have to be a certain length.

[14:36] Nor do they have to have a certain loudness. In fact, if you notice many of the prayers in the Bible, many of them are very short. I remember in Lewis, as a young Christian, some of the men talking in fellowship.

And they were saying before the 1930 revival came to Lewis, that was to sweep right through Lewis over a number of years. The minister in Carlway turned around and he said, you know, he said, or he was asked the question, was he expecting the revival to come?

Well, he said he wasn't, but he didn't notice something in the prayer meetings. The prayers of the men were shorter than they had been before. What is important, my friend, according to James in prayer, is fervency.

As one commentator said, if the arrow of prayer is to enter heaven, it must be drawn from a full bow. Now, you could translate these words effective, fervent, as being stretched out.

It is the picture of an athlete bursting for the tape with his last gasp of energy to get the prize. Or let me ask you a question today, Christian friend.

[16:01] Are you a praying man or a praying woman? Can I not suggest to you that this is perhaps the most difficult of exercises?

Is it not? It requires discipline. It requires energy. And then how do you pray? Is it when you go to bed at night, when you're tired, just as you drop off to sleep?

Or in the morning after having a restless night, you're falling off to sleep as you come to pray? Do you go up easily? Now the prayer that James is talking about here is approached with integrity, asked with fervency, and then look at verse 16.

Again, we see that it's answered with immensity. For he says that the effective prayer of a righteous man avails much. It's able to do powerful things.

It is the kind of praying that a man asks God, and God answers. A missionary once spoke of a letter he received from a wee girl, whose Sunday school class had been sending off letters to missionaries.

[17 : 20] The teacher told him that, oh, you know, missionaries are very busy people. They might not have time to answer your letters. But the one that this missionary received read like this.

Let's call him Mr. Smith. Dear Mr. Smith, we are praying for you, but we're not expecting an answer. Does that little girl sadly sum up much of our lives?

Are we praying people and not expecting an answer to our prayers? Well, James is telling us today that prayer does work.

Or to put it more accurately, pray. The sovereign God, now don't ask me to explain the mechanics of prayer, but a sovereign God who has ordained all things responds to the prayers of his believing people.

Let me say that again. A sovereign God who has ordained all things responds to the prayers of his believing people.

[18 : 33] Can I ask you today, is there a principle that we as Christians need to be reminded of and to realize for ourselves? Then secondly, there are pictures we need to visualize.

You see, James gives an Old Testament illustration here of effective praying. He could have used, I suppose, many examples in the Old Testament.

From Moses, Samuel, Daniel, Nehemiah, plenty of good examples there. No, he chooses this man Elijah.

And he tells us two very significant things about Elijah. He tells us, first of all, that this man was a naturally weak man.

Now, if he was a special prophet, perhaps we might have an excuse. or he was some sort of superhero, we might have an excuse. He doesn't say that.

[19 : 36] What the apostle is saying here, he was a man of like passions. In other words, he was perfectly human, just like us.

And I think that is one of the things that James is trying to emphasize here. man. This is not some kind of superhero. The Bible tells us he came from Tishbe.

He was a Tishbite. In other words, he came from the back of beyond. He was a country yokel, or as we call him he was a maw. Out from the back of beyond. Prone to all our failures, prone to all our weaknesses, all our sins, susceptible to all our diseases, he was simply a man.

That's what the apostles say. Now nowhere does that come out more clearly than on Mount Carmel. Remember he went to see Jezebel, that wicked queen, Ahab's wife, and he took fright and ran away.

This great man took fright and ran away. He went from the north of the country right down to the south of the country and then we find him with his head between his knees pleading for mercy.

[20 : 49] wishing himself to be dead. Now you're asking me today perhaps, how can that man encourage me in my prayer? Well listen to what the Puritan Thomas Manson said.

It was this man who seemed to have the key of heaven to open and shut it at pleasure. It was this man who was sometimes at the end of his tether who was such a mighty instrument in the hand of God.

You see Elijah was the means of turning a nation in repentance through prayer. Not a supernatural man but a man, a normal man.

History has shown us that man has developed through history. We saw horsepower, we've seen all sorts of different power, TNT, nuclear power, atomic power, but let me tell you this morning that the greatest power of all is the power of prayer.

God answered. You see, Elijah prayed for his nation. God answered. Verse 17, he prayed earnestly. He was a man subject to like passions as we are.

[22 : 23] He prayed earnestly. That means he prayed in his prayer. Is it not refreshing, my friends, to listen to a young Christian praying for the first time in the prayer meeting?

We had that experience recently in Greyfriars. And how refreshing it was to listen to this young man in prayer. I have a letter we received recently from Germany, from our scripture reader in Rheindalen.

So I have a prayer meeting on a Thursday night in Rheindalen, and also a meeting on a Sunday afternoon in Rheindalen. This soldier invited another soldier, called Aldo, to the prayer meeting on Thursday night.

Aldo was black, came from Malawi, had been bullied, and because of his colour, had been abused by many of the other soldiers. Didn't have any friends.

This Christian lad invited him to come to William's Bible study and prayer meeting. He came along. He was impressed by the love that he saw and the friendship that he saw amongst the Lord's people there.

[23 : 35] He came again on Sunday and was combated. He came the following Thursday evening, and this is what he said, do you think, William, that mind divine prayed?

Remember, shy guy, would be abused by others. Of course not, William said, after all, that's why we're here. It's a prayer meeting. But I can't pray like these other people pray.

That's no problem, William said. You just open your heart out to God. After a number of people prayed in the prayer meeting, he rose to his feet. And he said this, Lord, this is Aldo.

I'm the one who met with you last Thursday night. Forgive me, Lord, but I can't talk to you like the rest of the people do. But I want to tell you the best way that I can.

I love you, Lord. Amen. He sat down. You know what happened? He ignited that prayer meeting. That prayer meeting was on fire for the Lord.

[24 : 46] The rest have been doing a fantastic job going around the Milky Way. But he was a man who prayed earnestly. You see, those of us who have been Christians for 30, 40 years, you know, the jargon's there.

I'm not belittling prayer, and I'm not saying that there should be achieved familiarity in prayer. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that. But here is the innocence of a lad who opened his heart to God. Elijah persisted in prayer. And I think that persistence is very interesting because remember the story of Elijah on Mount Camel. And remember Elijah when he sent out his servant.

He sent out his servant how many times? He sent him out once looking for rain. He prayed for rain, you see. Sent him out twice, no answer.

Three times, four times, six times, no answer. Out again, seventh time. And what did he see? Cloud the size of a man's hand.

[25 : 52] He prayed persistently. have you stopped praying? My friend, go a seventh time like Elijah. Mother, if you're a mother here today, hold on for that wayward boy.

Father, hold on to your unsaved children. Life, hold on to God for your unsaved husband or husband to work for wife. You see, God responds to the prayers of his people.

because I want to tell you today that I'm living proof of that very fact. Because at the age of sixteen, having grew up in a Christian home, I wanted like the prodigal son to take that into his 20th century concept, to blow town and to live it up.

And the only way I could figure out how to do it was by leaving home. So I left home at the age of sixteen, joined the army, and for four years kicked against the bricks.

Many a Friday night, Saturday night, much to my shame, the worst for wear, seeing a wee light on in a bedroom, and a father praying for a wayward son.

[27 : 04] I'm living proof to the faithfulness of a persevering father in prayer. Finally, verse sixteen, it says, confess your faults to one another, pray for one another.

There is a principle here that we need to recognize. There is a picture that we need to visualize. But my friends, importantly, there is a practice we need to utilize.

I want you to notice in verse sixteen, this is the only direction in this directive in this section. The little part of the section is a principle.

The third part is an manifestation of the truth. We have an instruction here to confess our faults to one another, to pray for one another, that you may be healed.

James is speaking of something that is horizontal. Confess your faults one to another. This, of course, is a verse that many Roman Catholics would use for their confession to a priest as a mandatory exercise once a year, at least once a year anyway.

[28 : 20] On the other hand, this verse does not say that Christians are to go around confessing all their faults to every believer. That would result in carnal chaos, my friends.

My friends, today, we are privileged in being able to go straight to God. through our mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will listen and answer our prayers.

You see, when we sin against another believer, what this is saying to us, we must personally ask that Christian to forgive us. This, my friends, is personal confession.

You remember the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, and this is important. If you bring your gift to the altar, and you remember that your brother as are against you, leave your gift before the altar, and go first and be reconciled to your brother.

Brother, then come and offer your gift. My friends, what we see here is Christ's order of worship. Christ's order of worship.

[29 : 30] First be reconciled to your brother, or to your sister, then come and offer your gift. Is this something today that perhaps we need to do? Do you know consciously that you have offended another brother or sister?

And have you proved right? Well, listen, in order for you to be right with God, you need to be right with one another. James is talking also here about something horizontal.

look again, you will see that he is also looking at something that is vertical as well. Verse 16, he prays for one another.

Scholars tell us that the tense of the verb here is present imperative. Make it a practice in praying that you pray for one another.

Don't wait until a crisis comes between you. Pray for one another before a crisis comes. Pray, pray is what the apostle is saying.

[30 : 38] If a man is sick, pray. If you've got anything against a brother, pray for one another. what a contrast to verse 9. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged.

The judge is standing at the door. Wonderful attitude marks you and I this morning. The Amplified Bible puts it like this, that you may be healed and restored to a spiritual tone that you may be healed and restored to a spiritual tone of mind.

Oh, my friends, can you think of the many quarrels and divisions and dissensions in our churches that could have been healed if only we had followed James' teaching of mutual compassion and earnest prayer.

Praying for one another, all my friends, the power of prayer. Now, as I close, let me read out what Thomas Garthry said.

He said that the direct power of prayer, in a sense, omnipotent prayer, it moves the hand that moves the world.

[32 : 06] Do you realize this morning that nothing lies outside the reach of your prayer and my prayer except that which lies outside the will of God.

Nothing lies outside the reach of my praying except that which lies outside the will of God. How can we know the will of God?

Well, we can't know God's secret will. But God has given to us his revealed will. Where do I find it? That's where we find it.

in God's word. Are we students of God's word as we ought to be as Christians? So that we are able to pray in accordance with God's will and not in accordance with our desires.

R.A. Torrey said that prayer is the power that opens wide the inexhaustible storehouse of divine grace and power. There is no limit to what prayer can do.

[33 : 14] That is what God can do. The power of prayer. Jonathan Edwards said that there is no way that Christians in a private capacity can do so much to promote the work of God and advance the kingdom of Christ as by prayer.

Let me say that again. Nothing, there is nothing that we can do to promote the work of God and advance the kingdom of Christ that is better than prayer.

Perhaps we have substituted the prayer meeting by trying to do God's work for him, using man's means to achieve God's end.

Perhaps there is a lesson for our church today. prayer. My friends, there is power in prayer. Do you know something about this power? Do you know from personal experience, the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

Edward Payson, those of you who know much of Lloyd-Jones will have come across this man often. He quotes him often. He summarizes apathy, the indispensability of prayer.

[34 : 41] This is what he says. It is in the closet that the battle is lost or won. Let me close by quoting a hymn.

Thou art coming to a king, large petitions with thee bring. for his grace and power are such.
None can ever ask too much. May that speak to us today. May it speak to me.
May it speak to us all. That we might realize afresh individually and collectively the power of prayer.
If Elijah as an individual could turn a nation, what can the collective prayers of God's people achieve for us in our day?

Lord, we thank you for this opportunity this morning of gathering together in your house. And we pray that you would bless your word to us. Take away from our memories anything that was said amiss and that was not to your glory.

[35 : 58] For our desire above everything else is your glory. And now as we part one from the other, we pray that we might be taken home safely and that we might be prepared for the evening worship.

Grant to us that hunger and thirst that we need to enter into your house to hear your word. We pray now that as we part one from the other, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Lord.