

James

Dr. Charles "Buddy" Parrish
March 8, 2023



James 5: 12-20

Vs 12

- Here James is echoing the words of Jesus from The Sermon on the Mount. Repeatedly in the Law of Moses, Israel is told not to make false vows or to invoke the name of the Lord in a vow you are not going to keep. But in The Sermon (Matthew 5:33-37) Jesus says to make no vow at all. James here quotes Matthew 5:37 almost word for word. The problem in the broader Greco-Roman culture was that vows and oaths had become so common and voiced so easily that they had come to mean little or nothing and people perjured themselves so as to give it no thought at all! For the Christian, every word we speak is spoken with God standing beside us, so we have no need to swear to anything. Our word is enough.

Vss. 13-18

- James then moves into a powerful statement on prayer as his last word. If you are suffering, we need to pray. If you are glad and cheerful, then we need to sing! One of the things we have lost is the concept of singing being a form of prayer. The Jews well understood this. The Book of Psalms is a songbook. The prayers David and others offered in the Psalms are to be sung! Indeed, the vowel point system of the Hebrew alphabet also doubles as something like musical notes. Singing was a part of every worship service in the early church and often the final act of the early martyrs.
- The early church was a church that believed in divine healing through the power of prayer. Few communities have ever been so attentive to their sick as the early church, because they *knew* God could heal the sick. There were still so many eyewitnesses to what Jesus and the Apostles had done. So they prayed for the sick with confidence and clearly amazing things happened. Early church fathers like Justin Martyr and Irenaeus wrote often of "numberless" healings. And Tertullian wrote of how no less than the Roman Emperor Severus was healed by a Christian named Torpacion. Around the end of the Second century there was a book of church administration known as the Canons of Hippolytus. It offers a prayer to be said at the consecration of a bishop: "Grant unto him, O Lord,...the

power to break all the chains of the evil power of the demons, to cure all the sick, and speedily subdue Satan beneath his feet.” Similar writing offer the same sort of instruction and prayers for deacons and teachers. “Heal the sick, raise up the weak, cheer the faint hearted”.

- Further, we are to confess our sins to one another and then pray for one another that we may be healed. Here in James, being so deeply rooted in Jewish tradition and thought, is still the idea that sin is the cause for sickness (John 9:1-2). “There is no death without guilt”, the rabbis taught, “and no suffering without sin”. The only way you could be cured of your illness was to first be forgiven of your sins by God. This is why Jesus’ healing of the paralytic in Mark 2 was so earth shattering. The first thing Jesus said to the man was that his sins were forgiven. Only God can forgive sins! And the Jewish scribes were right there, choking on Jesus’ words, so Jesus asked them which was easier: to forgive sin or ask the man to get up and walk? To the Jews it was one and the same and they were flummoxed when Jesus commanded the man to get up...and he did!
- What James is trying to say is that there is truly no limit to the power of prayer. He uses Elijah as a Biblical example and how the prophet sought to demonstrate the power of God to an apostate people by praying for drought so that no rain fell for 3 ½ years and then he prayed again and the rain fell and the fields again produced its food.

Vss.19-20

- Finally, James, being the good pastor he is, shows his concern for the lost sheep of the flock. Be good shepherds! Go find that lost sheep and bring him home. And you will be forgiven a multitude of sins! When we were looking at John’s letters, people falling away from the faith into Gnosticism was a huge concern. Paul tells Timothy that a fellow brother, “Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica”. Worldliness is always a temptation. But there is no limit to the power of prayer, or the Truth of Christ, or the love of Christ. Those lost sheep **CAN** be found and brought home; the Prodigal **CAN** be turned back to the Father.