

## James 5:13-20

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The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. <sup>17</sup>Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. <sup>18</sup>Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

<sup>19</sup>My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, <sup>20</sup>remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

“PULLING ON THE BELL ROPE OF HEAVEN” JAMES 5:13-20

THERE IS A POEM WRITTEN BY WILLIAM COWPER THAT EXPRESSES THE THEME OF TODAY’S EPISTLE READING:

“PRAYER MAKES THE DARKENED CLOUD WITHDRAW,  
PRAYER CLIMBS THE LADDER JACOB SAW.  
PRAYER GIVES EXERCISE TO FAITH AND LOVE,  
PRAYER BRINGS EVERY BLESSING FROM ABOVE.

RESTRAINING PRAYER, WE CEASE TO FIGHT;  
PRAYER MAKES THE CHRISTIAN ARMOR BRIGHT;  
AND SATAN TREMBLES WHEN HE SEES,  
THE WEAKEST SAINT UPON HIS (HER) KNEES.”

PRAYER, AS WE KNOW, IS NOT A MAGIC FORMULA, NOR IS IT LIKE THE THREE WISHES A GENIE OF LEGEND MAY GRANT.

INSTEAD, PRAYER IS AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT “OUR HELP IS IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, WHO MADE HEAVEN AND EARTH.”

THUS PRAYER IS A BLESSING FROM GOD, AND A MEANS BY WHICH WE DRAW ON OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD.

PRAYER WILL CHANGE US, IF WE LET IT, EVEN WHEN IT DOES NOT CHANGE OUR CIRCUMSTANCES IN THE WAY WE DESIRE.

THE PRAYER OF THE RIGHTEOUS, MEANS THE PRAYER OF ALL CHRISTIANS, WHO RECEIVE RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.

AND PRAYER PLACES US IN MORE INTIMATE CONTACT WITH ALMIGHTY GOD, WHO HEARS OUR PRAYERS, AND WILL RESPOND, ACCORDING TO HIS PLAN AND WILL.

ANOTHER WAY TO LOOK AT PRAYER IS TO USE THE EXAMPLE OF ELIJAH, WHO IS MENTIONED BY JAMES.

GOD TOLD ELIJAH TO PRAY FIRST FOR THE RAIN TO CEASE, AND LATER FOR IT TO COMMENCE.

THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF PRAYER BEING A WORK GOD CALLS US TO DO, SO WE CAN SEE GOD ACCOMPLISH HIS WORK.

HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF THE POWER OF PRAYER AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER IN COMMUNITY:

I WAS LIVING IN NORTHWESTERN P.A. IN JULY OF 2002 WHEN THE LOCAL, AND LATER NATIONAL NEWS, WAS CAPTIVATED BY THE MINING DISASTER AT QUEECREEK MINE, WHICH TRAPPED NINE MINERS BELOW, WITH RISING WATERS.

THERE WERE MANY PRAYERS SAID BY THOSE WATCHING ON TELEVISION.

SOON, AFTER THE NEWS REACHED THAT COMMUNITY FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND NEIGHBORS OF THOSE TRAPPED, GATHERED AT A NEARBY CHURCH FOR PRAYER.

LATER, THE FAMILIES HELD A PRIVATE PRAYER SERVICE IN A FIRE HALL.

MEANWHILE IN THE MINE, THE RISING WATER WAS 55 DEGREES AND THREATENED TO SLOWLY KILL THEM.

AIR WAS RUNNING SHORT UNTIL HOLES WERE DRILLED FROM THE SURFACE. AND THE TRAPPED MINERS DECIDED EARLY ON THEY WOULD LIVE OR DIE TOGETHER.

CONSEQUENTLY, AS THE MINERS STRUGGLED BOTH PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY, THEY ALSO ENCOURAGED AND HELPED EACH OTHER.

FOR OVER 77 HOURS, AS WORK WAS BEING DONE TO RESCUE THEM, THE NINE STOOD TOGETHER. SO WHEN ONE GOT COLD THEY SURROUNDED HIM.

WHEN ONE BEGAN TO WEAKEN THE OTHERS HELD HIM UP, AND THEY REPEATED THESE ACTIONS WITH ONE ANOTHER AS NEEDED.

FINALLY THE MINERS WERE ALL RESCUED, AND THE EVENT WAS CALLED THE MIRACLE OF QUEECREEK.

THE MORNING OF THEIR RESCUE WAS A SUNDAY AND MANY CHRISTIANS JOINED TO PRAISE GOD DURING WORSHIP FOR THEIR SURVIVAL AND RESCUE.

THE ACTION OF THE MINERS IN KEEPING EACH OTHER ALIVE, IN ACTING AS A GROUP TO CARE FOR EACH OTHER, IS A GOOD MODEL FOR THE CHURCH.

JAMES, IN THE CLOSING REMARKS OF HIS LETTER, CALLS FOR CHRISTIANS TO USE THEIR GIFT OF SPEECH TO PRAY TOGETHER.

AND AS CHRISTIANS IT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW ONE OF THE THINGS WE CAN DO IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES IS TO PRAY.

OF COURSE WE MUST ALSO DO OTHER THINGS, AS WE ARE ABLE, BUT PRAYER IS A KEY ELEMENT OF FAITH.

THE APOSTLE JAMES REMINDS THE CHURCH THAT PRAYER IS NOT A LAST RESORT FOR CHRISTIANS, IT IS, OR SHOULD BE, OUR FIRST ACTION.

THUS JAMES COUNSELS HIS READERS TO PRAISE GOD, WHEN LIFE IS GOOD, SINCE SONGS OF PRAISE ARE ALSO PRAYERS.

CHRISTIANS SHOULD ALSO PRAY IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING, AND OTHERS SHOULD PRAY WITH THEM- FOR COMFORT, HEALING, ENDURANCE, AND STRENGTH.

PRAYERS OF CONFESSION ARE ALSO WAYS WE PRAY NOT ONLY ALONE, BUT WITHIN THE COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS.

AN OLD HYMN SAYS: "WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS... WHAT A PRIVILEGE TO CARRY EVERYTHING TO GOD IN PRAYER."

THE LYRICS OF THE ENTIRE HYMN REMIND US THAT PRAYER IS NOT JUST A RESPONSIBILITY, BUT ALSO A PRIVILEGE; MEANING GOD WELCOMES OUR PRAYERS.

AND LIVING LIFE IN A PRAYERFUL AWARENESS OF GOD'S GRACE AND LOVE CHANGES US.

IT ALSO CHANGES THE CHURCH, WHEN CHRISTIANS GATHER IN COMMUNITY TO WORSHIP AND PRAY FOR THEMSELVES, AND FOR OTHERS.

TRULY, A CHURCH WITHOUT PRAYER IS ONE THAT HAS GONE ASTRAY. YET PRAYER CAN BRING NOT JUST INDIVIDUALS, BUT ALSO THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH BACK TO CHRIST.

PRAYER IS THE WAY WE POUR OUR SOUL OUT TO GOD, IT HELPS TO ACTIVATE OUR FAITH.

SINCERE PRAYER IS ONE OF THE GREATEST ACTIONS WE CAN TAKE.

THERE ARE MANY SAYINGS ABOUT PRAYER, WRITTEN THROUGH THE AGES.

ONE SAYS THAT PRAYER IS LIKE “THE DOVE THAT NOAH SENT FROM THE ARK.”

ANOTHER SAYS “PRAYER UNIQUELY BINDS HUMAN AND DIVINE ACTIVITY TOGETHER, IN SUCH A WAY THAT IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE WHERE ONE ENDS AND THE OTHER BEGINS.”

THE DESCRIPTION OF PRAYER THAT INSPIRED TODAY’S SERMON TITLE COMES FROM REV. C.H. SPURGEON, WHO SAID:

“PRAYER PULLS THE ROPE DOWN BELOW AND THE GREAT BELL ABOVE RINGS IN THE EARS OF GOD.

SOME SCARCELY STIR THE BELL FOR THEY PRAY LANGUIDLY. OTHERS GIVE ONLY AN OCCASIONAL PLUCK AT THE ROPE.

BUT THE ONE WHO WINS WITH HEAVEN IS THE PERSON WHO GRASPS THE ROPE BOLDLY AND PULLS CONTINUOUSLY WITH ALL HIS (HER) MIGHT.”

PULLING ON THE BELL ROPE IS AN APT DESCRIPTION OF PRAYER, AND ONE EASILY ILLUSTRATED WITH THE BELL IN THIS BUILDING.

IT IS NOT EASY TO RING, A SIMPLE TUG ON THE ROPE WILL MOVE THE ROPE BUT NOT STIR THE BELL.

IN ORDER TO RING THE BELL ONE MUST PULL ON THE ROPE AS IF ONE REALLY MEANS IT AND WANTS THE BELL TO RING SO THAT IT CAN BE HEARD.

PRAYER TAKES A SIMILAR EFFORT, IT REQUIRES OUR WILLINGNESS TO CONNECT WITH GOD, TO BE HEARD BY GOD.

LET US THEREFORE LOOK MORE CLOSELY AT JAMES’ ADVICE CONCERNING PRAYER WITH, AND FOR, ONE ANOTHER.

PRAISING GOD IS AN IMPORTANT FORM OF PRAYER, IT REMINDS US ABOUT WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US AND OTHERS, AND THUS ENCOURAGES US TO PRAY.

PRAYER BY AND FOR THOSE WHO ARE SUFFERING, OR IN ANY KIND OF TROUBLE, IS ONE OF THE MOST FREQUENT SUBJECTS OF OUR PRAYERS.

IT CAN BRING HELP AND HEALING, STRENGTH, AND COMFORT. SUCH PRAYER CAN ALSO BE BENEFICIAL EVEN WHEN WHAT WE PRAY FOR IS NOT GRANTED.

20 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH OUR NATION ENDURED A TERRORIST ATTACK. PRAYER WAS ONE RESPONSE WHICH OCCURRED THROUGHOUT OUR LAND AND IN MANY OTHERS.

HERE ARE SOME OBSERVATIONS FROM A CLERGYPERSON WHO WAS IN NYC ON THE DAY OF THE ATTACK:

“... WE GATHERED IN THE CHAPEL OF THE INTERCHURCH CENTER WITH HUNDREDS WHO CAME TO PRAY, NOT KNOWING THE FATE OF LOVED ONES.

I ASKED THE PEOPLE TO NAME FOLKS IN THEIR HEARTS-AND NAME THEIR CONCERNS, BEFORE GOD...

A CHAPLAIN ANOINTED THE FOREHEADS OF FIREMEN WITH OIL.

LATER SURVIVORS REMEMBERED SEEING GLISTENING FOREHEADS RUSHING PAST THEM TOWARDS RESCUE...AND DEATH, LIVING OUT THEIR BAPTISMAL VOCATION.”

IT WAS ALSO SHARED HOW A PASTOR'S WIFE, WHO ESCAPED TOWER ONE, TOOK THE HAND OF ANOTHER WOMAN, AND QUOTED ROMANS 8: "NOTHING CAN SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD."

THIS IS ONE EXAMPLE OF THE CHRISTIANS GATHERING IN COMMUNITY TO PRAY, JUST LIKE JAMES CALLED US TO DO.

A DEVOTION ON PRAYER HIGHLIGHTS THE POWER OF PRAYING FOR GOD'S WILL. IT SAID:

"WHEN A CHURCH IS AT PRAYER MUCH CAN HAPPEN, BUT THIS CAN ONLY TAKE PLACE WHEN THE CHURCH'S PRAYER HAS TO DO WITH AN EARNEST SEEKING OF GOD'S WILL...."

EVANGELIST AND AUTHOR TONY CAMPOLO SHARES A STORY ABOUT PRAYER AND HEALING THAT CAME NOT IN THE WAY HE PRAYED, BUT IN A WAY THAT HELPED ANOTHER.

HE WAS ASKED, BY A WOMAN, TO LAY HANDS ON AND PRAY FOR HER HUSBAND WHO WAS DYING OF CANCER.

HE WENT WHERE HE WAS IN THE SANCTUARY AND THEY EARNESTLY PRAYED FOR GOD TO HEAL THE MAN. ABOUT A WEEK LATER THE WOMAN CALLED HIM TO LET HIM KNOW HER HUSBAND HAD DIED.

BUT BEFORE HE COULD RESPOND SHE ADDED: "DON'T FEEL BAD. WHEN HE CAME...TO CHURCH THAT SUNDAY HE WAS FILLED WITH ANGER...AND HE HATED GOD.

HE WAS ANGRY THAT AN ALL-POWERFUL GOD DIDN'T TAKE AWAY HIS SICKNESS AND CURE HIM.

AFTER YOU PRAYED FOR HIM A PEACE CAME OVER HIM AND A JOY CAME TO HIM...THE LAST THREE DAYS... WE SANG, LAUGHED, READ SCRIPTURE, AND PRAYED...HE WASN'T CURED, BUT HE WAS HEALED."

THIS TRUSTING GOD TO ANSWER OUR PRAYERS IN HIS OWN WAY IS AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF PRAYING FOR OURSELVES AND OTHERS.

THIS, IN FACT, IS HOW JESUS PRAYED. AND IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE, WE KNOW WHEN GOD SAID NO TO HIS PRAYER, JESUS COMMITTED HIS FATE INTO HIS FATHER'S HANDS.

WE ARE INVITED AND ENCOURAGED TO DO THE SAME WITH OUR PRAYERS.

NEXT, JAMES ALSO CALLED CHRISTIANS TO CONFESS OUR SINS AND PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER.

WE FULFILL THIS IN WORSHIP WITH OUR COMMUNITY PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE OF PARDON.

MANY OF THESE PRAYERS MENTION TRANSGRESSIONS WE NEED TO REPENT OF AND SO MINISTER TO US PERSONALLY.

OF COURSE THERE ARE TIMES SOME OF THE THINGS WE CONFESS IN THESE PRAYERS ARE NOT SINS WE HAVE RECENTLY, COMMITTED.

SOME MAY WONDER WHY THEY SHOULD READ ALOUD A PARTICULAR CONFESSION OF SIN THAT DOES NOT APPLY TO THEM, AT LEAST AT THAT MOMENT.

THERE IS GOOD REASON FOR US TO DO SO, BECAUSE BY PRAYING TOGETHER, WE OFFER ANY WHO MIGHT NEED TO CONFESS A PARTICULAR SIN TO DO SO WITHOUT CALLING OUR ATTENTION TO THEM.

AND GOD KNOWS AND HEARS THE CONFESSIONS OF THE HEART WE DO NOT, SO COMMUNAL CONFESSION OF SIN GIVES US AND OTHERS THE CHANCE TO CONFESS TO GOD.

FINALLY, JAMES CALLS FOR CHRISTIANS TO PRAY FOR THOSE STRUGGLING TO HOLD ONTO FAITH, AND THOSE WHO DO NOT YET BELIEVE IN CHRIST.

IN ALL THESE PRAYERS WE CONNECT, NOT ONLY OURSELVES, BUT OTHERS WITH GOD, AND THUS WE PLACE ONE ANOTHER INTO HIS HANDS.

SO LET US NOT NEGLECT TO KEEP PULLING WITH ALL OF OUR MIGHT ON THE BELL ROPE OF HEAVEN. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: JAMES 5:13-20 -PULLING ON THE BELL  
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