

TITLE: GOING FORWARD...THE POWER OF PRAYER

TEXT: JAMES 5:13-20

THESIS: The purpose of this sermon is to use James' words to explain the purpose & importance of "going forward" during worship.

INTRO: A member of the church and I were discussing a Bible passage. As she was making her point stronger, I took a step closer to her and stood and smiled at her. When she asked what I was doing I said, "I'm going forward!"
As members of the church, you know what I'm talking about. But we may take it for granted that *everyone* understands what it means to go forward at the end of a sermon during the "invitation." What *does* it really mean? For a non-Christian, it's an invitation to obey the gospel. But what is it really about for a Christian? James answers this for us in Jam 5:13-20.

I. PHYSICAL SICKNESS & THE POWER OF PRAYER(v. 13-15a):

A. General admonitions (v. 13)

1. *Is any afflicted* (suffering hardship/trouble of any kind)? *Let him pray* (imperative). A general admonition to talk to God about your problems (**1 Pet 5:7** – "cast your care on him, for he cares for you"). However, the answer may be no!
2. *Is any merry* (glad, joyful, cheerful)? *Let him sing psalms* (of praise).
* Whether times are good or bad, God wants to be an active part of your life. The way of the Christian goes against the ways of the world. When *we* face problems, we lean on God instead of our own strength. When times are good, we thank God, the source of everything good (1:17), instead of boasting in our own abilities.

B. Specific illness (v. 14-15a) – *Is any sick* (weak, needy; contrasted with "afflicted" in v. 13) *among you* (the brethren)?

1. *Let the elders pray over him* – the elders have this among their tremendous responsibilities.
2. *Let the elders anoint him with oil* – anointing with oil had medicinal and spiritual purposes:
 - a. Physical - Personal appearance (grooming) – **Mt 6:17** – "when fasting, anoint thy head & wash thy face."
 - b. Physical - It provided soothing against the sun & dust of Israel. (**Psalm 104:15** – oil makes the face to shine)
 - c. Physical - Hospitality to others – **Lk 7:46**
 - d. Physical/Religious - Preparation for burial – **John 12:7** – "Mary anointed Jesus feet "against the day of my burying"
 - e. Religious - In conjunction with miraculous healing – **Mk 6:13**
 - f. Inaugurating a king (**1 Sam 10:1**-Saul made king)- Symbolic action showing God's approval (power was not in the oil)
3. *Let it be done in the name* (authority) *of the Lord* – according to the Lord's will /command...(i.e., w/God's approval).
*So, here the oil appears to be used symbolically, considering also (v. 15) it is the prayer (i.e., God) that heals, not the oil.
4. (v. 15a) Result: *the prayer of faith* (here offered by the elders) *shall save the sick* (i.e., *the Lord shall raise him up*)!
It would seem that this is speaking of miraculous healings that were available then (**Mk 16:18; 1 Cor 12:9**)
Summary: With a physical illness, one calls the elders who pray and anoint him with oil, possibly laying on hands for a miraculous healing (either way, it is **GOD** that does the healing). ** "prayer of faith" - Remember, faith comes from the word of God (Rom 10:17), so what is happening here (then and now) must be according to God's word. Today we do not have miraculous abilities and therefore cannot "lay hands on" the sick.

II. SPIRITUAL SICKNESS & THE POWER OF PRAYER (v. 15b-20):

A. (v. 15b) In addition to the physical illness of this Christian, he also needs to deal with any sins he's committed. How? "If he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven." In the context, this is the 2nd result of the prayer of faith.

Does he merely have the elders pray for him? That is not what this passage teaches. It must harmonize with *all* scripture.

1. 1st, we must remember that it is God that heals *and* forgives sins (**Mt 9:1-8**), whether by miraculous or normal means.
2. Our part: We must repent of our sins (**Luke 13:3**), having godly sorrow for our sins (**2 Cor 7:10**).
3. We must confess our sins to God (**1 John 1:9**). Only to God? Herein lies the point of our lesson... (v. 16f)

B. (v. 16) Confess your faults one to another (each other, "reduplicated"; reciprocate).

1. This is **not** the Catholic Auricular Confession – which is all confessing to one.
 - a. First, in this system, the priest is a mediator between God and man, even though **1 Tim 2:5** says there is only one who fills this role, the man Christ Jesus.
 - b. Second, in this system, does the priest reciprocate, confessing his sins to the other person afterwards?
 - c. Third, *all* Christians are priests (**1 Pet 2:9**). There is no such thing as a "clergy/laity" system in the Lord's church!
2. This is **not every** sin a Christian might commit
 - a. Personal sins against one another are discussed in **Mt 18:15f**. It's clear that these are **not** to be shared w/the church.
 - b. Private sin (nobody else knows about): You repent, confess it to God, and he forgives you. No further need to discuss it.
 - c. *Public sins that have hurt the church, or any personal struggle for which a Christian wants additional prayers.
3. This is care and concern for brethren...praying for one another. We are to pray for each other to be forgiven and healed.
 - a. If a member is sick or struggling w/something, we should be praying for him. "*The prayer of faith shall...*" (v. 15)
 - b. If a member is struggling with sin: (forgiveness is *always* conditioned upon the repentance of the sinner)
 - a. If he has repented and is praying for himself as well, we should pray for his forgiveness & for continued strength.
 - b. However, **1 John 5:16** tells us not to pray for the one sinning a sin unto death (i.e., impenitent).
*We cannot pray for this person's sins to be forgiven, because he hasn't repented. But we can pray for our influence and for opportunities to positively affect this person in his decision making.
*We shouldn't give up easily on a wayward brother or sister (as we'll see in v. 19-20).

4. The effectual fervent (“energeo”-energy; effective, active, powerful) prayer avails much (“is very strong; has much power”). This verse can refer to the miraculous of that time, or the providential, non-miraculous of this age. God has the ability to work within the power of a human being. The power in prayer is *God’s* power, regardless of the age.
- C. (v. 17-18) James proves his point through the example of Elijah (**1 Kings 17:1**).
- D. (v. 19-20) Here is the desired effect of James’ instructions- to convert a brother who is erring from the truth! (**Isa 59:1-2**)
 1. This will save his *soul* from death (spiritual death) & hide a multitude of sins (past, present, possibly even future) God remembers our sins no more!
 2. This is **not** a miracle. Conversion is *never* miraculous. It happens in the attitude & action of the person (repentance).
 3. The instruction to confess your sins to one another is not intended to simply make your sins the knowledge of all, possibly causing embarrassment and driving the sinner further away.
 4. Instead, it is intended to help one another in remaining faithful to God. This is the purpose of “going forward.”
 5. This is also another passage refuting “once saved, always saved” (*if any brother errs from the truth...save a soul from death*)

CONCLUSION: The purpose of this passage is to encourage sharing with one another and praying for each other. If you’re struggling with something, don’t bear the burden alone. “Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ” (**Gal 6:2**). So this morning, if you’re struggling with something physically (maybe an illness, or depression, or financial burdens, etc.), or if you’re battling a sin temptation in your life, you don’t have to fight alone. Keep working at it, keep praying, but remember that you can also have several more prayers going to God on your behalf as well.