**Seoul Grace Community**

**The Book of James: A Community in Prayer**

**James 5:13-18**

**April 3, 2016**

1. **Introduction**
   1. James turns his attention to the practical issue of prayer
      1. Why is prayer important?
      2. Does all prayer get answered?
      3. Why does some prayer get answered and not others?
      4. How should we pray
   2. James fundamentally argues for the power and necessity of prayer
      1. “Prayer is an all-efficient panoply, a treasure undiminished, a mine which is never exhausted, a sky unobscured by the clouds, a heaven unruffled by the storm. It is the root, the fountain, the mother of a thousand blessings. . . . The potency of prayer hath subdued the strength of fire, it hath bridled the rage of lions, hushed anarchy to rest; extinguished wars, appeased the elements, expelled demons, burst the chains of death, expanded the gates of heaven, assuaged diseases, repelled frauds, rescued cities from destruction, stayed the sun in its course, and arrested the progress of the thunderbolt.” -Chrysostom
      2. St. Teresa of Avila: Prayer is the activity which allows us to enter into the “castle” of our soul and get in touch with who we are, who God is, and how we are to serve those around us.
2. **What Prayer is**
   1. Prayer is constant, according to James.
      1. Verses 13-14: James believes that we ought to be in prayer mode in the good times and the bad—the rainy seasons and the dry seasons.
      2. “Singing praises” is another way to say “praying.” James says that when we mourn, we should pray. When we celebrate, we should pray. When we suffer, we should pray.
   2. Prayer is practical, according to James.
      1. Verse 14: the use of anointing oils was simply meaning the use of medicine to go along with the prayer for the sick.
      2. We should pray, yes. But our prayer needs to work alongside with practical, daily things such as medicine, science, logic, therapy, etc.
   3. Prayer is in community, according to James.
      1. Verse 16: Says that we have to confess our sins and pray together.
      2. James knows that our prayer can’t be isolated only to the quiet times next to our bed where we sit alone.
      3. Prayer, for James, is an act of the community.
         1. The best example of this is when he says that we should pray over the sick.
         2. This would have been radically counter-cultural at this time. The sick, by logic’s standards, ought to be left to fend for themselves.
            1. One avoided lepers and people with illnesses because it was thought that the sin that brought the sickness on that person could be transmitted to you somehow.
            2. “The logic of envy is to claim strength at the expense of others. Envy, we have seen, leads to murder. Does someone fall sick? They are weak, leave them by the wayside. Their elimination leaves more resources for me; having to share my attention and resources with them distracts me and weakens me for my own struggle for supremacy and survival” –Luke Timothy Johnson
      4. But James says that in prayer, Christians show the world a radically new, inclusive, sacrificial act where we give our lives, resources, energy towards those who are sick and suffering.
      5. Our prayers are not our own—they ought to be directly linked towards the improvement of the immediate community surrounding us.
3. **What Prayer isn’t**
   1. Prayer is not showing perfect, unwavering faith in the thing you are praying for.
      1. Verse 15: James states that a prayer of faith will raise the sick and forgive sins.
      2. It’s tempting to translate this as “When I pray, I have to have perfect faith, or else God won’t grant me what I want.”
         1. But, Mark 9:24 tells the story of the man who went to Jesus to heal his son. Jesus asks him if he believes and the man says “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”
      3. So, we think that we must have perfect faith and then we will get exactly what we want all the time.
         1. But that’s having faith in prayer—not faith in the one to whom we are praying. The object of our faith becomes the prayer itself and not in seeking the face of God to know his will.
         2. Our prayer becomes frustrating and we feel that somehow either we, or God, are doing something wrong because we’re not getting exactly what we want.
      4. A prayer of faith is just that—faith in what you have trouble believing in because you know that God knows infinitely more about what’s better for you than you do!
4. **What True Prayer is**
   1. How do we get this type of prayer in our life? Prayer that is constant, practical, communal and totally focused on the will of God rather than our own will.
   2. James mentions Elijah as an example of this type of prayer
      1. We tend to think of Elijah as a great spiritual leader—which he was.
      2. But James says that he was a human like us—meaning he had the same fears, anxieties, worries (1 Kings 19 shows Elijah hiding in a cave, fearful for his life and unsure if God would protect him)
      3. James is saying that you and I must admit that we are the same as Elijah! Broken, lost, confused, afraid, and weak.
   3. When we do this we can start to pray the right way because we know the story of someone who was greater than Elijah and yet like us in human nature. Philippians 2:8 says that it was Jesus who came in the form of humans just like us.
   4. Jesus prayed constantly (in the morning, in happiness, in suffering, etc.)
   5. Jesus prayed practically (to feed people, to heal sickness, to help the suffering, etc.)
   6. Jesus prayed in community (he prayed that we would know God the way he did, he prayed for his bumbling and weak followers, he prayed at the Lord’s Supper with his disciples, etc.)
   7. But it was on the Mount of Olives (Luke 22), when Jesus prayed for the cup of God’s wrath to be taken away from him. Jesus asked God for another way to go about saving us and what happened? He was denied his prayer request and instead sent to the cross to die for us. Because it was the only way!
   8. Yet, because Jesus was denied his prayer request, we were granted free admission to the family of God—to pray to our God constantly, practically and communally because Jesus first prayed that way for us.
   9. In order for our prayer lives to be on fire, to be rich, to be a blessing to us and others—we have to see and embrace the one who sat on the cross and prayed for us “forgive them for they know not what they do” and who prays for us even to this day.
   10. Romans 8. The prayer of the most righteous man saves us. If you feel turned down in prayer look to the only truly righteous one who has prayed for us. He intercedes for us! He won't be turned down again.
       1. 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be[i] against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? 33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.[j] 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?