

James – Life after Faith
James 5:13-16
“The Kind of Church We Want to Be”

- 1. A CHURCH WHERE PEOPLE CAN BE HELPED**
 - A. The problems James describes**
 - B. The prayers James prescribes**
- 2. A CHURCH WHERE PEOPLE CAN BE HAPPY**
 - A. The feeling believers should have**
 - B. The freedom believers should have**
- 3. A CHURCH WHERE PEOPLE CAN BE HONEST**
 - A. We must dispel the myth of perfection**
 - B. We must divide the ministry of prayer**

1. When I was a kid in Sunday school they taught me how to interlock my hands, raise my index fingers, and say, “Here’s the church, here’s the steeple, open the doors, see all the people.”

2. The Word of God teaches us that the church is not defined by a building with a steeple, but rather by the people you see when you open the doors.

3. This building in which we meet week after week is not the church. *We* are the church. Those of us who have believed the gospel, and been baptized into this fellowship. We are White Oak Baptist Church.

4. If you were to ask someone what James 5:13-16 is about, if they were familiar with it, they would probably say, “Oh, that is the passage about healing.”

5. I contend that while James does talk in this text about how to pray for the sick and their healing, this passage is less about that particular ministry, and more about the church who is called to perform it.

6. Verse 14, where James asks, “*Is any sick among you?*” falls in the middle of a section where James asks *other* questions about those “among us”, and gives *other* instructions about our ministries to one another.

7. When we look at this passage as a whole, a picture develops of a congregation of believers who care for one another, pray for one another, and help one another in the journey of faith.

8. I believe it is a picture of the kind of church we want to be, by God’s grace. Let me show you what I mean as we seek to unpack what is in these verses.

9. I would say, first of all, the kind of church we want to be is:

I. A CHURCH WHERE PEOPLE CAN BE HELPED

1. O.S. Hawkins, in his book on James says, “The tragedy of our day is that when most secular people hear the word ‘church’ they think of a musty-smelling, irrelevant institution that is totally out of touch with...hurt, [and] with human need.”¹

2. That is indeed a tragedy, because the church is not supposed to be a museum where religious people are displayed. It is should be more like a hospital where hurting people are treated.

3. In this text notice with me a couple of the questions Bro. James posed to his brothers and sisters in the early church. He asks in verse 13, “*Is any among you afflicted?*” Then in verse 14, He asks, “*Is any sick among you?*”

4. These are rhetorical questions. The answer is obviously, yes! In that early church, as in *this* church, there are hurting people who need the help of the believers around them.

6. Look at what James has to say about these hurts and how we can help them. First of all, notice:

A. The problems James describes

1. In verse 13, James asks, “*Is any among you afflicted?*” The word translated afflicted speaks of suffering evil or trouble from the world around you.

2. Jesus said to his disciples in John 16:33, “...*In the world ye shall have tribulation...*” Being a Christian does not insulate us from troubles and trials in this world.

3. Christian people lose their jobs. Christians have car trouble. Christian families go through crises. James reminds us that even good, godly people among us have pressures and problems.

4. Look at his question in verse 14. He asks, “*Is any sick among you?*” The word “sick” there literally means “to be without strength”. It speaks of illness and disease.

5. Yes, in God’s providence, some of His people get diseases and sicknesses, and find themselves “without strength.”

6. The person who tells you that Jesus died to end all your problems is a person who knows neither God nor the gospel.
7. The Christian life is a pilgrimage, not a party, and therefore in every church there are always people with problems and believers with burdens.
8. Notice not only the problems James describes, but as we think about being a church where people can be helped, notice also in this text:

B. The prayers James prescribes

1. With each of the questions James poses in this text, he offers a corresponding instruction.
2. Notice verse 13. James asks, *"Is any among you afflicted?"* The inferred answer is yes, and so James says, *"...let him pray..."*
3. Likewise, for those who are suffering illness and disease, the prescription in verse 14 is, *"...let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him..."*
4. It is important to note that the church's answer for both the *struggling* and the *sick* is prayer. Prayer is the power we use to help hurting people.
5. Acts 12:5 is a verse that describes the chief strategy of the church to help its members. It says, *"Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him."*
6. If you are feeling the pressure from the problems of life, this ought to be a place where you can come and seek the Lord.
7. If you are suffering affliction, we say with James, "Keep praying," and we will pray with you.
8. Likewise, if any among us is without strength due to disease or sickness, they have the privilege, as led by the Spirit, to call the ordained leaders of our church to come to them, anoint them oil, and pray for their healing.
9. I have no confidence in the charlatans and charismatic con-artists on television, who prey on the infirmed and the ignorant.
10. However, I do believe that Jesus Christ still has the power to raise up people from their sick bed. I believe God still heals, and I will still pray for it if someone asks.

11. The point I want to make here is that we as the church, through prayer and faith in God, have everything we need to help hurting people.

12. This ought to be a place of prayer, and we ought to be a people of prayer, so that those among who are suffering can be helped!

13. Notice something else we draw from this passage. The kind of church we want to be is not only *a church where people can be helped*, but we also want to be:

II. A CHURCH WERE PEOPLE CAN BE HAPPY

1. In all the debates and discussions of what James says and means in verse 14, sometimes people overlook what he says in verse 13.

2. Stuck between the afflicted and the sick among us, James says in verse 13, *“Is any merry? let him sing psalms.”*

3. While it is true that there are hurting people in the church, that is not the only thing that is true about us. In fact, even among the hurting there is happiness.

4. The church should not be like a funeral procession on their way to the graveyard. No, instead, we should be more like a victorious army on our march toward home.

5. Let me explain what I mean. Consider what James says in verse 13, and notice with me:

A. The feeling believers should have

1. I hope you know that we do not base our faith on feelings. We base our faith on the truth of God’s Word.

2. With that being said, while we do not base our faith on feelings; that does not mean that our faith is without feeling.

3. James asks in verse 13, *“...is any merry?”* Notice that word “merry”. Some translations render it as “cheerful”.

4. It is translated from a word that means “good spirits”. It speaks of a sense of well being in the soul. It is happiness in the spirit.

5. If anyone on earth should have joy and happiness in their soul it is those

whose souls have been saved by the grace of God.

6. Though the people in the church are not without their problems, they should have a joy, and a feeling of deep down well-being that abides regardless of what is going on around them.

7. I wonder about those people who claim to know Jesus, but never smile or laugh. They constantly look like they have a headache and a lemon stuck in their mouth.

8. You ask them how they are doing, and then you need an anti-depressant by the time they get done telling you.

9. There should be some cheerful people among us! Those who have experienced the grace of God in their lives should have a feeling of joy and happiness in their hearts!

The songwriter said:

*Life now is sweet and my joy is complete,
For I'm saved, saved, saved!*

10. Notice with me not only the feeling that believers should have, but as we talk about being a church where people can be happy, notice also:

B. The freedom believers should have

1. James says in verse 13, *"Is any merry? let him sing psalms."* The word translated "psalms" is not referring to the book of Psalms. It literally describes someone playing an instrument.

2. The *ESV* translates it this way: *"Let him sing praise."* The idea is that if someone feels that joy and happiness in their spirit that comes from being saved, they should have the freedom to express it through praise.

3. This is not the library. You don't have to be quiet for fear of disturbing the other students. If you want to say "Amen," then say, "Amen!"

4. If the choir starts singing about the cross, and the blood of Jesus, and you feel like standing up and shouting, "Glory to God!" then you just go ahead and shout!

5. If the Spirit of God starts stirring in your soul, and reminding you of all the Christ has done for you, and how good God has been to you, don't try to suppress that joy and hide that happiness.

6. If the Spirit of God moves in your heart, let that movement translate to your hands. Lift them up and give God praise and glory!

7. A little boy asked his father about a military memorial plaque hanging on the wall of the church. He said, "What's that for?" The dad answered, "That's for those who died in the service." The little boy thought a minute and then said, "Which one, the morning or the evening service?"

8. We don't want a church full of dead, dry, dull people. We want a church full of shouting and singing, holy and happy saints who testify of the joy God has put in their hearts.

9. The kind of church we want to be is *a church where people can be helped*. We also want to be *a church where people can be happy*.

10. Looking at this text, I would add one more thing. The kind of church we want to be is:

III. A CHURCH WHERE PEOPLE CAN BE HONEST

1. The opening phrase of James 5:16, is probably scary to some who read it. There James gives this instruction: "*Confess your faults one to another...*"

2. We live in a world of make-up and make-believe, where people try to give the impression that they don't really have any faults.

3. We want other people to think we are "normal". We want to give the impression that everything is fine in our lives. Therefore, our tendency is to cover up our faults. Yet here, James is encouraging us to *confess* our faults.

4. Believe it or not, this actually good news for all of us. James is teaching us that the church is the one place where we can be totally honest and transparent – or it least it should be.

5. Think about this with me. If we want a church where people can be genuine, candid, and honest, then there are a couple of things we need to do. First of all:

A. We must dispel the myth of perfection

1. Contrary to how some in the church try to act, none of us are perfect. None of our lives are without numerous and obvious faults.

2. That's ok, though. Think about it. Perfect people don't preach the gospel.

Perfect people have no need of a Savior who bleeds to death on a cross for their sins.

3. If you have trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, then you don't have to keep trying to act as if you are perfect.

4. The fact that you needed to be saved is a confession that you were so messed up that God had to come and rescue you.

5. When we gather in this place, we are not trying to show the world how good we are! We are showing them *how bad we know we are*, and how desperately we need the grace of God!

6. That's why the first part of verse 16 should not scare us. We should not mind to confess our faults to one another! We should feel free to be honest about our failures and shortcomings.

7. If more of the people in churches would stop putting on shows, and start being honest with one another, we would be better able to reach out to the lost world around us that desperately need the same forgiveness that we experience.

8. There are two kinds of people who wear masks. There are those who wear a mask at Halloween to look like someone they are not, and then there are those who wear a mask when they go to rob a bank.

9. Listen, Christian. You don't need a mask at church. There is nothing to hide and nothing that has to be stolen. Take off the masks, and be real with each other. In so doing, we will dispel the myth of perfection.

10. Look again at verse 16. If people are going to confess their faults and be honest, there is something else we are going to have to do.

11. We are not only going to have to dispel the myth of perfection, but James also teaches us that:

B. We must divide the ministry of prayer

1. Why does James urge us to confess our faults to one another? Look again at verse 16. He says, "*Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed...*"

2. We need to be honest with one another, and confess our faults, not so that we will feel better about our own failures, but so that we can pray for one another, that those faults will be healed.

3. So often, prayer in the church is relegated to the pastor's opening and closing prayers. However, the ministry of prayer is something that is to be shared by every member of the church. We are to be praying for one another everyday.

4. Our prayer should be that while none of us are perfect, all of us could be better than we are and more like Christ.

5. When is the last time you prayed for someone in this church that you knew had a fault and a failure?

6. Rather than tearing them down through insults and gossip, should you not lift them up to God, and pray that He would give them grace to overcome their faults?

7. If we were the kind of church that regularly and reverently prayed for one another, would we not also be the kind of church where people felt they could come and be honest?

8. I love the story of the little boy who kept acting up in church, in spite of numerous warnings from his mother. Finally she yanked him up and started toward that door. Hanging over her shoulder, the little boy hollered out, "Ya'll pray for me now!"

9. We want to be the kind of church where even when we are not acting right, we can be honest with one another, and know that we will be prayed for!

1. There is a common thread that runs through these 3 verses. It is prayer. The afflicted are called to pray. The prayer of faith saves the sick. When someone makes a confession, it is met by intercession.

2. James closes verse 16 with an oft-quoted Bible phrase. "...*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*"

3. The truth is; if we want to be a church where people can be helped, and where people can be happy, and where people can be honest, then we must be, above all else, a praying church.

4. Prayer is the force that lifts the struggling and the sick. Prayer opens the heart to praise. Prayer helps a faulty people become more like Christ.

5. All the things we want to be as a church are impossible without prayer. With

www.standandspeak.org

that in mind, why don't we pray today that God will make us this kind of church?

Terry Trivette 2009

www.standandspeak.org

¹ Hawkins, O.S., Getting Down to Brass Tacks, (Loizeaux Brothers, Neptune, NJ, 1993), p. 167

Terry Trivette 2009