

The Prayers of the Righteous are Powerful and Effective / James 5:13-20 / Series Conclusion

For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. And I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have the power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses all knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who can do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, to him be the glory in the church, forever and ever! Amen.

We often lack what we do not consider beneficial to our existence. That is, until we find out through trial and error – mostly error – that the precise thing we lack is precisely what we need. In September of 2000, my family and friends gave me this unsolicited piece of advice: “Derrick,” they said. “You have got to purchase this wonderful invention called the Nokia 3310 Cellular Device. It may look like a miniature Snickers bar, but boy oh boy, can you do some amazing things with it! You can call people long distances without long distances charges. You can even do this wonderful thing called text messaging on it. It’s even got this jolly good time of a game called Snake.” To which I responded: I don’t need this wonderful invention called the Nokia 3310 Cellular Device! I don’t care if it looks like my favorite candy bar! I don’t need to call anyone at a long distance! I don’t need to text anyone! And, the Lord knows, I absolutely do not need any more electronic games!” Three years later I had no choice but to purchase this wonderful old invention called the Nokia 3310 Cellular Device because the only place I could find a phone booth while out and about was in the Smithsonian. I found out through trial and error – mostly error – that the precise thing I lacked because I did not consider it beneficial was precisely what I needed. You’ve had experiences like that too, haven’t you? You go to Home Depot and see a sale: 50% off portable air conditioners. But you pass right by them because you need a lamp shade, not a portable air conditioner. You ask yourself: “why in the world would I need a portable air conditioner when mine works just fine?” Three years later, when you’re a/c goes out during a hurricane, you are reminded that pretending you don’t live in Florida doesn’t make you not live in Florida. So, you march right back to Home Depot only to learn that everyone in that store is looking for the same thing you are. And, unfortunately, those bad boys are not 50% off anymore. Consequently, you find out through trial and error – mostly error – that the precise thing you lacked because you did not consider it beneficial was precisely what you needed.

I want to suggest to you this morning, that unlike the Nokia 3310 and the Portable Air Conditioner, we know well before the storm that prayer is beneficial and necessary for our lives. However, if we are being honest, we must admit that even though we possess the spiritual privilege and honor of taking things to the Lord in prayer, we do not pray like it really changes anything. The truth is, regardless of what we confess to others to be seen as spiritual, the reason we lack quality time before God in prayer is because we do not really believe prayer changes anything. If we did, we would pray more often, pastor included. But church, I’ve got some good news for you today. That is this: James doesn’t end his book with a thunderbolt about faith and works. Nor does he end it with a gale force wind about the need to tame the tongue. He simply concludes with a passage about how the righteous have prayed before and how they should pray now. The prayers of the righteous really do have much to teach us about the power of prayer in the lives of God’s people. Those prayers really do really do “avail” much. Please turn with me to James 5:13-20 and let’s read together.

¹³ Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. ¹⁹ My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, ²⁰ remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

1. Where the Prayers of the Righteous are Powerful and Effective.

- **W.H. Abrams is a man you’ve probably never heard of. But you should remember that name.** (1) He owned a parcel of land out in the middle of West Texas. (2) His grandfather lived on that property and struggled. (3) His father lived on it and struggled also. (4) But in the 1920s, a gentleman came to his property and said “sir, we have reason to believe that underneath the earth of your home lies the biggest oil basin in North America. (5) Sure enough, they dug and found the Permian Oil Basin. (6) Amazing, isn’t it? The Abrams family lived their whole lives in a struggle, not recognizing the infinite resources available underneath their feet.

- **Main Idea of the Point:** The prayers of the righteous were powerful and effective because they believed that prayer changes things in all areas of life.
- **Main Textual Emphasis: (1) There is power in pain (13a)** – The book of James begins with pain and not it ends with it. They not only considered it pure joy in facing trials of many kinds, but they also prayed during them. **(2) There is power in praise (13b)** – Notice now how the form of prayer changes. It's moved from prayer/prostration in pain to singing songs of praise in times of happiness. **(3) There is power in physical ailment (14)** – In the parable of the Good Samaritan, oil was poured on the wounds of the injured man to heal. And that's the first connotation here that fits. But not the only one. Paul prayed for the removal of his thorn and the flesh, but it didn't happen. In fact, Paul's life ended in Rome soon after the prayer. So, James also has in mind here the anointing of Jesus with oil that happened at Bethany by Mary (not his mother) to prepare his body for death. The idea is that healing now or in heaven is in God's hands. **(4) There is power in confession (15)** – Now the oil is removed from the passage and the balm that soothes is a different one: confession. It's the idea of what to do to bring about spiritual healing. Jesus said if you start praying, but remember you have something against your brother/sister, leave the altar, make things right and return. And then God will hear you.

2. Why the Prayers of the Righteous are Powerful and Effective.

- **Zenko Hrynkiw is another name that you not only probably never heard of, but you also probably can't spell.** (1) He is a doctor in Birmingham Alabama who just happened to be the only surgeon in the city capable of performing a lifesaving operation on a certain individual who had taken a turn for the worst. (2) The problem was that this specific night this person needed emergency surgery also happened to be the same night of the worst snowstorm in the history of the state of Alabama. (3) When his car got stuck on the interstate, he proceeded to walk 6 miles in the snow and ice to the hospital. (4) The earnestness of his journey was just as important as the act of surgery itself.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Earnestness, or having a sincere and intense conviction about something, is the fuel that makes the prayers of the righteous powerful and effective.
- **Main Textual Emphasis:** As an illustration of why prayer gains the attention of God, James uses the example of Elijah. **(1) He was a human being** – that's James's way of saying he wasn't perfect; he didn't have all the right words; he was a sinner, just like you and me. **(2) But he prayed in earnestness** – for two things that defy nature – the rains ceasing and then coming again at his word. **(3) Acted as if God would answer his request before he did:** Ahab – there will be no rain except at my word.

3. How the Prayers of the Righteous are Powerful and Effective.

- **Cleaning This Gun** – (1) As my daughter buds into a teenager, my mind has been racing and preparing for what is to come in the next couple of years. (2) And the only thing I can think of is the chorus of a song that says: "So you like my daughter, do you now? We think she's something else. She's her daddy's girl. Her momma's world. She deserves respect. That's what she'll get. So ya'll run along and have some fun. I'll probably be up all night, cleaning this gun."
- **Main Idea of the Point:** The prayers of the righteous were powerful and effective because God answered them because his conditions had been met long before the prayers were uttered.
- **Main Textual Emphasis:** What's great about this text is the emphasis on both the prayers of the righteous and the answers they receive from God: (1) Prayers offered in faith will make the sick person well (15a); The Lord will raise them up (15b); so that you may be healed (16a); prayers are powerful and effective (16b); and it did not rain (17a); and the heavens gave rain (17b); (2) What do these have in common? The types of prayers evoked him to act.
- **Why?** – (1) right way; (2) right heart; (3) earnest and without ceasing; (4) in faith; (5) dependent upon God's timing and God's way.

4. Who Benefits the Most

- **Only One Major Difference Between Us and the Great Saints of the Bible and History:** (1) I want to meet Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Ezekiel, John the Baptist and Doubting Thomas when I get to heaven; (2) I also want to meet William Carey, David Livingstone, Billy Graham, DL Moody, and Billy Sunday. (3) But the thought occurred to me last week, that since we all walk by faith as they did, there is only one major difference. (4) We pray the best when our lives depend upon it. (5) They prayed the best when your life depended upon it.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** It's not enough to pray like our lives depend upon it. We must pray as if other's lives depend upon it.
- **Main Textual Emphasis:** Straight forward and crystal clear: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins. To God be the Glory. Forever. And ever. Amen.