

James 5:12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes," be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment. 13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. 19 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”

The Prayer of the Church

When I first gave the short series from the Book of James here at Church of the King the final message was on the Prayer of the Church. As has been the case with some of the other messages, there is simply too much to cover here in just one week! So today we will consider the text here in James and next week spend some time on the Lord's Prayer: That is where Jesus taught us to pray and we will look to the Heidelberg Catechism for important insights into that prayer.

So far on our journey we have seen:

- James addressing the Saints as the “beloved brethren” encouraging them to apprehend the “joy and crown” of their salvation.
- James teaching how we must be “doers of the Word” & not merely “hearers only” by our acts of mercy.
- James teaching that God's gracious gift of saving faith would be demonstrated in our lives with actual works of faith.
- James teaching that the Holy Spirit must be the pilot controlling the rudder in our lives and here at Church of the King.
- James showing that we must honestly confess our sins before God.

And in our last few lessons, James has been teaching us that we must truly submit to God's authority with our judgments, our plans & our riches.

- In short, we must be willing to go where He leads us as His church, the Body of Christ. And finally as James concludes his short Epistle, he will teach us the importance of approaching the Throne of Grace in prayer!

In the closing text that we read this morning, James mentions prayer or praying seven times in nine verses!

- Thus we should focus where James focuses, with some instruction about prayer.
- And as I just mentioned, next week we will review the Lord's Prayer to better understand the power of its simplicity and the importance of our catechisms as teaching tools in our lives.

As we consider what James is teaching this week and next, a little homework could be to review the prayers of Nehemiah interwoven throughout that entire book.

IF you are one that is OK with marking up your Bible you could highlight or underline them all! The prayer life of Nehemiah, and later what we see in the life of Jesus are examples of what we are told to do with regard to prayer.

The New Testament gives us very specific instructions about prayer and our attitudes when Paul writes to the Church at Philippi:

Philippians 4: 4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

- **This instruction is repeated to the church at Thessalonica”**

I Thes. 5: 16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

The question to ask is whether we believe that the commands in these verses MEAN what they say?

Are we in fact commanded to:

- **Pray without ceasing?**
- **Rejoice always?**
- **Be anxious for nothing?**
- **Give thanks in everything?**

So, with all that in mind, let me begin with the text before us:

James 5:12 “But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes," be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.”

- **James gives us a final warning that we should not “judge lest we be judged.”**
- **Being honest and truthful in all that we do, including prayer!**
- **Avoiding the sin of legalism.**

“13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.”

- **Again, James stresses the importance of keeping God at the center of our Christian life:**

Trouble? We are NOT to despair...

We are to be a people of prayer!

Good times? We must NOT take God’s blessings for granted...

We should rejoice with Psalms!

As John Calvin rightly observed: “God always invites us to Himself but our fallen nature drives us away.” Far too often we want to do things our way and be in control and that negates a proper attitude of praying always.

- **James addresses times of trouble:**

14 “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”

- **Here we see details:** We are to make our requests known because God cares about details in our lives.
- **Here we see power:** Oil brought by Elders which shows the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Church.
- **Here we see honesty:** Confessing our sins as part of covenant renewal worship and praying Scriptures like Psalm 51 before the throne of God!

Again, the \$64,000 question is, “Do we believe that our prayers are effective?”

- James says that “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”
- We don’t have a problem believing that God answer the prayers of the righteous...
- We struggle with believing that we ARE righteous: Perhaps why this is an important LAST lesson!

James immediately gives one of his practical examples to make his point:

17 “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, & the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. 19 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”

- Elijah’s prayers are effective even though he is a fallen creature with a nature JUST like ours...
- We tend to put these Saints “way up there,” forgetting how Elijah was faithless in the wilderness right after God answered this prayer!
- We are righteous IN Christ and as the writer of Hebrews confirms, it gives us access to God’s very throne of Grace:

Hebrews 4:14 “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

We should be careful to not miss what James puts right there in plain sight: He is comparing some results of effectual prayers:

James contrasts Elijah impacting nature with the saving of a sinner:

- **So the tough question that should be asked is, which is the bigger miracle?**

Rain stopping and starting on demand because of Elijah’s prayer?

- Or the fact that we sit here this morning as members of Christ Church in response to some faithful Saint’s prayers?
- Who among us cannot think of some faithful Saint that prayed for our conversion?
- And of course the covenant children among us should be thankful for the faithful parents who brought us to Christ at baptism and prayed for us all the days of our lives!
- Pondering the importance of such prayers should remind us that God’s Kingdom advances one step at a time, or as we should see, one prayer at a time!

And if you doubt which answer is more important, we can think about the account of the man brought on his bed to Jesus? James proclaims that his sins are forgiven and the religious leaders are outraged! So, Jesus turns to them asking this very question:

Mark 2: “8 But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, “Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise, take up your bed and walk’? 10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the paralytic, 11 “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your ouse.” 12 Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!”

So again, which is the bigger request to bring before the throne of Grace?

- That God would start or stop the rain or that God would save the soul of a family member, friend or stranger with whom we might have a divine appointment?

James is telling us to take what Jesus said to those religious leaders seriously:

- Our hearts and minds should plead for the lost believing that God answers our prayers!
- As righteous Saints, we must learn what Jesus taught us about how we should pray and look to the various examples that we have given to us in the Scriptures!

Next week we will study how Jesus taught His own disciples to pray, but we also know that Jesus gave instructions on what NOT to do... First and foremost we should not show off...

Matthew 6:5-8 "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full."

We should NOT pray ‘hail marys’ or say the prayer of Jebeez over & over:

"And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words."

- I trust what we have studied helps us to see that James does NOT leave things hanging with the last two verses of his Epistle:

“19 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”

- We are to remember all James has taught us AND why we are here and not in heaven with Jesus.
- We are part of God’s eternal plan to “save His people from their sins” and this includes seeing the fullness of the Gentles come into the Kingdom.

James has given you what is needed to be faithful in our lives & families so we can joyfully serve our risen and reigning Savior, taking & proclaiming the Good News to ALL the nations!

Communion Meditation: Luke 24

²⁸ Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He ^hindicated that He would have gone farther. ²⁹ But they constrained Him, saying, “Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.” And He went in to stay with them. ³⁰ Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. ³² And they said to one another, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?””