“Comforting and Restoring Those Who Suffer”

James 5:13-18

Good morning! Please open your Bibles to the 5th chapter of the Epistle of James. In our discussion today we will be looking at the topic of suffering and how Christians need to support each other. How many of you have ever been in a situation that you felt there was no escape or when you felt overwhelmed by what was happening around you? In the world today there are many followers of Christ who are suffering under oppressive governments where they do not have the freedom to worship Christ openly. We in this country do not have that challenge, but still, it can be very challenging to be a Christian in a society that is slowly drifting more secular every day. It can be frustrating to see the nation you love drifting this way. However, even though it seems like the world is falling apart, our God is always present and in our passage today we will learn how He will comfort and sustain us during these challenging times. Let’s read James 5:13-18 together:

**13 Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15 and the prayer of faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. A prayer of a righteous person, when it is brought about, can accomplish 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 earth for three years and six months. 18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.**

**13 Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.**

* James is writing this letter to Jews who were believers in Christ and had been dispersed throughout the Roman Empire because of persecution.
* James has been discussing trials and suffering since the beginning of the epistle. He commanded his readers to stay patient during trials (1:2) and then in chapter 5 he spoke to the followers of Christ who were being persecuted by the rich (5:1-6). So, one of the main ideas of the epistle is to encourage believers who are suffering.
* As we look at the context of this verse we first need to become familiar with what kind of suffering he is speaking of. The suffering he is speaking of is spiritual in nature because the entire book has been discussing suffering that people are facing because of their faith in Christ.
* So, the question that is being asked is if there anyone suffering because of persecution? We know that the answer to that question is Yes. What is the solution for those who suffer because of Christ? James gives the solution which is to pray. He instructs his readers to do this because it is only God that can bring comfort to the suffering heart. Other Scriptures that confirm this: (2 Cor. 1:3-4, 1 Pet. 5:7, Jonah 2:7).
* ***On the opposite side of the spectrum James now addresses those who are cheerful. In a similar fashion he instructs his readers to share that feeling with God. Praising the Lord in song is a wonderful way for us to share our joy with Him. This brings up a very important question, why do all churches sing in their worship services? Followers of Christ sing for many reason. I typed this question into my computer, and it came back with the following list which I have found to be very informative:***
* ***Expressing thanks: Singing to Jesus can be a way to express gratitude that others can hear.***
* ***Focusing on Jesus: Singing can help worshipers focus on Jesus, which can lead others to look to him as well.***
* ***Communicating God's work: Singing can be a way to communicate the amazing things God does.***
* ***Strengthening spirituality: Singing can strengthen believers spiritually.***
* ***Memorizing promises: Singing can help believers memorize God's promises.***
* ***Loving God: Singing can help believers love God with their hearts, souls, and strength.***
* ***Responding to God: Singing can be a natural response to God's power, faithfulness, goodness, and holiness.***
* ***Teaching the gospel: Singing can educate believers and teach them about the gospel of Jesus Christ because hymns and other Christian songs often contain rich theological text.***
* ***Connecting emotionally: Singing can connect believers emotionally with God and the church.***
* “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and pleading with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6).
* “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving;” (Colossians 4:2).
* No matter whether we are suffering or are cheerful we need to connect with the Lord and share with Him what is in our hearts. Praying and singing are marvelous ways to express to the Lord the desires of our heart.

**14 Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;**

* In this verse we have discussed the issue of illness. At first glance it might be a quick conclusion to say that James is referring to physical illness. However, when we take into context the entirety of the epistle I believe it is best concluded that James is not referring to physical, but rather spiritual sickness or weakness.
* Let me defend this conclusion by sharing a few examples from both this epistle as well as other passages in Scripture. But before I do, can all of you who have your Bibles with you look at your translation and let me know if you have any other work for “sick in verse 14? Most likely you do not, because when I looked this up I found that all the major translations use the word ”sick.” In Greek the word for *sick* is astheneō, and means “to be weak, feeble, to be without strength, powerless, needy or poor.” As we think about this definition we can reasonably conclude that being sick can mean to be either physically or spiritually weak and in need to restoration. Therefore, my view is that this verse is speaking of spiritual, not physical illness.
* If someone is facing a situation where they have been spiritually drained, James instructs for the elders of the church to pray over that person and anoint them with oil. The first command is very powerful because we are instructed to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ when they are struggling. Prayer, when done with seeking the will of the Lord, can accomplish much as James will say a few verses later in this chapter. When someone comes before the elders of the church asking for prayer they are doing so because they are experiencing spiritual weakness. They feel depressed and have a defeated mentality because of the repeated attacks they have been experiencing. This can happen because of physical challenges, but when God’s people come together and pray for His guidance this can bring restoration.
* Why does James instruct that the elders of the church must pray and then anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord? There are several instances where oil was used to heal physical infirmities such. In Mark 6:13 it is reported that the disciples when Jesus sent them out healed many sick people and anointed them with oil. Therefore, this could mean that James wants the elders to use oil to help heal those who had been physically abused for their faith in Christ. But we cannot forget as we have previously discussed, James is mostly discussing spiritual sickness, so this anointing of oil shows that when a follower of Christ is sick and distressed due to persecution, they can go to the elders of the church who will restore them with prayer and anointing with oil. David himself, in the 23rd Psalm, says that God has restored him after facing his enemies by anointing his head with oil. Therefore, this anointing with oil with faithful prayer will help followers of Christ be restored both spiritually and physically when they are sick after facing persecution for their faith.

**15 and the prayer of faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.**

* The prayer of faith is a prayer that comes from followers of Christ who truly believe that God can and will answer His people. If the elders of the church pray in faith James tells his readers that the person being prayed for will be restored.
* The Lord raising him up means that the person will be restored by the Lord due to the prayers of His people. This means that we the church need to continually lift others up who are being persecuted for the gospel. When we pray for all Christians in the world this is what we are doing. Being raised up refers to becoming spiritually whole again after facing such persecution. It is the church who supports the spreading of the gospel, so we need to pray for each other.
* James then says that the sins of the person being prayed for will be forgiven. This proves the fact that when we have committed sins we can approach the throne of grace and ask God to forgive our sins through the blood of Jesus Christ. This is practiced in Scripture. One such example of David in Psalm 32.5 where he writes “I acknowledged my sin to You, And I did not hide my guilt; I said, “I will confess my wrongdoings to the Lord”; And You forgave the guilt of my sin.” God forgives sins when His children come before Him, repent, confess and ask Him to forgive them. This shows the graciousness of God.

**16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. A prayer of a righteous person, when it is brought about, can accomplish much.**

* Just as we are commanded to approach God for the forgiveness of sins, we are also commanded to confess our sins to each other so that we may be healed from our sickness. This again can be either physical or spiritual. We as the church need to pray for each other as well as confess our sins to each other so that we can lift each other up.
* We need to include each other in our lives and share the burdens we are carrying. The church gives us the opportunity to be with other believers who can help us to carry the burdens we have. This healing (restoration) is the result of Christians coming together and lifting each other up. In Acts 28:27 we read “For the hearts of this people have become insensitive, And with their ears they hardly hear, And they have closed their eyes; Otherwise they might see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I would heal them.” God can heal when His people listen to His word, open their eyes, understand with their hearts and return to Him.
* Then James tells his readers that when a faithful person prays much can be accomplished in the name of God. He is next going to give his readers and example of how a strong prayer accomplished much. He brings up what Elijah did.

**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 earth for three years and six months.**

* When Elijah prayed for the rain to stop he was doing this because the people had neglected God and had forsaken Him to worship the god Baal. Through his prayers he was able to restore the nation of Israel to the true worship of God. He accomplished this through his faithful prayer which was aimed at restoring Israel to the true worship of God.

**18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.**

* Finally, Elijah’s prayer ended the drought and restored the rain. Once again, this prayer was answered by God because it was done to restore His people.
* This restoration that Israel was facing was due to spiritual sickness, so it was only the work of God and the prayer of His faithful people that brought the restoration Israel needed. This shows us that when God’s people come together and lift each other up He will lift that person up and provide the restoration they need.

**What Have We learned Today?**

1. Spiritual sickness and weakness are situations that every follower of Christ will experience from time to time. Facing persecution or challenges in the faith is something that we should expect. James has commanded us to look at these challenges with joy. When we face those trials with joy God can use those to build up our endurance so that when we face them again we will be able to face them with strength.

2. As brothers and sisters in Christ we need to continually lift each other up as well as other Christians when they are facing trials or need encouragement. Prayer needs to be a daily part of our lives. Communication with God is a privilege. Remember that God already knows our needs before we ask Him (Matthew 6:8), so lift your concerns to the Lord. He will listen and act according to His will.

3. God uses His faithful people to bring about major change in the world. When His faithful people pray, seek His face, study His word and support each other, the gospel message will be proclaimed and He will be honored. In the way we handle trials and persecution we can either bring God glory or we can dishonor Him. May we be people who bring Him the honor He deserves and may we always support each other. The world will see our faith and will see that we are different. This will lead others to desiring to know the Lord and can have an eternal impact on their lives.