

The year was prob. 688 B.C., & the Assyrian army had surrounded Jerusalem, attacking it.

Hezekiah, king of Judah, walked briskly into the Temple courtyard at Jerusalem, opened up a letter and spread it out, as if to say=>

“Look, Lord, at what the king of Assyria has dared to write about You to me.”

What the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, had written was this=>

“Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, ‘Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.’ / Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands, destroying them completely. So will you be spared? / Did the gods of those nations which my fathers have destroyed deliver them?”
(Isa 37:10-12).

I.e., “Your God is no different/better, than their gods.”

King Hezekiah prayed to God, saying=>

“O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, who art enthroned above the cherubim, Thou art the God, Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. Thou hast made heaven and earth. / Incline Thine ear, O LORD, & hear; open Thine eyes, O LORD, and see; and listen to all the words of Sennacherib, who sent them to reproach the living God”
(Isa 37:15-17).

Then Hezekiah added=> *“And now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that Thou alone, LORD, art God”* (Isa 37:20).

Did God answer Hezekiah's prayer? Listen to Isa 37:36=>

"Then the angel of the LORD went out, and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, all of these were dead."

You're bound to have a bad day, when you wake up dead.
**Throughout the Bible we find examples of God's people
praying to Him, & receiving answers to their prayers.**

- * In Josh 10:12, Joshua prayed that God would cause the sun to stand still, so he could defeat the Amorites in battle;
God did it, and Joshua won a great victory.
- * In I Kn 17:21, Elijah prayed for the widow of Zarephath's dead son, & vs 22 says=> *"The LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child returned to him and he revived."*
- * In II Kn 4:35, Elisha prayed for the dead son of a Shunnamite woman, & he came back to life, sneezed & opened his eyes.
- * In the NT, the church at Jerusalem prayed for Peter after he had been arrested/imprisoned (Acts 12:5-17).
An angel miraculously unlocked prison doors, woke Peter up, and walked him out of the prison, into freedom.
He went to a house where the church was praying for him, & they were so surprised that God had actually answered their prayers, they wouldn't open the door, at first, until Peter proved it was himself standing outside.

Our own reaction may be like theirs=> God answers the prayers of spiritual giants like Hezekiah/Joshua, Elijah/Elisha, even the early church—but not mine.

Today's text puts the lie to that kind of negative thinking, saying that Elijah's nature was like ours, but God answered his prayer.

In fact, our text will tell us that the effective prayer of a righteous man (any righteous person) can accomplish much.

Jesus stated it in very unequivocal terms=> *“All things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you”* (Mk 11:24).

This is an amazing promise from God to us!

Our text this morning is James 5:16-18, the last part of the passage we began last time—Jms 5:13-18.

In today's study we will review the first part of this passage, examine today's text, & then apply the text to ourselves=>

*** The Review**

I believe this is important, so we will really understand what James is saying about prayer.

James began by telling any of his readers who were suffering that they should talk to the Lord about it, in prayer.

Then he added that, if any of them were feeling cheerful, he/she should pray about that too—praising the Lord.

Whatever our emotional state, it can/should result in our pouring our hearts out to God in prayer.

**Secondly, James taught us to pray whenever we are weak—
either physically weak/sick, or spiritually weak, or both.**

But in this situation James added a special provision, telling us to call for the elders to pray over us, anointing us with oil.

We saw, that in Scripture, olive oil is associated with gladness/joy, and that it was also used to sooth the pain of bodily injuries, as the Good Samaritan used oil to sooth the wounds of the injured man, lying on the side of the road, after having been attacked by robbers.

Being anointed w/ oil became a daily routine for the Jews, which gave them a sense of health/wellbeing.

When elders anoint a person for whom they are praying, they are to do it as an act of lovingkindness, *“in the name of the Lord.”*

I.e., on behalf of Jesus, because that’s what He wants them to do for this weak/sick Xn, reminding him of the Lord’s favor—the ultimate cause of his wellbeing.

Because of his relationship w/ Jesus X, he can say w/ David, regardless of his circumstances=>

*“Thou hast **anointed** my head with **oil**; My cup overflows” (Psa 23:5).*

This practice of anointing can get confusing because it has two distinct purposes in the Bible, and there are 2 different Gk words in the NT which are both translated “*anoint.*”

The 1st purpose, as we have seen, is to give a sense of wellbeing, esp. in view of the Lord’s care/provision/concern for our lives.

This is the purpose for which elders are to anoint the sick, as they pray for them.

The 2nd purpose was seen only in the OT, where certain men were anointed w/ oil and w/ the H.S., in preparation & in consecration for some special service to the Lord.

E.g. Saul/David were both anointed w/ oil by the judge and prophet Samuel, as kings of Israel, to indicate God’s choice of Israel’s ruler.

The H.S. empowered them to serve, but He didn’t permanently indwell them, as He does Xns today.

Later, the Spirit departed from Saul because of his sin, and when David sinned, he prayed=> “*Do not take Thy Holy Spirit from me*” (Psa 51:11).

In the NT, Jesus was anointed w/ the H.S., & so are believers.

In fact, Jesus X is the ultimate “*Anointed One.*”

The title *Christ* itself specifically means “Anointed One.”

Ironically, there is no record in the Gospels of Jesus ever having been anointed with olive oil.

In Lk 4:18, Jesus said=> “*THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR.*”

God anointed Jesus spiritually, pouring out the H.S. upon Him.

NT believers are also anointed by the indwelling of the H.S.

Thus 1 Jn 2=> “*You have an **anointing**[the H.S. (vs 27)], from the Holy One and you all know*” (2:20).

But for a Xn to be anointed w/ oil, as a symbol of the H.S.’s presence/power, would seem superfluous, given the fact that we already have the Spirit Himself dwelling w/i us.

Rom 8:9=> “*If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him*” (the HS never leaves us).

Some might say, “The oil just *reminds* a Xn of the H.S.’s presence.”

A: God always rejected such “reminders” in the OT because they invariably led to idolatry.

The Reformers rejected the Catholic Church’s icons, images, and relics for the same reason.

Man is idolatrous by nature.

Left to himself, he’d turn olive oil into an object of veneration and worship.

There is also confusion over anointing w/ oil, due to the fact that 2 different words in the NT are used to translate *anoint*=> the word *chrío* (& its cognate *chrisma*); and the word *aleipho*.

* *Chrio* is used 5 times in NT, referring in every case to the anointing of X/Xns w/ the H.S.—never w/ olive oil.

If you want to check that out, here are all the verses in the NT where some form of *chrio* occurs=>
Lk 4:8 / Acts 4:27 / Acts 10:38 / II Cor 1:21 /
Heb 1:9.

* *Aleipho*, the other word for anointing, is a more general word, which never refers to anointing w/ the Spirit, but always w/ a tangible substance (oil/perfume/spices/ointment).

Again, if you want to check that out, here are all the NT verses in which that word occurs=>
Mt 6:17 / Mk 6:13 / Mk 16:1 / Lk 7:38, 46 /
Jn 11:2 / Jn 12:3 / Jms 5:14.

When Jms 5:14 says of the elders, “*Let them pray over him, anointing him with oil,*” he uses *aleipho* (the more general/mundane/tangible word)—not “*chrio*.”

I.e., he chooses the word that means to smear a fluid substance on one’s body.

Not the word that refers to an anointing w/ the H.S.

So it’s unlikely at best, that elders’ are to anoint w/ oil as a symbol of H.S., but rather as a loving act, by which to identify w/ the weak.

James then went on to make a connection between the restoration of the weak person, & the confession and forgiveness of particular sins that he has committed.

As we saw last time, the wording implies that it's possible and even probable that the afflicted person's weakness represents God's chastening him for some particular sin; But it's not absolutely guaranteed that that's the case. Nevertheless, if it is, James says, his sins will be forgiven (implying he has confessed them to the Lord).

Having demonstrated the importance of prayer, James will now declare its power in today's text, then provide us w/ an historical example of that power, the prophet Elijah.

*** The Text**

James begins by declaring that prayer is a powerful force.

[James 5:16b]=> “*The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.*”

“Prayer” here doesn't mean prayer in general, but a specific kind of prayer—the petition/request for a blessing from God.

It's not essentially a prayer of adoration, confession, or thanksgiving, although elements of all 3 of those types of prayer may be included in it.

It's a prayer of request/supplication for blessing from God.

James has in mind a prayer w/ a real sense of urgency behind it.

It's pleading, and even begging the Lord for something, as implied by the word for prayer that James chooses. So an amplified version of this verse might be: "The powerful prayer that pleads w/ God, coming from a righteous person's heart, does a mighty work w/i that person himself, and through him, to those for whom he prays."

Notice that James doesn't say every man's (or even every Xn's) prayer is powerful.

Rather that the prayers of a "*righteous man*" are powerful. A "*righteous man*" is certainly someone to whom the righteousness of God has been imputed, because he has believed in Jesus X as his Lord/Savior (i.e., he's positionally righteous before God).

But positional righteousness like that is not all that James means here.

His whole epistle has been about the way we Xns live, in terms of practical righteousness.

The "*righteous man*" James is talking about, is a believer who is righteous in both word/deed—one who is neither worldly, nor walking in the flesh.

These are the same people David referred to, in Psa 34=>

*"The eyes of the LORD are toward the **righteous**, and His ears are open to their cry"* (Psa 34:15).

The "righteous man" James has in mind is not among the=>

* believers in Jms 4:2 who are seen fighting/quarreling.

- * Neither is he one of those in Jms 4:3 who ask but don't receive, because they ask w/ wrong motives, seeking their own pleasures.
- * He's not a friend of the world, like those in Jms 4:4, and therefore an enemy of god.
- * He's not a believer who knows the right thing to do, but whose life shows a pattern of not doing it (Jms 4:17).
- * Instead, he is among those in Jms 4:8, who have cleansed their hands, purified their hearts, rid themselves of their doubled-mindedness, and drawn close to God. And as a result, God has drawn close to him/her, and is ready to answer this righteous person's prayer.

God usually ignores the prayers of unrighteous people.

Psa 66=> *"If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear"* (66:18).

Prov 28=> *"He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, Even his prayer is an abomination"* (28:9).

James assures us that the prayers of a Xn who is righteous both positionally/practically, can *"accomplish much."*

When backed w/ strong faith, they produce an effect.

X said that if we even have faith as small as a tiny mustard seed, we shall say to *"this mountain, 'Move from here..., ' and it shall move"* (Mt 17:20).

The word “*accomplish*” is in a grammatical form that means the righteous man’s prayer does a mighty work w/i the man himself first.

But it also works through him for the people, for whom he prays.

When a righteous believer prays a powerful/effective prayer, it affects others’ lives, & it affects himself, making him more diligent and persistent in prayer.

Now James gives us a biblical example of a righteous man’s effective prayer of petition, that accomplishes so much.

[Verses 17-18]=> “*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. / And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit.*”

James uses the prayer of Elijah as an example for his readers (or any other believers) to follow.

His point is, that Elijah was a fallible human being just like us, but that fact did not stop God from answering his prayer.

Elijah was held in very high esteem among 1st century Jews, such as those to whom James was writing.

To a great degree, this was prob. because Malachi had prophesied that God would send Elijah back to earth as the forerunner of Messiah, before the great/terrible day of the Lord.

Elijah’s name appears in all 4 Gospels—9 times each in Matthew and Mark, 8 times in Luke, and twice in John.

1st century Jews had even come to venerate Elijah as superhuman.

But if Elijah were superhuman, his prayers would also be

superhuman, & I certainly cannot expect to pray like that.

So I'm left wondering whether I can pray prayers that God
would even listen to at all—let alone answer.

To deflate that kind of faulty thinking, James assures us that

Elijah was a man just like us, w/ a nature like our own.

And Scripture bears that out.

Elijah had accomplished some wonderful feats, such as

standing single-handedly against the prophets of

Baal, praying to God for fire out of heaven, and

seeing it come down w/ such intensity that it

consumed the water/sacrifice/wood/stones/dust;

It was a dramatic display of God's power, triggered by

Elijah's prayers.

But Elijah also had a weaker side.

In the very next chapter of I Kings, he ran from Queen

Jezebel in fear, then sat down under a juniper tree in

deep depression, & asked God to just let him die

(I Kn 19:1-4).

James is saying, Elijah erred greatly at times, just like you, but

God answered his prayers, & He will answer yours as well.

James says Elijah “*prayed earnestly*” that it might not rain.

He poured himself into his prayers.

He didn't make casual suggestions to God about how He might conduct the affairs of His universe.

He longed for God to take drastic action to correct the sins in Israel caused by Ahab/Jezebel.

So he intensely pled w/ God in prayer about it, and God answered him.

The result was a 3½ year famine in Ahab's kingdom.

Then Elijah prayed again, and I Kn 18:1 says the word of God came to the prophet, saying=> *“Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the face of the earth.”*

The sky gave forth its rain w/ thunderous abundance, the parched/hardened ground became moist, and the earth finally produced its fruit once again.

21st century man does a pretty good job of predicting the weather, but he still can't control it.

Elijah, by contrast, had such close communion w/ God, that when he prayed earnestly, the Spirit revealed God's purposes to him, so that His plea for a drought matched God's will, and the weather patterns suddenly changed.

*** The Application**

How many Xns do not really enjoy prayer, because they don't believe that their prayers actually accomplish much?

They don't really view prayer as Elijah did: Seeking a blessing from God in the firm conviction that He will hear/provide.

In Mk 11, Jesus taught us the proper view of prayer=>

*“Therefore I say to you, **all things** for which you **pray** and ask, **believe** that you have received them, and they shall be granted you” (11:24).*

Based on the words of both James/Jesus, there are certain qualities that are essential to our success in prayer.

*** The 1st of these is definite objectives (daring to make specific requests of God).**

We may sometimes ramble in prayer, because we don't really desire anything specific, but just feel it's our duty to pray.

Or we feel that if we keep it general, there's a better chance something will happen which we can at least interpret as being God's answer to our prayer, as if we're making it easier for God to answer it.

Elijah knew he needed something specific—a famine—to get Ahab to recognize the seriousness of his/Jezebel's sin.

He was convinced that a drought was w/i God's will, so he prayed that it might not rain, & the rain stopped.

We too should make specific requests of God.

If we need money to meet basic needs, and we know we're not motivated by a desire to spend it on our own pleasures (Jms 4:3), then we should ask God for more money.

We should ask for it in plain/simple/direct words, not hedging/equivocating, or assuming a tone of false humility/modesty/moderation.

If we were going to visit our state's governor and make a request, we should expect to be asked to state that request clearly.

And we would be expected to give an answer that's as clear/simple as possible, not wasting her time w/ irrelevant chitchat/trivialities, but getting right to the point, being respectful of her time.

The same is true of the Owner/Operator of this universe.

It's not that He doesn't have much time for us, but that we should give a simple/direct/respectful answer to the question, "What is your request?"

We don't need to schmooze Him or talk Him into granting our request.

E.g. instead of praying for the salvation of sinners in general, we should pray for specific people we know/love, are concerned about, and w/ whom we hope to share the gospel.

- * We can pray very specifically for grace in dealing with whatever problems we are facing, or expect to face that day.
- * We can pray for more faith, or more love for God, or for someone in our lives whom we find difficult to love.
- * We can pray for the specific needs of other people.
- * We can pray that our city/country will repent of its sin.

But whatever objectives we pray for, they should be definite/specific.

Our prayers should be stated in our own words, not some inflated language we imagine to be more suitable for heaven/God.

The Lord wants our words to express our hearts sincerely and wholeheartedly, and if we can relax and do that, we will catch ourselves thinking, “I can’t wait to get alone, so I can again truly pour out my heart to my beloved Father.”

*** The 2nd quality of effectual prayer is earnest desire.**

When we make lukewarm requests of the Lord, not fervently pleading for them, we’re really just pretending to seek.

To seek as Elijah sought, praying “*earnestly for rain,*” we must know how much we really need what we’re asking God for.

We must become preoccupied w/ that thing we desire.

We must understand what the consequences will be if the Lord doesn’t grant our prayer.

So we plead for it the way a man might plead for his very life.

If you have not believed in Jesus X for your soul’s salvation, you have never really prayed, because you’ve never had a mediator through whom to converse w/ God.

But you can pray, as David did, saying=>

“*O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great*”
(Psa 25:11).

The prayer of a sinner who sincerely asks God to forgive his sin, for the sake of Jesus X, who died for sin, is a request God hears/grants.

It's as if we are left alone, wrestling all night w/ God's angel for the desired blessing, the way Jacob wrestled w/ Him, saying=> *"I will not let you go unless you bless me"* (Gen 32:26).

Jacob got his blessing, because of his earnestness, but also because the very thing he desired, was the thing God had wanted him both to-desire/to-have all along.

He was praying according to God's will, and if our hearts are right before God, we too can assume that He has moved on our hearts, *"both to will and to work for His good pleasure"* (Phil 2:13).

*** The 3rd essential quality of effectual prayer is strong faith.**

It is faith in the God to whom we pray, and faith in prayer itself, as the means God has ordained for our will to communicate with His will, and for our hearts to commune w/ His heart.

Do you believe in prayer?—that it is not just a Xn fantasy/fiction, but a power greater even than gravity, or nuclear energy, because it is the direct link between man and omnipotent God?

Do you believe God will hear/answer your prayer because He has promised through His Son=> *"All things for which you **pray** and ask, **believe** that you have received them, and they shall be granted you"*?

Effectual prayer requires that we pray w/ an expectant faith, just as Elijah did, when he prayed for rain.

He crouched down on the ground w/ his face between his knees, praying earnestly/fervently.

Then he told his servant to go look toward the sea for the clouds that hadn't appeared in the sky for 3½ years.

He told him 7 times to go looking for those clouds, and finally on the 7th search, the servant came back saying=> *“Behold, a cloud as small as a man's hand is coming up from the sea.”*

Elijah responded expectantly=> *“Go up, say to Ahab, ‘Prepare your chariot and go down, so that the heavy shower does not stop you’”* (I Kg 18:44).

That is the nature of expectant faith.

- * It is a Xn mother taking her sick child before the Lord in prayer, believing that either the child is about to recover, or that if it doesn't, this will be a greater blessing to both herself/her-child, bringing greater glory to God.
- * It is saying, “I know God has heard me, and in contentment I will look to Him, waiting for His answer.”
- * It is Hezekiah spreading the letter out before God, leaving it there, & saying, “I am resigned to Your will.”
- * It is Daniel on his knees, surrounded by hungry lions, expecting to be delivered/released.

* It is Joshua boldly asking God to stop the sun, or Elijah asking Him to stop, then restart, the rains.

If you/I are living in the truth that **all things** for which we (Xns who are just humans like Elijah) **pray, believing** that we've already received them, they shall be granted to us, by God.

“The Prayerful Christian” (Part 2)

November 18, 2012

Text: James 5:16b-18

1. Throughout the Bible we find examples of God’s people praying to Him and receiving [16 answers] to their prayers.

Isa 37:10-12, 15-17, 20, 36; Josh 10:12; I Kn 17:21-22; II Kn 4:35; Acts 12:5-17; Mt 11:24

In today’s study we will *review* the first part of this passage, examine today’s *text*, and then *apply* the text to ourselves...

*** The Review**

2. James began by telling any of his readers who were suffering that they should talk to the Lord about it in [14 prayer].

Psa 23:5

3. The practice of anointing can get confusing because it has two distinct purposes in the Bible, and there are two different Greek words which are translated [14 anoint].

Lk 4:18; I Jn 2:20; Rom 8:9; Jms 5:14

4. James went on to make a connection between the restoration of the weak person and the confession and forgiveness of particular [10 sins] that he has committed.

*** The Text**

5. James begins by declaring that prayer is a [18 powerful] force.

[James 5:16b]

Psa 34:15; Jms 4:2, 3, 4, 17, 8; Psa 66:18; Prov 28:9

6. James assures us that the prayers of a Christian who is righteous both positionally and practically can [22 accomplish] much.

Mt 17:20

[Verses 17-18]

7. Elijah was a fallible human being just like us, but that fact did not stop God from [20 answering] his prayer.

I Kn 19:1-4

8. James says Elijah “*prayed earnestly*” that it might not rain; he [14 poured] himself into his prayers.

I Kn 18:1

* The Application

Mk 11:24

Based on the words of both James and Jesus, there are certain qualities that are essential to our success in prayer...

*9. The first of these is [18 definite] objectives.

Jms 5:3

*10. The second quality of effectual prayer is [16 earnest] desire.

Gen 32:26; Phil 2:13

*11. The third essential quality of effectual prayer is [14 strong] faith.

Mk 11:24; I Kn 18:44

12. If you and I are living in the truth that **all things** for which we (Christians who are just humans like Elijah) **pray, believing** that we've already received them, they [12 shall] be granted to us by God.