

Place: Lurgan Baptist 9:1:2005

## PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

Reading: James 5:13-20

### 31. A GOD FOR EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE

Wouldn't it be wonderful if life were just a series of mountaintop experiences ? Wouldn't we be happier if there were no valleys in our lives ? Yet God knows how to balance our lives. Do you recall what God said about the Promised Land that He was giving to His people Israel ? He said, “ *But the land whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys.* ” ( Deut 11:11 ) I cannot think of a better description of the Christian life .... a land of hills and valleys. Life is full of variety. There are mountain tops and valleys, there are clouds and sunshine, there is pain and pleasure, and sometimes they all seem thrown together in a hopeless confusion. Yet there is provision for the Christian to cope with every situation in life for the believer has “ *A God for every Circumstance.* ” Now this is the very theme that James develops in ( 5:13-15 ) Here he mentions three types of situation in which we the people of God may find ourselves in. Firstly he talks about,

#### (1) TIMES OF PRESSURE

Did you notice the first of three questions ? “ *Is any one among you afflicted .... ill treated, suffering evil. He should pray.* ” Do you see here,

##### (a) *THE CONDITION:*

The word “ *afflicted,* ” ( kakopatheo ) here means, “ *to suffer the evil blows from the outside world.* ” The same root words are used in ( 5:10 ) when James speaks of the prophets “ *suffering affliction.* ” Now while this may include physical suffering, it goes beyond this to include pressure, pain, or problems of any kind. Do you recall what David said ? “ *Many are the afflictions of the righteous.* ” ( 34:19 ) As Christians in today's world we face Natural Afflictions, ( Rom 8:22 ) Physical Afflictions, Mental Afflictions. Did you know that 50% of the hospital beds in the United Kingdom are occupied by people who are not there because of any physical affliction they have ? My .... are you under increasing pressure to succeed ? To work harder ? To move faster ? To meet an increasing demand ? What about the

Spiritual Afflictions we face ? For are we not opposed by a living, intelligent, powerful, implacable enemy who goes about “ *seeking whom he may devour.* ” ( 1 Pet 5:8 ) Then again the believer faces Special Afflictions, for Paul talks about “ *the afflictions of the gospel.* ” ( 2 Tim 1:8 )

Now what should we do when we find ourselves in such trying circumstances ? Well, look at,

**(b) THE COUNSEL:**

“ *Let him pray,* ” ( 5:13 ) In 1924 two climbers, Mallory and Irvine were part of an expedition that set out to conquer Mount Everest. As far as known, they never reached the summit, and they never returned. After the failure of the expedition, the rest of the party returned home. Addressing a meeting in London, one of them described the ill fated venture, then turned to a large photograph of Mount Everest mounted on the wall behind them. “ *Everest,* ” he cried “ *we tried to conquer you once, but you overpowered us. We tried to conquer you a second time but again you were too much for us.* ”

*But Everest, I want you to know that we are going to conquer you, for you can't grow any bigger, and we can.* ” Do you see a spiritual parallel ? There is a sense in which our afflictions can never grow any bigger. They can certainly never grow any bigger than God allows.

( 1 Cor 10:13 ) But we can grow bigger by the grace of God. We can grow bigger by the power of prayer, for

“ *they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.* ” ( Is 40:31 )

My .... our afflictions can be faced, our mountains can be conquered, we can say to the Everest's that we face in life, “ *You can't grow any bigger but we can.* ” And we can do so as we lay hold in prayer upon the power of the living God. Is this not wonderful encouragement ? You see the Lord is looking, listening, longing to deliver us from all our afflictions, longing to bless us, encourage us, help us, comfort us, guide us. “ *For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers.* ” ( 1 Pet 3:12 ) Tell me, have you told the Lord about your trouble ? Like those bereaved disciples in the Gospels ( Matt 14:12 ) who just “ *went and told Jesus.* ”

**“ *Have we trials and temptations ?* ”  
*Is there trouble anywhere ?*  
*We should never be discouraged*  
*Take it to the Lord in prayer.* ”**

## (2) TIMES OF PLEASURE

For did you notice the second question “ *Is any merry, let him sing psalms ?* ” ( 5:13 ) Will you notice here,

### (a) **THE STATE:**

The word “ *merry,* ” denotes an inner feeling of joy and well being. Now the root of the word used here is used only four times in the whole of the N.T. ( Acts 24:10 ) Three of those times occur in the story of the shipwreck in ( Acts Ch 27 ) where the great storm Euroclydon swept down the Mediterranean as Paul and others were on their way to Rome. When panic began to set in Paul cried, “ *Be of good cheer,* ” ( Acts 27:22 ) Some time later he added, “ *Be of good cheer for I believe God.* ” ( 27:25 ) Then much later in the story, when his confidence seems to have permeated the other passengers we read, “ *then were they all of good cheer.* ” ( Acts 27:36 ) Now here was Paul under pressure. His very life was in danger, yet he had a deep inner joy rooted in an unshakeable faith in God. My .... if he could be cheerful then, can we not be cheerful now, when the sea is calm and the sky is blue ? Is the Christian life not meant to be a cheerful life ? Do you recall what this man of God says ? “ *the kingdom of God is .... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.* ” ( Rom 14:17 ) I heard about a very poor lady who was always speaking cheerfully and confidently of going to heaven when she died. A sceptic was speaking to her one day and said, “ *But suppose you never get there.* ” The lady replied, “ *But I am bound to. God has promised it and I am resting on His Word.* ” The sceptic persisted, “ *but what if you were to reach the very gates of heaven and at the very last moment you were refused entry ?* ”

The lady thought for a moment and then said, “ *well in that case I would walk around the walls of heaven all day shouting what a wonderful time I had on the way.* ” There was a genuine sense of joy about her daily Christian experience. Is that you ? Does the joy of the Lord radiate from your personality ? (a) and then note

### (b) **THE SUGGESTION:**

“ *let him sing psalms,* ” was James a Covenanter ? One thing is sure, you’ll never go wrong when you sing Scripture. Someone once said, “ *it is amazing that man is not always praising God, since everything around him invites praise.* ” Thomas Manton says “ *every new mercy call for a new song,* ” and as God’s mercies “ *are new every morning,* ” ( Lam 3:23 ) every morning should find a song in our hearts. The Lord says, “ *whoso offereth praise glorifieth me.* ” My .... praise glorifies God.

Is it any wonder therefore that David cries out, “ *O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together.*”

( Ps 34:3 ) My .... do you realise that you have “ *A God for every Circumstance ?*”

When the world is on top of you, pray, when you are on top of the world, praise.

1:2:

### (3) TIMES OF PAIN

Did you notice the third question ? “ *Is any sick among you ?*” ( 5:14 ) Now there are few verses in the Bible which are as misunderstood, misapplied and misinterpreted as ( 5:14-15 ) Much of what we see in healing ministries today is directly opposed to James’s teaching. Now in order to try and grasp, what is probably the most controversial passage in this epistle, I want us to look at this statement,

#### (a) ***NEGATIVELY: What is not Taught Here:***

I think we can safely say that this statement does not teach,

##### *1. That All Sickness is the Result of Sin:*

This was an idea widely held in Christ’s day. Once when the disciples and the Lord Jesus passed by a blind man they asked, “ *Master who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind. Jesus answered, neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be manifest in him.*” ( Jn 9:2 ) Do you ever hear Christians saying, “ *sickness shows that you are out of God’s will.*” Or does it not say, “ *And with His stripes we are healed.*” ( Is 53:5 ) Surely, there is healing in the atonement ! Well, Peter did not think so, for he speaks of this as spiritual healing not physical.

“ *Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness, by whose stripes ye were healed.*”

( 1 Pet 2:24 ) Now some sickness is the result of sin, but not all. ( 1 Cor 11:30 )

##### *2. Extreme Unction:*

This is one of the seven sacraments held as valid by the Roman Catholic Church. The priests anoints with oil a person who is dying and prays for the remission of his sins, but that unscriptural practice has no connection with these verses. Extreme Unction is only given where the sufferer is expected to die, whereas James is clearly speaking of someone who is expected to recover.

### 3. A Ministry of Healing confined to Apostolic Times:

Many take the view that this practice was only for the apostolic age and therefore is no longer relevant. The great Matthew Henry wrote, “ *When miracles ceased, this institution ceased also.* ” This view, however does not coincide with James invitation to the sick person to call the elders. My .... by using this title James associates this ministry to the sick, not with the unique and irreplaceable apostles, but with the continuing leadership in the local church. Here is a local church ministry at a members bedside.

### 4. That the Use of Means is Wrong:

Should Christians go to doctors ? Certainly, the Lord Jesus assumed that sick people need a doctor for did He not say “ *they that be whole need not a physician but they that are sick.* ” ( Matt 9:12 ) Do you recall how Hezekiah’s healing took place ? He besought the Lord in prayer for healing and “ *Isaiah .... said, let them take a lump of figs, and lay it for a plaster upon the boil, and he shall recover.* ” ( Is 38:22 ) My .... God was laying down a principle here. When you get sick, do two things pray and go to a doctor. Now is it not strange that those who advocate what they call “ *Divine Healing Without Means,* ” are themselves so inconsistent as to wear glasses, have contacts, and false teeth. (a)

#### **(b) POSITIVELY: What is Taught Here:**

This difficult passage is describing a local church ministry at a member's bedside. After all, who is most in need of healing ? Is it the person who can drive to the tent or church ? Or is it the one who cannot get out of bed ? Most modern so called “ *faith healers,* ” rent large halls and invite people to come to them, but those who are most in need can’t get there. Listen to James’s directive, “ *Is any sick among you ?* ” ( 5:14-14 ) Now there are several things that I want you to notice here, Notice here:

#### 1. THE PROBLEM:

“ *Is any sick among you ?* ” ( 5:14 ) Now the Greek word translated “ *sick,* ” in ( 5:14 ) has a variety of meanings including “ *without strength,* ” “ *not functioning properly.* ” It can mean being weak either emotionally, spiritually, or physically. ( *astheneo* Acts 20:35 Rom 14:1-2 ) Now the word “ *sick,* ” in ( 5:15 ) is not the same Greek word as used in ( 5:14 ) ( *kamno* ) This word described documents that have become threadbare by frequent use. It meant severely sick in the physical

realm. James is not talking about an ordinary occurrence but about a very serious problem.

In the context of James it may also be describing believers who because of pressure and persecution were tempted to give out, to give in or to give up.

## 2. THE PROPOSAL:

" *Let him call .... church.* " ( 5:14 ) The Greek word for " *call,* " means " *to call alongside, to summon.* " Now will you please notice that the elders or pastors don't have any mysterious powers for knowing that any member of the flock is ill, when no-one not even the sick one tells them. Now who is the sick one to call for ? Healers ? No ! Elders ! Yes ! Now the thing that James is stressing here is that the initiative comes from the patient. There is no warrant for people running around with bottles of oil in their pockets anointing anyone and everyone. The onus rests with the sick person. (1) (2)

## (3) THE PROCEDURE:

" *Pray over him anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord .....* " ( 5:14 ) Now the Greek word translated " *anointing,* " can be used in a medicinal or symbolic sense. ( Lk 10:34 Mk 6:13 Is 1:6 alepho ) But look at that phrase, " *the name of the Lord.* " Its used in ( 5:10 ) to refer to prophets who spoke under a divine mandate. The ministries of these men were in God's name, according to God's will and on God's authority. ( Acts 3:16 ) Now James is not saying that when a Christian falls ill he must immediately send for the elders to anoint him with oil. The calling of the elders and their response, are not automatic press button procedures for healing. If they were no Christian would die. No, rather these actions will only be effective when carried out " *in the name of the Lord.* " That is according to God's will and on God's authority ! Do you know what that means ? It means that there must be a conviction of the Holy Spirit that it is right to call the elders and as " *God is not the author of confusion,* " ( 1 Cor 14:33 ) we may expect that when there is, the elders will have a similar witness that the course of action is right, and God will beget in the elders,

## 4. THE PRAYER:

Not just any prayer, but " *the prayer of faith.* " So whose prayer and whose faith is it ? It is the elders prayer and faith. The faith of the sick person actually has little, if

anything to do with the restoration. ( Matt 8:10,13 Mk 2:5 ) Do you know what modern faith healers say ? “ *If you have enough faith you will be healed.* ” Is this not the turning of the knife in every faith healers weaponry ? The sick person has not recovered, and all the jiggery pokery has been done, so the faith healer tells the sufferer, or the little babies parents, “ *if only you had more faith.* ” Well, Lazarus ( Jn 11:1 ) Jairus’s daughter ( Matt 9:18 ) and the widows son were all dead. ( Lk 7:12 ) My .... they were incapable of displaying faith. Yet they arose from the dead by the power of Christ. Do you know something ? I wish the boys who claim to have the “ *gift of healing,* ” would spend a little time in the funeral parlour. But what is “ *the prayer of faith,* ” that heals the sick ? I believe the answer is in ( 1 Jn 5:14-15 ) “ *And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us, and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.* ” My .... the “ ***prayer of faith,*** ” is a prayer offered when you know the will of God. The elders would seek the mind of God in the matter, and then pray according to His will. Did you notice,

#### 5. THE PANACEA:

“ *And the Lord shall raise him up ....,* ” ( 5:15 ) I wonder did James have far more in mind than the physical dimension when he penned this passage ? Was he thinking about a believer who has wandered into sin and remained in sin. God has chastised him by bringing sickness into his life to bring him back to Himself. When that believer recognises that God has brought a severe illness to incapacitate him, he is to call for the elders of the church. The elders are then to come. He is to confess his sin, and they are to anoint him with oil and pray over him. If sin is the cause of the sickness, then God will raise him up.

My .... whatever view we take of ( James 5 ) is it not encouraging to know that the Lord is aware of your sickness ? He is concerned about your sickness and He is involved your sickness ! Do you remember what I called this study, “ **A God for Every Circumstance,** ” A God who will be with you in times of Pressure, in times of Pleasure, in times of Pain. My .... God is your Sufficiency, and the Lord “ ***will perfect that which concerneth you.*** ” ( Ps 138:8 )

