

Introduction:

Today we come to our final message on the book of James.

We arrive at what has been described as one of the most difficult portions of scripture to interpret and apply.

I. Why is this passage so difficult to interpret?

- A. It is difficult for the passage has no direct parallels in other portions of scripture.
- B. This passage is difficult to interpret because the language is difficult.

The language is difficult for two reasons.

- 1. The passage contains Greek words that are not common words in the New Testament.
- 2. The passage also contains some Greek words that are used in a variety of ways in the New Testament.

One must decide in what way the words are used in our text.

- C. The passage is difficult because there is no consensus of interpretation among evangelical commentators.

II. What are the interpretive issues?

A. What relationship does sin have to sickness?

- 1. We know that not all sickness is due to immediate sin.

John 9:2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

John 9:3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.

- 2. We know that some sickness is due to immediate sin.

1 Cor 11:27 Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

1 Cor 11:28 A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.

1 Cor 11:29 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

1 Cor 11:30 That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

3. What relationship does the sickness in our passage have to sin?
  - a. Is the sickness described not due to sin?
  - b. Is the sickness described due to sin?
  - c. Does it matter?

B. What is the purpose of calling the elders?

James 5:14 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;

C. What is the purpose of anointing with oil?

James 5:14 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;

Oil served two purposes in the Scriptures.

1. Oil was used as a medicinal tool.
2. Oil was used a means of consecrating and purifying an individual or thing?
3. Which use is it occupying in our text?

D. What is the prayer of faith that is described?

James 5:15 and the prayer offered in 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.

1. Is the prayer itself unique?
2. Is it the degree of faith that is unique?

E. Why is the word "sins" in the plural in verse 15?

James 5:15 and the prayer offered in 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.

F. What role does the purpose clause play in verse 16

James 5:16 therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

G. Why is righteousness introduced into the passage?

James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

H. What does Elijah serve to illustrate?

1. Does Elijah serve to illustrate a righteous man?
2. Does Elijah serve to illustrate a man of faith?
3. Does Elijah serve to illustrate a man who accomplished great things through prayer?
4. Does Elijah serve to illustrate something else?

I. What is the point of the ultimate application found in verses 19&20? How does it relate to the rest of the context?

James 5:19 My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back,

James 5:20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.

III. Why are the interpretive issues important?

- A. The answers that one gives to the interpretive issues should govern one's application of the passage.
- B. At the end of the day, what are we to do in light of the teaching of James 5:13-20?
- C. How is this passage to be lived out in the life of the church?

D. One should not answer those questions before addressing the interpretative issues.

IV. A consideration of the interpretive issues?

A. Where to begin?

1. Well, prayer is a key element of the passage so let us begin there.

a. The elders are called and they are to pray.

James 5:14 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;

b. The Greek word translated as “prayer” in this verse is a generic and common word for prayer.

c. Thus the activity is quite common. Elders are to come and engage in the activity of prayer.

2. However, it should be noted that the word for “prayer” that is found in verse 15 is a very unique word.

James 5:15 and the prayer offered in 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.

a. This word for “prayer” is found only three places in the scriptures.

(1) It is found here in verse 15

James 5:15 and the prayer offered in 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

(2) It is found in Acts 18:18.

Acts 18:18 And Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow.

(3) It is found in Acts 21:23

Acts 21:23 "Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow;

b. Therefore, the prayer that is offered has the force of a vow.

B. The next key issue is the anointing with oil. What role does the anointing with oil play?

1. Is the oil medicinal in nature? Or does it serve some other function?

a. It is true that oil was commonly used for medicinal purposes in the New Testament era.

In the story of the Good Samaritan we have this account.

Luke 10:33 "But a certain Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion,

Luke 10:34 and came to him, and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

b. Oil was also used to purify an individual or a thing to consecrate it for the Lord's use.

Exo 30:29 "You shall also consecrate them, that they may be most holy; whatever touches them shall be holy.

Exo 30:30 "And you shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister as priests to Me.

Exo 30:31 "And you shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, "This shall be a holy anointing oil to Me throughout your generations."

2. It is the prayer that is credited with the healing of the individual not the oil.

James 5:15 and the prayer offered in 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.

3. The oil is to be administered in the name of the Lord.

James 5:14 Is any sick among you? 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:

4. However, the passage is applied to today, when one is anointed with oil the oil that is used has no medicinal benefit.
5. If the purpose of the oil was medicinal, then the passage would teach that praying in faith is not contradictory to using medicine as well.
6. While it is true that one should pray and one should use medicine as well, I don't think that is the primary lesson of the passage.

C. The third key issue is what relationship does the sickness have to sin?

1. It is assumed the individual who is being anointed has committed a great many sins.
2. Three elements in verse 5 lead us to the conclusion that it is assumed that the person anointed with oil committed a great many sins.

a. First, the "if statement" is a first class condition in Greek. This construct assumes reality .

James 5:15 and the prayer offered in 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.

b. Second, the word for "sins" is plural not singular. It is not just that the person has committed sins but has committed many sins..

James 5:15 and the prayer offered in 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.

c. Third, the verb "committed" is in the perfect tense which denotes something that has happened in the past and is continuing to the present. Thus ,the person had been committing sins in the past that continued right up to the present.

James 5:15 and the prayer offered in 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.

3. The summation of the passage leads us to the conclusion that the individual who is being anointed has committed a great many sins.

James 5:19 My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back,

James 5:20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.

4. Next, the purpose clause is directly related to the preceding verse. Why is the confession of sins addressed at this point?

James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

- a. Praying for one another is in the previous text.

James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

James 5:14 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;

- b. The healing is in the previous verse.

James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

James 5:15 and the prayer offered in 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.

- c. The righteous person is in the previous verse.

James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

James 5:14 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;

- d. Where is the confession of sins in the previous verses?

James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

- e. The confession of sins must be associated with anointing and the vow of faith

James 5:14 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;

James 5:15 and the prayer offered in 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.

- f. Note how the confession of sin is associated with the anointing of oil in the Old Testament.

- (1) The righteous person comes bringing rebuke.

Psa 141:5 Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me; It is oil upon the head; Do not let my head refuse it, For still my prayer is against their wicked deeds.

- (2) The rebuke is a form of blessing leading to consecration as illustrated by oil upon one's head.

Psa 141:5 Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me; It is oil upon the head; Do not let my head refuse it, For still my prayer is against their wicked deeds.

- (3) The individual receives the rebuke as demonstrated in not refusing the oil of consecration. Instead he accepts the rebuke and the oil.

Psa 141:5 Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me; It is oil upon the head; Do not let my head refuse it, For still my prayer is against their wicked deeds.

- (4) It is accompanied with prayer disassociating one's self from evil deeds.

Psa 141:5 Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me; It is oil upon the head; Do not let my head refuse it, For still my prayer is against their wicked deeds.

D. What is accomplished? Note three things are accomplished.

1. The person will be restored meaning that his physical life will be saved.

James 5:15 and the prayer offered in 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.

KJV translates the word literally -"saved"

James 5:15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

It is the same Greek word in verse 15 that is found in verse 20

James 5:20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.

James 5:20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

2. The person will be raised up from his/ her death bed.

James 5:15 and the prayer offered in 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.

3. The person's sins will be forgiven even if they are great in number.

James 5:15 and the prayer offered in 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.

E. What does the person of Elijah illustrate?

1. Elijah is an example of a righteous man, but a man not any more righteous than we are.

James 5:17 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.

2. Elijah comes rebuking Ahab for his sin.

1 Ki 16:33 And Ahab also made the Asherah. Thus Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him.

1 Ki 17:1 Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."

3. Elijah's prayer brought about a drought upon the earth as a judgment against Israel's sin.

James 5:17 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.

- a. God had warned Israel that He would discipline them by the means of withholding rain.

1 Ki 8:35 "When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray toward this place and confess your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them,

- b. God would heal the land by sending rain if the people repented.

1 Ki 8:36 then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live, and send rain on the land you gave your people for an inheritance.

4. Elijah prayed a second time which brought healing to the land in the form of rain when the people of God repented.

James 5:17 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.

James 5:18 And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

1 Ki 18:1 After a long time, in the third year, the word of the LORD came to Elijah: "Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land."

5. The children of Israel repented.

1 Ki 18:39 When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD--he is God! The LORD--he is God!"

1 Ki 18:40 Then Elijah commanded them, "Seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away!" They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there.

6. The rains came.

1 Ki 18:41 And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain."

7. The result was much was accomplished.

- a. The land was healed of the drought that had come upon it because of Israel's great sinfulness. by the supply of rain.

- b. The people of Israel repented and were forgiven their sins.

8. The illustration applied.

Elijah serves an example of a righteous man who reproves a sinful Israel, whose land is afflicted by a drought because of Israel's sinfulness. . Elijah prays for a repentant Israel. The result is that the rain comes healing the land and the nation of Israel experiences the forgiveness of its many sins

- V. The summarization of the passage seems to help us the most in interpreting the overall purpose and meaning of the text.

James 5:19 My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back

James 5:20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save

his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.

- A. A person departs from the truth.

James 5:19 My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back,

James 5:20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.

- B. Another person turns that person from their path of sin.

James 5:19 My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back,

- C. That person which has been turned from sin has his physical life preserved.

James 5:20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.

James 5:20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

- D. That person who has been turned from sin, not only has his physical life preserved, but is also forgiven.

James 5:20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.

- VI. Conclusion: - The scenario is as follows:

- A. A person is sick because of his sins.

- B. In repentance he calls for the elders of the church.

- C. The elders of the church pray over the individual, and consecrate the individual to the Lord anointing him with oil as they pray a vow of faith on his behalf.

- D. The individual is healed and his sins are forgiven despite the fact that his sins had been many.

- VII. Application: What should we do in the light of this passage?

- A. Should I call for the elders to be anointed when I am sick?

You should if you believe that you need to repent of your sins and that the sickness is God's way of disciplining you to bring you back to Himself. Such repentance must be genuine. It is a commitment made to the Lord in faith.

B. How do I know if my sickness is a result of sin?

The passage is speaking of a person who has "strayed from the truth." One who has gone down a wrong path. One who has committed a multitude of sins.

C. Are my sins too grievous to experience the forgiveness of sins?

Even if one is on one's death bed, and one's sins are a multitude, those sins can and will be forgiven if one comes to the Lord in true repentance.