

# James 5: The Prayer of a Righteous Man

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## James 5:1-6 Heaped Together for Burning

As in previous chapters, Yaacov warns the rich. Verse one is a call to repentance, as he counsels the rich to weep and howl for the miseries that are yet to come upon them. Regarding their attention to material wealth, he urges closer inspection. Look, he says, at your riches. Look closely. Your riches are corrupted, your garments are moth-eaten. You might have closets full of shiny, clean looking garments, but up close the work of the moth would become visible.

Moth-eaten garments are useless. They will fall apart. Your wealth is only apparent. Trying to make use of it will reveal its illusory nature. Yaacov may have in mind Isaiah 59:3, where the wicked seek to cover themselves with their own works. So with the rich. Things look well and good on the outside, but closer inspection shows that the defect is not hidden; it stands in plain sight.

Your gold and silver is cankered, and its rust will testify against you, says Yaacov. Now gold and silver do not rust. But you can store gold and silver coins or objects in a steel box, and if that box is exposed to moisture, you can find gold and silver inside with rust deposits on it. Rust would testify that some time has passed and the metal boxes have lain unattended. The materialistic rich did not become that way in a moment. Years of nurturing, cultivating greed take their toll. Long trust in the wrong things means a character has been developed built upon trust in wrong things. The rust is an emblem of trusting in something other than God.

A life built up on false stuff will so testify in the end, for it leaves behind a trail of faithless works. Treasure has been heaped together, yes. But for the last days; for the time in particular when it can do nothing for its possessor. The rich Yaacov speaks of are so committed to their “lifestyle” (the latest buzzword), that they have cheated their workers of their wages. For the sake of their own pleasure they have committed themselves to injustice, even plotted murder. This is where they have travelled, to injustice for which they find no repentance. Yaacov’s first verses in this chapter offer a last call to the rich. His last plea is to the pacific stance of the victim, who “doth not resist you.” If one has become so dead that they cannot be moved by their fellow humans, he has dehumanized himself. For him, no appeal remains.

## James 5:7-11 Prepare for Second Coming

Now Yaacov turns to the victim of injustice. His argument? “Be patient therefore brethren unto the coming of the Lord.” He points to the fact of the harvest principle. Just as the owner of the vineyard waits for the fruit of the earth, so too does the divine husbandman wait for the vine of the earth to ripen. When the time of early and then latter rain comes, then He knows that the harvest is near. The argument is that God waits so very patiently for His harvest, and we must wait so very patiently for the harvest of justice. In mercy God lingers, He withholds the finalization of judgment until all have irrevocably committed themselves to a certain moral character. Only then will final accounts be settled.

We must take advantage of the time offered us to settle our hearts. We want to be settled into God’s truth both intellectually and spiritually, so that we cannot be moved. Now is our moment of opportunity.

There is no time to hold a grudge. There is no time for tiny little personal vendettas and cheap shots against one another. Indeed, “the judge standeth before the door” and “with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matthew 7:2). Judgment is imminent; that is the message of Yaacov. How we treat one another is an index of how significant we view our turn in the docket to be, how serious we think the price paid by our divine Attorney to ransom and heal us.

The example of the prophets is not just an example of suffering, but also of patience. God is not developing our character with mere affliction; patience must be developed. In the end God points to us and remarks, “Here is the patience of the saints (Revelation 14:12; 13:10). I’ve heard some complain about M. L. Andreasen’s use of the example of Job as a reference point for the experience of God’s end-time believers in his chapter “The Final Generation” but then they will also have to take Yaacov to task. For, “Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.”

The goal of God in the trials of Job was the perfecting of Job’s character. Yes, God vindicated His own character in the process. Yes, Satan’s charges against Him were defeated in the process. But the divine mind had all these things in play at the same time. He did with Job; He does with us too.

## **James 5:12-18 The Prayer of Faith**

We have no quick-tempered nature to coddle, we are not to enter into oaths at the drop of a hat, or to swear about anything. The answer to affliction is prayerful living. And if things are moving ahead well, the sobriety of Psalm-singing is advocated. For sickness, the elders of the church are to be called. They are to pray for the sick and anoint him with oil. But this is not just any prayer; it is the prayer of faith.

What is the prayer of faith? Here in James 5:15 is the only occurrence of the phrase in the Bible. In connection with this passage we may see the prayer of faith associated with individual perseverance and also with unity in the covenant community. Notice that we find the phrase here where we are reading of the elders gathering united in

prayer, where we read of the confession of faults to one another, and of prayer for others for healing. The example of Elijah is given (and we will turn to it in a moment).

We have followed fairly closely the plan of simple exposition in this series, but we set that aside for a moment to share an extract of seven paragraphs from Ellen G. White's book, *Acts of the Apostles*. Hear some very practical, helpful insight into the prayer of faith:

There are many who, though striving to obey God's commandments, have little peace or joy. This lack in their experience is the result of a failure to exercise faith. They walk as it were in a salt land, a parched wilderness. They claim little, when they might claim much; for there is no limit to the promises of God. Such ones do not correctly represent the sanctification that comes through obedience to the truth. The Lord would have all His sons and daughters happy, peaceful, and obedient. Through the exercise of faith the believer comes into possession of these blessings. Through faith, every deficiency of character may be supplied, every defilement cleansed, every fault corrected, every excellence developed.

Prayer is heaven's ordained means of success in the conflict with sin and the development of Christian character. The divine influences that come in answer to the prayer of faith will accomplish in the soul of the suppliant all for which he pleads. For the pardon of sin, for the Holy Spirit, for a Christlike temper, for wisdom and strength to do His work, for any gift He has promised, we may ask; and the promise is, "Ye shall receive."

It was in the mount with God that Moses beheld the pattern of that wonderful building that was to be the abiding place of His glory. It is in the mount with God—in the secret place of communion—that we are to contemplate His glorious ideal for humanity. In all ages, through the medium of communion with heaven, God has worked out His purpose for His children, by unfolding gradually to their minds the doctrines of grace. His manner of imparting truth is illustrated in the words, "His going forth is prepared as the morning." Hosea 6:3. He who places himself where God can enlighten him, advances, as it were, from the partial obscurity of dawn to the full radiance of noonday.

True sanctification means perfect love, perfect obedience, perfect conformity to the will of God. We are to be sanctified to God through obedience to the truth. Our conscience must be purged from dead works to serve the living God. We are not yet perfect; but it is our privilege to cut away from the entanglements of self and sin, and advance to perfection. Great possibilities, high and holy attainments, are placed within the reach of all.

The reason many in this age of the world make no greater advancement in the divine life is because they interpret the will of God to be just what they will to do. While following their own desires, they flatter themselves that they are conforming to God's will. These have no conflicts with self. There are others who for a time are successful in the struggle against their selfish desire for pleasure and ease. They are sincere and earnest, but grow weary of protracted effort, of daily death, of ceaseless turmoil.

Indolence seems inviting, death to self repulsive; and they close their drowsy eyes and fall under the power of temptation instead of resisting it.

The directions laid down in the word of God leave no room for compromise with evil. The Son of God was manifested that He might draw all men unto Himself. He came not to lull the world to sleep, but to point out the narrow path in which all must travel who reach at last the gates of the City of God. His children must follow where He has led the way; at whatever sacrifice of ease or selfish indulgence, at whatever cost of labor or suffering, they must maintain a constant battle with self.

The greatest praise that men can bring to God is to become consecrated channels through whom He can work. Time is rapidly passing into eternity. Let us not keep back from God that which is His own. Let us not refuse Him that which, though it cannot be given with merit, cannot be denied without ruin. He asks for a whole heart; give it to Him; it is His, both by creation and by redemption. He asks for your intellect; give it to Him; it is His. He asks for your money; give it to Him; it is His. "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price." 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20. God requires the homage of a sanctified soul, which has prepared itself, by the exercise of the faith that works by love, to serve Him. He holds up before us the highest ideal, even perfection. He asks us to be absolutely and completely for Him in this world as He is for us in the presence of God (*Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 564-566).

But little need be added to those lines. We might say this: the Christianity often offered up has but little bite in it. The active, self-battling, praying, old-fashioned, militant, clawing in the dirt, eyes-wide-open for heaven kind of experience known by our Christian grandmothers and grandfathers is rare. But we may choose to return to it. If we care to.

One other quick quotation too...

It cannot be our duty to call for the elders of the church for every little ailment we have, for this would be putting a task upon the elders. If all should do this, their time would be fully employed, they could do nothing else; but the Lord gives us the privilege of seeking Him individually in earnest prayer, or unburdening our souls to Him, keeping nothing from Him who has invited us, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." Oh, how grateful we should be that Jesus is willing and able to bear all our infirmities and strengthen and heal all our diseases if it will be for our good and for His glory. Some died in the days of Christ and in the days of the apostles because the Lord knew just what was best for them (*Medical Ministry*, pp. 16, 17).

Notice in our passage, the prayer of faith shall save the sick. Who raises up the sick? The elders may pray, but the Lord raises him or her up. If one is consecrated to God, if he is surrendered, then of course, his sins are forgiven him. In the life of Jesus both were offered hand in hand.

Protestants do not believe in the confessional as operated by the Roman Catholic Church. Scripture teaches instead a priesthood of all believers. We may, individually come to God in prayer; we are each our own priest; we may each approach our intercessor Jesus with our needs. But we also exist in connection with one another.

The church of God does not consist of God plus a billion individuals. The church of God consists of God plus a billion brothers and sisters. And when we have committed a personal breach of trust with our fellow believers, it is right for us to approach that soul whom we have offended, and confess to him our evil deed and seek his forgiveness. All sin is sin first against God, but most of the time the the same sins have second and third and fourth level victims. We want to be right with each other like we have never been right before.

And so comes the counsel that we are to pray for healing for each other. Physical ailments? Yes. But above the physical, let us pray for each other's spiritual needs. That became a part of our business when we gave ourselves to Jesus, and when we joined ourselves to this covenant community. We are to lift each other before the throne of God in prayer. For healing.

The example is given in our passage: Elijah. His prayer was no mere prayer. It was a fervent prayer. But it was no mere fervent prayer. His prayer was an *effectual* fervent prayer. So you ask, *why* was his prayer an effectual fervent prayer? And the answer is in our text. Elijah was a righteous man; that is why his prayer was effective. If you are not righteous, you cannot offer effective prayer. You can offer prayer. It is a gambit and a gamble and God is under no obligations. But the prayer of a righteous man can open and shut the sky.

Maybe this seems radical. But consider Proverbs 15:29: "The Lord is far from the wicked: but He heareth the prayer of the righteous." This is the kind of prayer that Yaacov says, "availeth much."

We know that many in contemporary Christianity laugh at this idea. No one, so they teach, can be righteous. Now it is true, you can't squeeze any righteousness out of a man any more than you can squeeze orange juice out of a bottle of motor oil. First you have to put orange juice into the bottle of motor oil and then you can squeeze orange juice out of a bottle of motor oil; it is the only way. And the only way for there to be a righteous man is for God to first impart His righteousness to the man, and then you can get righteousness out of the man. But it will be God's righteousness operating through the man, because he has no righteousness in himself apart from God.

See, Elijah was a man, as our text reminds us, subject to like passions as we are. He was human as we are. Bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, Elijah, as we are, we may be sure, had in his heritage a motley collection of criminals, sociopaths, and sinners of every stripe. He came into this world with inherited tendencies to evil. Like us, at some point he sinned and continued until he was adept at it. We aren't given a catalogue outlining these things in Elijah's case; on the basis of the broader testimony of the Bible about man, we may presuppose it. He was a man with warped, cultivated passions as we are. And yet, when he gave his heart to God, God gave His righteousness to the man.

And Elijah prayed and the heavens were closed. It was like flipping a switch. And the switch stayed flipped for three and a half years until it was time to flip it back the other way. And he prayed again and rain came. Elijah is not given us as a curiosity or a holy man lifted high up above us that we are not to be able to relate to. Rather, he is offered as just another of God's everymen. He was a plain, brown-paper bag, generic

follower of God. He knew what the prayer of faith was because he lived by it. He made mistakes. He was still growing and sometimes failing. But he was seeking to follow His Lord. And His Lord could use a simple man like that. And that is how He can use you and me.

## **James 5:19, 20 He Which Converteth the Sinner**

Yaacov closes his book with the following lines:

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

If Yaacov began his book with the trials of the individual and how he is to lay hold of God's help individually, personally in time of affliction, he finishes his epistle with an appeal for us to labor for the salvation also of others. It has become popular today to think that truth doesn't matter very much; just make sure your heart is right. But Yaacov links soul salvation here with conversion from error. God does the saving but He uses human agents to appeal to others. He has troops on the ground. Us.

What does it mean to err from the truth? It means to follow a pathway that leads to sin, or that makes sin a light thing, or that changes one set of chains only for another. How many come to Christ but refuse to leave behind their old bondages. Or they become a Christian for awhile and then because the battle is hard they eventually sink back into the mire. It is easier to lay in the mud of sin, to smell its stink in your nostrils, to blow little brown bubbles in the mud and say you are lost and that is all you will ever be. Don't do that. Satan likes that song; he loves it; he will ask you to repeat it, but louder. But we saw in chapter four we have no business with him lingering round; he is to be sent fleeing.

Now once we have fallen into sin, we need some help. On television or in a movie it is fashionable to show an angelic being coming to the rescue. That's almost never the way God works. He sends his soldiers—His human ones. Each one of us should be equipped through our connection with God to convert the sinner from the error of his ways. In doing so, we will play a small part in the salvation of that man or that woman for eternity. And the sins that will be hid will be the sins that would have been committed in the continuation of the life of evil. The universe will never see them. Satan will never take satisfaction in them. They will be preempted and the universe will rejoice because it was seen that in Jesus Christ was found power to defeat sin in this human flesh and to live our lives to His glory. **LGT**