

James 5:13, 2020.06.24 Prayer Meeting Lesson

Hopewell ARP Church, Culleoka, Tennessee

This verse teaches us to respond appropriately to God's Providence. We learn that it is wise and righteous to adapt properly to our circumstances.

But what is that right way of adapting to our circumstances? It is to interact with God Himself in them! To recognize that our Lord is always interacting with us, and that He intimates that we would should respond in kind.

Suffering isn't the only time that we should pray. But we should always pray, when God gives us suffering. It is an assignment from Him, as much as if heaven should open, and God were to say, "thou shalt pray now." This is a necessary conclusion of what God says here, "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.

Similarly, then, we learn to receive assignments of providence in the second half of the verse as well, but this time to praise. The word 'cheerful' here translates a word that means to be "heartened" (the opposite of disheartened, which is to say "encouraged" or "strengthened" or "gladdened" or "refreshed")... there is more here than merely being in a good mood. Whenever God does something that supports and strengthens our mind, emotions, or will, this command is in effect.

Again, when we are heartened is not the only time that we should praise. But we should always praise, when God heartens us. When He strengthens us or encourages us or gladdens us, it is an assignment from Him, as much as if heaven should open, and God were to say, "thou shalt sing psalms now."

How are we doing with these providentially cued commands of God? It will be very difficult for us to sing God's praise whenever we are cheerful, if we do not have a good store of His praise in our hearts and minds ready to hand (or tongue) for when we read them.

Similarly, if we are not in the habit of praying, how will we know what to do when the providential cue (suffering) comes? We must know what it is to come to God in Jesus. We must know what it is to depend upon His Spirit, both by employing the words of Scripture to form our prayers, and by presenting them not in our own strength but rather in dependence upon His Spirit's strength. We must know what it is to submit our wills to His, to bow our hearts in reverence toward Him and humility toward ourselves, to keep spiritual fervor, to present words that are confident of Him and loving toward Him.

This is not a condition of heart that comes naturally, and so if we are out of practice in coming to God in prayer, then we will find it quite difficult to respond with prayer when God's providential cue comes. Indeed, how very many find great difficulty in prayer, because their souls are little exercised with it! And many, sadly, because they have never genuinely prayed at all, even claim that they "pray continually," referring to some mere mental or verbal self-expression that they carry on, or some form of meditation borrowed from false religions, or some other thing that is not the biblical practice of prayer that we have described above.

Oh, let us not be found unexercised and unready when the moment of suffering comes. For, when that moment comes, then the command from God will be upon us, "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray."