

**Hopewell ARP Prayer Meeting, Wednesday, July 1, 2020**  
**Devotional on James 5:15–16a**

*And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*

There is a hesitance to take the wonderful promise of v15 as a true and genuine promise, due to various fears of presumption about faith healing, gifts of healing, and the like. But such fears not only fail to take the context of the passage into account, but they suffer from exactly the same sort of shortsightedness and earthly mindedness that this book has been teaching against from the beginning.

We know that healing is not promised to every prayer—not only because of the memorable example of the apostle Paul in 2Corinthians 12, but even because of the way that this very book began: “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and I will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” And of course, it goes on to talk about considering earthly circumstances in light of what God is doing through them for the believers eternal blessedness in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, at the end of the book, the prophet is talking about “the prayer of faith.” Isn’t this the same prayer as earlier? Aren’t illnesses one of the various trials into which believers fall? Are we not to be asking for wisdom to see them rightly, and rejoice in them, as time-limited circumstances that our Redeemer has appointed for our good? And isn’t this what those seasoned men of righteousness from the next verse—almost certainly the “elders” summoned in the previous verse—are going to be praying? In the way that the prophet has commanded at the beginning of the letter?

So, it may be that a believer’s sickness ends in death from that sickness. But, there are also sometimes these short-term “raisings up” in response to such prayers as are commanded in chapter 1 and by the elders who are summoned in obedience to chapter five. This “raising up” language is used of the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law from her sickbed, and of paralytics, and others in the gospels. And the Lord Jesus often tells people whom He heals in the gospel that their faith has “saved” them (which our English translations so often render “healed”).

So the promise being made here is much more than that someone’s cancer will go away in the near term. It’s describing a prayer of faith in which the believer, who has called the elders to pray for him, and is being led by those elders in prayer, joins with them in praying according to the instructions in chapter one, clinging to Christ and His righteousness and sacrifices for true blessedness now and forever.

And such a believer will absolutely be healed of whatever the illness is, 100% of the time. It is true that death and decomposition might come first. But healing comes last. And it comes permanently. The believer will absolutely be raised up.

What is added, however, is a specific case that occurs in the context of calling the elders to come pray for you. Here are the undershepherds who watch over your soul, and who speak the Word to you. And here, they are praying for the purposes of God to be accomplished in your illness, with the blessed and certain hope that there is coming a day in which there is no more sickness.

But in that day, there will also be no more sin. And one of the Lord’s purposes in our illnesses is to sanctify us from sin—even when that particular illness is not from that particular sin. So, in the context with the prescribed elder visit in this context, the believer is to search himself by the Scriptures for unrepented sins, that he may confess them.

It may be, as it was with the Corinthians and their profaning the Lord’s table in 1Corinthians 11, that illness has been given for a particular sin. And this text does tell us that the confession and repentance in this particular case will result in the lifting of the illness that was given for that reason.

But let us not lose the precious truthfulness and robustness of the first half of v15. This praying that is commanded by Christ is part of His work in the believer’s life—a work that one hundred percent of the time ends in sinless believers whose health will be invulnerable in the resurrection. It is a rejoicing together of pastor and parishioner in that glorious truth of Psalm 103:3. The Lord heals believers from just as many of their diseases as the number of their sins that He forgives. All of them!

And believing prayer, which participates in this work of His in our lives, will always save the sick believer!