

9-26-21 St. Peter Lutheran Church, Doss, TX “Praying About Problems”

James 5: ¹³ Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. ¹⁴ Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. ¹⁷ Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years! ¹⁸ Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops.

I've been taking a course on line from Hillsdale College on the main stories of Genesis. One thing the professor points out is that God always hears our cries of help and responds with promises to work things out. In the case of Abraham and Sarah, they had to wait quite some time for Isaac to be born. In our text from the second lesson, we hear about suffering, sickness, healing and faith. Whenever I anoint a person with holy oil, this text is key. Let's look at it closely and then at sickness and suffering in general. It begins with suffering and happiness, inviting the sufferer to pray and the happy person to sing praises to God. In the case of sickness, one is asked to call on the elders of the church. In our case, it would be the pastor and several church council people. Their task is to pray over the person and one, most likely the pastor, to anoint them. James, who is purported to be the brother of Jesus, and leader of the Jerusalem Church, said in v.15: *15 Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven.* The key here is faith. Jesus said in several Gospels (MT 17, Luke 17): *“You don't have enough faith,” Jesus told them. “I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it would move. Nothing would be impossible.* One of gifts of the Spirit is deep faith as Paul recounts in his first letter to Corinth (ch. 12) *“7 A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. 8 To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. 9 The same Spirit gives great*

faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. 10 He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. 11 It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.” The gift of faith means a deep faith and one is given that gift while another grows in their faith over time and experiences where they’ve seen God come through in difficult situations. And God comes through for us in little ways as well as big ways. The little ways are easy to miss. Verse 16 goes on to say: *16 Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.* In approaching God in humility and respect, one must always confess sins and claim the blood of Jesus, Who is our Savior. God tells us in His Word that He looks on the heart. (1 Sam.16:7) Faith on the part of the recipient as well as the care givers is vital and so is confessing our sins. Confessing them to a live person you trust, a person of faith, and receiving forgiveness from them puts a human touch from God to that person. The only other physical touch from God is the bread and wine of Holy Communion. Communion assures us of forgiveness, eternal life and salvation. James then gives an example from Elijah praying for drought which was fulfilled and then rain after three years and it was fulfilled.

Pastor Rick Warren, in his book Purpose Driven Life, has a chapter called, *Transformed by Trouble*. He says that God has a purpose behind every problem. He is not saying that God causes every problem. There’s a difference. Jesus warned us that we would have problems in this world. No one is immune to pain or insulated from suffering and no one gets through life problem free. God could have kept Joseph out of jail, Daniel out of the lion’s den, Shadrach and two others from being thrown into the fiery furnace, but He didn’t. Paul says in Romans 8:” ²⁸ *And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.*” To love God is more than just knowing about God. I once visited a patient in a critical care area of the hospital

where I was serving as chaplain. He had memorized the Bible, knew it front to back, and yet he wasn't a Christian. Even Satan knows God's Word and even tried to use it against Jesus in one of the temptations in the wilderness. To love God means to get to know Him and that is only through prayer often and time in His Word. It is also something we can pray about since it is the Great Commandment. We can pray, Lord, help me to love you with all of my heart, soul, mind and strength and my neighbor as You guide me. Let's look at that verse phrase by phrase. When Paul says, "We know," it represents the truth that God is in complete control of the universe and loves us. When Paul says, "that God causes," it means that our lives are not random but there is a master plan. When Paul says, "everything," it includes your mistakes, sins and hurts. When he says, "to work together," it means that the events in your life work together in God's plan. When Paul says, "for the good," he is not saying that everything in life is good. All you have to do is look at the news and see the evil in our world. But God specializes in bringing the good out of it. Just think of Jesus' cross and our salvation. When Paul says, "for those who love God and are called," it means this promise is for God's children and not for everyone. All things ultimately work for good for those living in opposition to God and insist on having their own way. Finally, when Paul says, "according to his purpose," His purpose is that we become more like Jesus every day. ²⁸ *And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.* "

Let's respond to problems as Jesus would. **First**, remember that God's plan is good. It is vital to stay focused on God's plan, not your pain or problem. That is how Jesus endured the pain of the cross. In the letter of Hebrews, the writer says, "*Fix your eyes on Jesus.*" (12:2) Don't give in to short-term thinking. Romans 8 also says, "*17 And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.*" **Secondly**, rejoice and give thanks. Paul said it this way: (1 Thessalonians 5:18) "*Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.*" The Bible says, "Rejoice in the Lord always," (Phil.4:4) not rejoice in your pain.

Thirdly, responding to problems as Jesus would, refuse to give up. Be patient and persistent. Paul in his Roman letter (5:3-5) *“We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.”* You may just want a comfort prayer like “help me feel better” but don’t miss out on the more important ‘conform me’ prayer which means “make me more like you, Jesus.”

If you are facing trouble right now, don’t ask, “Why me?” but “God, what do you want me to learn?” Then trust God.

Richard Parker lives in Alabama. He said: Being transported on a gurney gave me a different perspective of the hospital where I had worked for five years. Now I was a patient. After suffering chest pains, I had taken myself to the emergency room. The cardiologist decided I needed an angiogram.

Because I was always the respiratory therapist who attended patients on life support, I knew the procedure when my gurney was pushed into the room. The nurse was surprised to see me, but she said that she didn't have to explain the procedure since I already understood what was going to happen. She was right, but nevertheless, I began to worry.

At that moment, an incredible peace entered my heart. It was as if God said to me, "It doesn't matter if you live or die; you are in my hands." I discovered that peace doesn't mean the end to conflict; it simply demonstrates the love of God. And we don't have to wait for a major crisis in our lives; we can allow the peace of Christ to rule our hearts each day.

When I was a chaplain, I remember a couple whose young child died of leukemia. Their church told them that she died because they didn’t have enough faith. They never went back to that church. I told them that it wasn’t their faith alone, but also mine and, by the way, their church, who had also prayed. The bottom line is that we must trust God, get to know Him and know, truly know, that He loves us more than life. Amen.