



Thought for the Week – 20th June 2021

READING

James 5:13–18,

¹³ Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

¹⁷ Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

SERMON

James 5:16 says *“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective,”* and on this Father’s Day we should realize the incredible need for praying dads, but I believe that this verses for today also applies to everyone in the congregation.

I’m sure the fathers here today often question their ability to really make a difference. We read stories of great Bible heroes like Moses, Joshua, Elijah, and Paul, but we think they’re out of our league. If you move on to read the next verse – v 17 - it says *that “Elijah was a human being even as we are.”* Older version say *Elijah was a man with a nature like ours . . .*” We sometimes have a tendency to elevate biblical characters to a super-human status. The Bible, however, is very clear: God doesn’t use extra-ordinary people; He uses ordinary people in extra-ordinary ways if we PRAY.

1. Pray (James 5:17).

Elijah was human just like us, in all our frailty and weakness. Do we find it hard to pray? Well, so did he, but he still prayed. Do we ever doubt? So did he, but he prayed. Do we ever get discouraged? So did he, but he prayed. Do we ever grow weary? So did he, but he prayed. Elijah didn’t just make excuses, he prayed; and so should we. Throughout his letter, James exhorts us to pray: when we need wisdom, when we are suffering, when we are tempted, before we speak, about the future, when we are joyful, when we are sick, and so on. The question is *“Do we live this way?”* Is prayer the natural environment of our life, the climate in which we live? Prayer should be our first choice, not our last resort. Sadly, most of us (ministers included) would have to admit that it is not.

2. Pray with a Clean Heart (James 5:16).

Elijah is given as an example of a *“righteous man,”* whose prayer is powerful and effective. James does not mean that Elijah lived in *“sinless perfection”* when he uses the term *“righteous,”* – it means that he was in a right relationship with God. That’s where we all need to be. When we repent of our sins and place our faith and trust in Jesus Christ who died to take away our sin, He transfers His perfect righteousness to us. Scripture describes it as being like we’re covered over with a Christ’s robe of

righteousness. It's our PPE, might be a contemporary way of putting it – we're totally covered and protected by Christ. Have you trusted Christ? Are you covered? Notice that James also refers to a practical righteousness; we should confess our sins to one another. This does not mean we should confess our sins to everyone, but only to trusted believers who can then hold us accountable and help to build us up in Christ when we get things wrong.

3. **Pray Earnestly** (James 5:17).

In Elijah's days, King Ahab and Queen Jezebel led Israel away from the true God to worship the false god Baal. Baal was the "god" of rain. The people believed Baal controlled the heavens: the thunder and lightning, and especially the rain. Look up the whole story in 1 Kings 17 & 18 sometime. Elijah prayed that God would withhold rain from the land to cause them to turn back to the true God. Notice that he prayed, "earnestly," literally in the Greek, "he prayed in prayer," a deliberate repetition of the words used for extra emphasis. When was the last time you prayer "earnestly" and "wrestled with God" in sincere heaven-moving prayer?

4. **Pray Specifically** (James 5:17–18).

Elijah prayed for drought; it came. Elijah prayed for rain; it came. He didn't pray, "Lord, bless the weather," but specifically, for God to withhold the rain. Sometimes we must pray in detail.

5. **Pray in Accordance with God's Will** (1 Kin. 17:2; 18:1).

The Lord spoke to Elijah concerning the drought (17:2) and the rain (18:1). He prayed in accordance with God's Word. The problem is, sometimes we do know God's will. We have help, of course, for He has revealed some of His will clearly in Scripture for us – for example to help us overcome temptation, to be patient in trials, and to be bold witnesses for Christ. We can pray these and other prayers with full confidence, but praying that God will give us a new job or a new car may or may not be in His will. God will always answer, but sometimes His answer is yes, sometimes no, and sometimes wait.

Someone has summarized how God answers different prayers: If the request is wrong, God says no. If the timing is wrong, God says slow. If you are wrong, God says grow. When the request, the timing, and you are right, God says go!

Trust God to answer your prayers according to His will.

6. **Pray with God's Honour in View** (1 Kin. 18:36–37).

The motivation of Elijah's prayers in 1 Kings 17–18 was solely that God would be glorified and honoured. Elijah prayed that it might not rain because of his zeal for God's glory in the midst of the people's idolatry. Don't we live in an idolatrous generation, where few worship the true God? What better motivation for our prayers than for God's glory to shine through our sinful society.

Elijah was a man with the same nature as ours and his prayers brought repentance to a nation! Are you an ordinary dad or an ordinary person? Think of what your prayers can do! But no matter who you are, whether you join a prayer chain or make an altar each morning or evening at your bedside, pray! Then watch God work!