



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

James 5: 12-20

James

“Oaths, Prayers, and Wanderers”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Our passage this evening is James chapter 5. We’re going to look at the last portion of it. Verses 12 through 20. But let’s begin with a word of prayer. Father we thank you for your goodness and your grace. We look forward to this evening and our time of study in your word as we look into this last chapter in the book of James. We cover different topics. We pray that you’d bless us as we study them and pray that you would teach us and guide us through our text and make this an enjoyable and profitable time for all of us.

We thank you for it. We pray for the other meetings that are going on this evening, for the young people. Bless them. Bless the instruction they receive and their time of fellowship together. We also remember the events of the day and of our nation. We pray for it. We pray for this land as a day of decision is approaching, when we will elect a new government. We pray that you would bless us. Give the people of this country wisdom, that they would choose wisely and well.

And we pray for good leadership. We are thankful, father, that we know that ultimately you determine all things and you work out your will for this nation and the world. And that everything is moving according to your plan and that plan will ultimately bring us to your kingdom on this earth. And so we are grateful and comforted by that great truth.

But we are to be responsible in the day in which we live. And we pray that you would bless us with wisdom. Bless this land with wisdom. Now bless us, father, as we turn our attention to your word, instruct us, build us up in the faith. We pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.

[Message] We have come to the last passage that we will cover in the book of James 5:12-20, in which James deals with three subjects. He deals with oaths, prayer, and reclaiming backsliders. There doesn't seem to be any unifying theme to these subjects. James simply seems to be giving some concluding comments in his epistle. And so we're going to treat it in that way. But verse 12 may have a connection with what preceded, in the discussion that preceded, that worldliness, which James dealt with at some length because it covers all of chapter 4 and in the first half of chapter 5.

And in verse 12 he seems to bring that discussion to a conclusion when he forbids swearing or taking of oaths. Above all, he says, do not swear. His advice here echoes the words of our Lord and the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:34-37, where the Lord forbids swearing altogether. They are both referring to the casual use of oaths in informal conversation. This is not swearing in the sense of bad language – taking the Lord's name in vain, something like that – and it's not the formal use of oaths in a court of law.

God himself has said to have made an oath in Psalm 110, verse 4. And Paul often – well, not often, but there are times in the New Testament where Paul called God is his witness in 2 Corinthians 1:23, and then in Galatians 1:20. What this has to do with is swearing in daily conversations. And it is a trait which, if we can fit it within the context, reflects a spirit of worldliness, in which an oath is given in an attempt to hide the truth for a personal advantage. In order to gain the upper hand over someone. It was a very important issue to James. He begins with the words, “But above all.” So this is something of which James was especially concerned about because this has to do with the whole issue of honesty. And integrity. Among Christians.

You might expect a violation of that among the world, but we are to be far above that. So he gives two of spurious oaths. Do not swear, either by heaven or by earth, or within any other oath. It was done, as I suggested, in conversation to support the truthfulness of a statement, or of a promise. It was a common practice among the Jews and their daily relationships. In fact, in the Mishnah, which are the writings of the rabbis – the sayings, the decisions that the rabbis made just a generation or so prior to James, and then 100 years or so after James. So the idea, the decisions, the thoughts that the rabbis had at this time are contained in the Mishnah. And in those books – and there are a number of volumes.

I have copies of them at home. There's a tractate, a passage, that deals strictly with oaths. And there the rabbis discuss which oaths are binding and which oaths are not binding. You think, well I'll oaths are binding. But this was a different kind of situation or culture. And oaths which were used in which they employed the name of God – or more likely referred to God, made reference to him – those were binding. But a person can swear by the gold of the temple, or on the gold of the altar, and it would not be binding because it didn't make direct mention of God. So it all had the appearance of a binding oath – that you swear by the gold of the temple – but it could be escaped a moment later.

Because God's name had not been invoked, or reference to God had not been made. It's a little bit like kids who are asked to make a promise that they'll do something, or a promise that they won't tell some secret. And then they make the promise, but they do it with their fingers crossed. And so then they can violate the promise because it didn't really count. That nixed everything. Well this is more sophisticated than that, but essentially it's the same thing. And James says avoid swearing altogether. Your yes is to be yes, and your no, no. So that you may not fall under judgment. And a person who's honest will do that and will not need to give credibility to his or her word.

And honest person will not to do that because his or her word will be sufficient in and of itself. And so an oath is redundant to such a person. It takes faith to do that. Now James doesn't mention faith here. Not in this verse. But I think that lies behind what he's saying. The honest person fears God, trusts God. The world connives, the world cheats, in order to gain the upper hand. But the Christian doesn't do that. The Christian is to be honest, in spite of the – what we might consider, and what, in one sense, is – an unfair advantage that the world has. It doesn't play by the rules. It's not honest. It can make promises that it won't keep. We cannot do that.

That takes faith because we are going to be honest and trust God for the outworking of the results. And we can do that by faith knowing that God, who is in control of all things and who ordains all things, who governs life completely and does so without fail, is going to bless the things that we do. So I do think faith stands behind everything that James is saying here in regard to oaths. And faith – trusting God – is what James counsels in the next portion of the passage where he discusses

prayer. This is the major section of this final portion of the book. Prayer is a prominent subject in the book of James.

We find it in chapter 1 in verses 5 through 8, and then we find it again in chapter 4. And now James devotes a number of verses to it. Verses 13 through 18 of chapter 5. It is a logical conclusion to the book, which is about genuine faith, which is active faith. Or as one author in a brief commentary, Guy King, used to title his commentary on James, a belief that behaves. That’s what James is advocating. That’s what genuine faith is. I believe that behaves. And it can only be that – it can only behave and have power – through a vital relationship with God in prayer. That’s what James teaches in these last verses.

And he was well qualified to teach on the subject. Because James was, himself, a great man of prayer. Eusebius, who wrote in the early part of the fourth century and is known as the father of church history, recorded an old tradition that James spent so much time in the temple praying for people that his knees became as hard as camels. So the tradition is that James was a man of great prayer. We have no reason to doubt that. He certainly has much to say about prayer. And here he writes, “Is anyone among you suffering?

Then you must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.” Now that gives two extremes. One of distress, the other of delight. And it implies everything in between. It’s a way of covering all of the emotional experiences of life – all of the experiences of life – and it is a way of saying, pray at all times. Are you sad? Are you happy? Pray. Always be praying. Are you in distress? Are you rejoicing? Are times good? Are times bad? Well, be praying. And if you’re praying in those times, you are to be praying at all times in between. There is an acrostic that is sometimes used in order to define prayer or help us understand all of the elements of prayer. And that is the word ACTS. A-C-T-S.

A for adoration, or praise. C for confession. Confession of sin. T for thanksgiving. And S for supplication, or making petitions to God. That’s how we pray. But these two words – James doesn’t give us all those words – but these two words get to the essence of prayer. It is our means of seeking God’s help, of petitioning him for what we need. And for praising him, for thanking him, for the blessings that he has given. Now James has already made a point to the people to

whom he has written about the need to pray. They weren't doing that. They were caught up in jealousy, in envy. They were a worldly people.

They did not have the things that they felt they needed to have. Large part is because they were wanting things that they shouldn't have anyway. And they were setting their hearts sinfully on things that weren't theirs. But the main problem, as James has pointed out, is that they weren't praying. They weren't seeking things from God. They weren't looking to God for their needs. They were trying to gain them in their own way. They were not praying. And so they lacked. And he has made great point that we need to be men and women of prayer.

We can't pray and we can't ask God for what we need too much. Sometimes hear that. I don't think that we can ask too much of God. I don't think we can be petitioning God too much. We're to be praying at all times. You can't make too many requests of God. We can't, also, praise God enough. We should be doing both things. When we are in need, we're to go to the Lord with our needs. When we suffer, we are to bring those needs to him. Prayer is not just the private sufferer. It is also the praise that arises from blessing.

And so when we are blessed, we're to praise him. We can't praise him enough. In fact, we should be praising him even when we're suffering. We have examples of that from the New Testament, from the book of Acts. Remember Paul in Acts chapter 16 is in Philippi, and he and Silas are thrown in prison. They're beaten. They're put in stocks. Bound in chains. And then late at night, at midnight, what are they doing? Grumbling? Asking God to deliver them? They're not doing either one of those. As far as we know, they weren't asking God to deliver them. We know they weren't grumbling.

What they were doing is singing praises to God. They were praying and giving praise in the midst of their suffering. So that's what we will do. That's what we should do. Be praying at all times and praising God, even when we're going through difficulties. Now in verse 14, James gets specific. And he gives a special form of suffering. “Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church, and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.” Now the subject is still prayer.

It's suffering and prayer, but it's still about prayer. And sometimes we find it's very hard to pray. Suffering can be so great – physical pain can be so debilitating,

emotional distress can be so great – that the mind is distracted. It’s hard to pray. Calvin was a man who suffered much. Some of you may have read biographies on Calvin. His health was terrible. He had all kinds of diseases. A number of biographies that I’ve read on him have listed these diseases. They take up a paragraph. He had all kinds of physical problems, all of his life. He was under emotional stress. Constantly under attack. He had enemies in Geneva and enemies throughout Europe.

Constantly being attacked. And he had a great deal of sadness in his own life, in personal terms. Tragedies under his own roof. So he was a man who suffered greatly in all areas of life, all kinds of ways. Physically, emotionally, whatever, in personal relationships. And so one of his favorite prayers was the words of Psalm 6 in verse 3. “Oh Lord, how long?” He would pray it in Latin. And it’s a biblical prayer. Sometimes that’s all we can pray. And that is what David prayed in the Psalm. Sometimes that’s it. One can get out that much. He doesn’t understand the problem that he or she is going through, can’t articulate it well, can’t articulate the need that one has.

And so all one can do is simply pray something like, “Oh Lord, how long?” Well that’s biblical, as I say, but it’s also biblical to have other people come alongside and bear one another up in prayer. And that is what James advises for the sick to do, to call for the elders, to come to their homes and to intercede for them. The elders are the leaders of the church. They are the under shepherds of the flock who give pastoral care, who shepherd the children of God.

And so it is assumed that they are mature in the faith. It’s not that other people can’t do this. They can, they should be doing this, but in these situations, James is saying, call for the leaders of the church. They are men who should be mature in the faith. Spiritual men. And they should be men of prayer who know how to pray, how to pray well. And they will come and they’ll pray for healing. Now there’s a procedure to this. And first of all, they are to ask for the elders. The elders are to be sought out. Their presence is to be requested.

And so it is the responsibility of the sick person to notify the elders of the need and request their visit. The elders can’t be expected to know the need if it is not brought to their attention. And so first of all, the sick person must do that. They will come – come to the person’s home – and anoint that person with oil and pray for

healing. The function of oil in this procedure is not explained, but it is generally assumed to be either medicinal or symbolical. Olive oil has medicinal value. It was clearly used in that way in the ancient world.

For example, in Luke 10:34, which is the parable of the Good Samaritan, you remember the Samaritan find this man who had been beaten. And in verse 34 he pours oil and wine into the man’s wounds. Well, that’s obviously a medicinal practice. Oil has that value. So some have argued that that is the meaning here. The Lutheran commentator, Lenski, argued for that. B. B. Warfield favorite that, as well. Arguing it on the basis that oil was the universal remedy, medical remedy, in that day. He also felt that if the ceremonial use of oil were the meaning, more emphasis would have been put on it.

But since the anointing is alluded to so **cursory** – alluded to lightly – that that weighted in favor of a medical use. I don’t find that a very weighty argument. I’m not sure why that would be. I think a better argument for that point is that which others have used, and that is that the word here for anointing, the Greek word, is not the normal word for ritualistic or ceremonial anointing. This has a mundane meaning. That is, a more common meaning, which would fit the use of oil in a medical way. And generally, that’s true about the word for anointing here. But it is used of ceremonial anointings.

In Exodus 40:15 in the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, this is a word that’s used of anointing the priests. And there are other places as well. So it has a mixed usage. And the wording here sounds ceremonial. Anointing in the name of the Lord is similar to baptizing in the name of the father, and the son, and to the Holy Spirit. And oil is a common figure throughout the Bible for the Holy Spirit. And the power of the Holy Spirit. It does seem clear from verse 15 that James didn’t regard oil as the healing agent, but prayer. He writes, “Prayer, offered in faith, will restore the one who is sick.

And the Lord will raise him up.” So it seems to me that the use of oil here is symbolical. Like water is in baptism, it represents the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit. And is an emblem of dependence upon the Spirit to perform this work of healing. It’s recognized that this is not something that the elders accomplish in and of themselves, but the oil is a symbol representing the power of the spirit to do whatever takes place. So that’s the significance, and that’s what takes place when one is sick.

But sometimes prayer is not enough. Sometimes sickness is due to sin. It is chastisement. Not always.

And I think that bears putting some emphasis upon because often we are sick simply as a consequence of living in a cursed world. Very often, maybe mostly, that is the case. And the Lord made that clear in John chapter 9, you remember, in verses 2 and 3, where they see this blind man. And the disciples ask, “Who sinned? This man, or his parents?” And the Lord said, “Neither sinned. This happened for the glory of God.” And the point is, not all sickness is due to sin. We live in a fallen world. We live in a world that has been cursed. And that curse will not be lifted until our Lord comes and lifts it at the end of the age.

But in the meantime, we get sick and we die. But sometimes sickness is due to sin. And in those cases, more than prayer is needed. It is also necessary to confess sin in order for healing to occur. And that is what James requires. Verse 15 ends, “If he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him, but there must be confession. And in verse 16 he draws that conclusion. “Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed.” Prayer is a means for that end. Prayer offered in faith, as verse 15 puts it.

Prayer which is according to God’s will. It can always be counted on. The one qualification is thy will be done. That’s how Jesus prayed. When he was in the garden of Gethsemane, you’ll remember he asked, “If it is possible, let this cup pass from me.” But he added, “Not as I will, but as you will.” And that is how we’re always to pray. Thy will be done. We don’t know what God’s will is for us. We know what his will is in terms of what is written out and the precepts that are set before us and how we’re to live our lives, but there are things, there are decisions to be made.

We don’t know what the right decision is all the time. We’re to pray for wisdom and ask for wisdom. God gives it generously, James says. And we seek his will in that way. We seek it through prayer. And we seek his will in healing of the sick, but we don’t know what that will is. And so in obedience we pray, or we ask the elders to pray, convinced that we pray to a wonderworking God. And he’s certainly sufficient to heal us of every disease and remove every problem that we have. And we pray with that confidence.

That Christ did that when he went into the garden, he prayed with absolute confidence that if it's God's will to remove that cup from him, it will be removed. He said, "Thy will be done." And it was not God's will that the cup be taken from him, and healing is not always God's will. If healing does not occur, we should not necessarily conclude that the prayer was not answered due to a lack of faith. It's not God's will that everyone be healed. He wills that some people suffer lifelong illnesses.

And he wills that people die from their sicknesses. There are numerous examples of that from the Bible itself. The Scriptures prove it. In 2 Corinthians 12:7-9, Paul writes of his thorn in the flesh. He's speaking there of a physical affliction. He doesn't identify it for us. He doesn't define it. But it's a thorn in the flesh. It's something that afflicted him greatly. He prayed about it, prayed that the Lord would remove it, and prayed three times, and would have prayed four, five or ten times, except that the Lord answered the prayer. And the answer was, it's not going to be taken away. But my grace is sufficient for you.

So it wasn't God's will that that affliction be removed. In 2 Timothy 4:20, Paul records that he left Trophimus in Miletus. Left him there sick. Well I would assume that Paul prayed for him, and that Trophimus that he would be healed as well. I don't know that, but that seems logical and a fair conclusion. But he wasn't. Paul left him there sick. It wasn't God's will that he be healed. And that wasn't a problem with prayer or lack of prayer. It was just God's will for that to be. But we are to pray and we're to pray for those things. And we're to pray with confidence. And we're to pray often.

James gives that assurance. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. The righteous man is a saved man. God doesn't receive the prayers of the unrighteous. Now does he hear the prayers of an unsaved person? Well of course, he hears everything. He knows what they're praying, but he doesn't receive them, doesn't honor them, doesn't answer those prayers. As Warfield said, "Sin breaks communion with God, and he owes the sinner punishment, not favor." Only in Christ is the breach between God and man filled. So all prayer that is acceptable and received by God is prayer conveyed to him through Jesus Christ. But the context here suggests more than that, suggests more than a saved individual.

It is a man who is living obediently. That fits the argument for James’s book. He is arguing for a belief that behaves. He’s arguing for vitality of faith. And that’s the kind of prayer, that’s the person whose prayers have value. Great value, he says. They accomplish much because he is righteous, because he walks with God. He seeks God’s will. And he prays in a manner that is acceptable to God. The man who is living in obedient life, the woman who is living an obedient life, prays prayers that are valuable and are effective because they are in harmony with God’s will. Their life is, their thinking is, and their prayer life is.

Now James illustrates this from the story of Elijah, which is this fourth reference to an Old Testament character. Elijah was a man of effective prayer. He prayed for drought and he prayed for rain, and God answered those prayers. Those were not significant prayers, for God to shut up the heavens so that no rain would fall. And that God would open up the heavens so that it would rain. God answered those very bold, significant prayers. And so for three and a half years, it didn’t rain in Israel.

And finally, when he prayed, James says the sky poured rain. And the earth produced its fruit. Prayer is effective, he’s saying. And effective in great ways. And if you read 1 Kings 18, you learn about the prayer of Elijah. That’s where it’s described. His **prayer** goes up on Mount Carmel and he puts his head between his knees and he prays. And he prayed six times. He continued to pray. That tells us something about prayer. The effect of prayer of a righteous man is prayer that’s persistent. It’s earnest prayer. He continued to pray. He continued to make requests until he received an answer.

He kept sending his servant back to look toward the sea, to get some sign that his prayer was answered. And he sent him seven times. And so Elijah prayed repeatedly until the servant came back and said he saw a cloud the size of a man’s hand arising from the sea. Just a small cloud. It wasn’t big at all. But Elijah knew what that meant. That was enough. He quit praying. He knew God had answered his prayer. And that cloud turned into a huge rainstorm. Elijah didn’t get discouraged. As I said, this tells us something about prayer in faith.

He continued to pray. He was persistent in his prayer. That is an element of prayer offered in faith. You sometimes hear the opposite. Sometimes hear, “Well why do you keep praying? If you believe God’s going to answer it, all you need to do

is pray once and forget about it.” And you can see the logic of that statement. It seems to make some sense. It just doesn’t fit any of the models of Scripture that we have. Men prayed constantly.

Paul, as I said, prayed three times, and would have prayed more. But God gave him the answer to the prayer that he prayed. No, I’m not going to take the thorn in the flesh away. And so he quit praying. He received the answer. And Elijah prayed six times until he got the answer to the prayer. Prayer of faith continues. It is persistent. There’s no great faith in stopping to pray because you don’t get it answered. That’s just the opposite of faith. Faith continues in prayer. It continues to trust God. And James speaks here of that kind of prayer.

Prayer which is persistent. His point is, see how much prayer can accomplish. See what the prayer of a righteous man can do. So pray. Be a people of persistent, earnest prayer. Now someone might say, “Well, but that’s Elijah you’re talking about. Elijah was a great prophet. He was an unusual man. In fact, he has a special status within the minds of the Jewish people. He was the greatest of the prophets in their thinking.” And James anticipated that, and introduced his example by stating that Elijah was a man with a nature like ours.

In other words, he’s just a man. True, he was a prophet, but he had his weaknesses. And if you go back and read about Elijah, shortly after that he’s fleeing Jezebel. He’s in complete fear. He’s completely undone. He’s not behaving like a man of faith at all. He had his weaknesses. He’s made of the same stuff as we, with a nature like ours. His success was not due to his office. It wasn’t due to his gift as a prophet. But to the quality of his prayer. He was a godly man. He had his weaknesses just as we do, but he was a godly man. He walked with the Lord. And offered prayer in faith. And you can do the same, James is saying.

This is one of James’s great concerns, that we be a people of prayer. And I suspect that if we are all honest with one another, are honest with ourselves, we would all confess: we are not the people of prayer that we ought to be. I confess that about myself. I’m amazed at how poorly I pray at, at times. And how much I should be devoting to prayer. All the great men of the Scriptures, and of the history of the church, were men of prayer. And that’s what James is concerned to instill in the people to whom he’s writing, and to the church of Jesus Christ.

Now I think we should have a time daily when we do that, when we pray. That’s a good discipline. That’s a good habit, whether it’s in the morning or the evening, to get on our knees and to make requests to God, to make petitions to him. Confess our sins, thank God for what he’s given to us, praise him and make our petitions. Go through the procedure of prayer, intercede for one another. All of that. But Warfield, I believe, was right when he said that “all conscious communion with God is prayer.” Every form of expression of the soul Godward is a form of prayer.

And so we’re able to pray when we’re outside of our closet, when we’re outside of our study or bedroom or wherever we pray. When you’re in the car, when you’re at work – wherever you are. Walking from here to there, you’re able to pray because as your mind is focused on the things above and you think about God, you’re able to pray. And your thoughts are communion with God. And we are to be doing that. We are to be setting our minds on the things above, to always be communing with God.

That’s what James is urging. Now James concludes his epistle with some important business. The problems that had occasioned the writing of this book had left some people estranged from the Lord. Not walking with the Lord. And not fellowshiping with his people due to worldly interests, to jealousy, to fighting. They had fallen into sin, fallen out of favor. They needed to be reclaimed. They needed to be brought back into the fold. And that’s the aim of James’s letter. He did not write this letter in order to condemn, but to restore. And so he urges the brethren to do that. In verse 19 he writes, “My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back,” and then he goes on to commend that.

The King James Version has “convert him”. And in verse 20 it again reads, “Convert a sinner.” But it does not refer to soul winning in the sense of making new converts. The wandering is from the Christian community. He says, “If any among you strays.” So these are Christians that James is speaking of. And the word that’s translated there in the King James Version as “convert” is the word that the Lord used of Peter in Luke 22:32, “When once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” Well Peter was certainly a believing man then. Weak, and he failed miserably. But he was a saved man. And James here is referring to saved people.

He’s referring to a Christian brother who has strayed from the truth. He has become indifferent, to some extent, to the doctrines of the faith that he had embraced

at conversion, and the moral conduct that's based upon that. He's a backslider. He's wandering. And James urges them to reclaim such a one. And so the new American Standard Bible has “to turn him back”, rather than “convert him”. Turn him back to the truth. Well this is the task of the whole church. This is not just for elders to do, though elders would certainly have a responsibility. But when we see one in error – when we see a fellow Christian straying – we're to go to that individual. We have other places in the Bible where that is urged upon us.

Every Christian is to be concerned about wandering sheep. Alfred Plummer, in his commentary, wrote, “There is something fatally wrong about us if we have no strong desire to bring back sinners to God.” We ought to be concerned about that. And to do that – to do it effectively – takes prayer, which ties in with what James has been saying. It certainly fits that context. It takes personal contact. It involves going to that person and dealing with that person. But James assures us that this rescue work is significant, and it is far-reaching. He concludes the letter, the epistle, “Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.”

The way of sin is a way of death. It is a way of destruction, spiritually and physically. Back in chapter 1 verse 15, James spoke of that. He gave this anatomy of sin and how it develops and what results from it. He says, verse 14, that “each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin. And when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.” That's the way of sin. The way of sin is the way of death. And to turn a sinner back from the sinful way – the way of error – is to rescue that person from danger. And a Christian can get on that spiritual path of death. He cannot lose his salvation, of course, but can be on a destructive path.

Destructive spiritually, destructive to the spiritual life. Nothing can snatch the soul from the hand of God, of course, but we can go on a destructive path and a path that is destructive physically as well. So James urges that these people to whom he's writing – and he urges us as well – to reclaim those kinds of people, to rescue them from the dangers that they are in. From the peril. And the blessing that follows is not just that they have been rescued, but, he says, they are forgiven as well. He says, “He will save his soul from death, and cover a multitude of sins.” So there's great blessing for that person.

Not only are they rescued, but a multitude of sins is covered. The wanderer’s sins are forgiven. God receives that person back fully, completely, into the fold, into the Fellowship of God, just as the father received the prodigal son back into the family with blessing, with joy. And so, too, we have that encouragement, that the sinner – the wayward person – will be received back. Well it’s on that note that the epistle ends. And it’s a rather abrupt ending.

And commentators have noticed that. Professor Tasker states that “such an ending is wonderfully arresting. And sounds a call to which we should eagerly respond.” I think that’s probably a good analysis. Suddenly it ends. And it ends on that note, that we are to rescue sinners. We’re to be concerned for those who wander. James had written a book to a church of wandering believers. They were in confusion, they were in sin, they were in the grips of worldliness, jealousy – all kinds of problems.

They weren’t praying to the Lord. And he seeks to correct that. And that’s to be our heart, too. So may God produce that within us. Give us the grace to be concerned for others. And to follow the injunctions, the instruction, of the book of James. Let’s pray.

[Prayer] Father we do thank you for the instruction in this marvelous book. This wisdom that is imparted to us. We pray that we would heed it. That we would be people who are concerned about those who wander. And we would certainly be concerned about ourselves, that we not get off the path straight and narrow and be attracted by the things of the world as these, to whom James was writing, were.

The world is an attractive place. It has many allurements, and we pray that you would guard us from that. One way we will be guarded from that is by a vigorous, earnest prayer life. Give us that, father, and make us see the importance of that. And as we continue in prayer this evening, we pray that you would bless us. We pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.