



## James 5:17-18 The Power of Prayer and Confession Pt 2

Lessons from Elijah's Drought

May 15, 2016

### Text: James 5:17-18

When we were in this Text last, we learned a bit about the Power of Prayer, and particularly, the power of a repentant, confession type of praying within the Church. We said:

*...It seems as if this entire section, verses 13-20, have to do with the return of the "backslider," the confessing believer who gets himself in quite a mess due to his sin, and needs to be restored. Even the mention of Elijah concerns rebellion: rebellious Ahab and Jezebel, and God's judgment, as we'll explore.*

*So, as we look at the passage, we can construct a contextual interpretation:*

1. *If a believer is sick, he is right to call the elders for prayer. (v14)*
2. *Those elders should pray over him and anoint him with oil. (v14)*
3. *The prayer of faith (that is, both the elders and the person being obedient to God's command in faith) saves the sick. (v15)*
4. *But the sick in this case, is one who is likely suffering as a direct result of unconfessed sin. (v15)*
5. *Therefore, that sin should be confessed, perhaps to the elders, but certainly to the one(s) sinned against.*
  - *Short relational tabs are to be kept then, among the saints, that we might walk in greater healing (v15). We aren't allowed to hold grudges, or to gossip, etc. There seems to be consequences when we do.*
  - *The command to confess one's sins isn't a call to tell everyone every wrong thing you do, but rather to go to the one(s) you have wronged, especially other Christians (members of the church). (v16)*
  - *Accompanied by praying one for another, this sort of confession strengthens the Body and positions us to be used by God. (v16) It also allows little room for Satan's activity!*

### Lessons from Elijah's Drought

Friends, I find it interesting that this sort of repentance is mentioned in the context of Elijah's prayer. Some backstory is in order.

1. Elijah, one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament (Jn 1:21-25; Rev 11:6), ministered in a time of deepening darkness in Israel.
2. When Elijah entered the scene, Israel (as opposed to Judah) had experienced the successive reign of many evil kings:
  - Nadab ("did what was evil in the sight of the Lord" 1 Ki 15:26); Baasha ("did what was evil..." 1 Ki 15:34); Elah (killed by one of his own men, 1 Ki 16:10); Zimri (murdered the previous king and then committed suicide, 1 Ki 16:18); Omri ("did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did more evil than all who were before him." 1 Ki 16:25)
  - And then there was King Ahab, the son of Omri, who "did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who ever before him!" (1 Ki 16:30) An increasing, progressing evil!
3. In fact, Ahab is widely acknowledged as one of the worst, most evil kings in Israel's history. Scripture says concerning him:

*And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the*

*daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him. He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. And Ahab made an Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun. (1 Kings 16:30-34)*

4. You might recall this sin of Jeroboam which is mentioned over and over again in Scripture (1 Ki 12:25-33). This wicked idolatry is apparently eclipsed in evil by King Ahab. The land under Ahab was so wicked in fact, we even see an attempt to rebuild Jericho, which brought additional curses upon the people (Josh 6:26).
5. In this context of evil ruler after evil ruler, was thrust Elijah the Prophet. God often sends the “prophetic voice” during these times. Then, like now however, the majority rarely **listens**.

There are some important lessons the church can learn about the power of prayer and confession from this context.

### **The Drought (1 Kings 17:1-7)**

1. In his first mention in Scripture, Elijah bursts onto the scene. No background is given. Immediately, the prophet does what prophets do: speak the words of the Lord in power and pronounce His mighty judgement.
2. Not only is this event brought up in James to communicate the power of prayer, but I believe it also encourages the church to stand and speak.
3. James, desiring the power of repentance in the church, prophetically declares God’s will. The goal is for the people to repent. We’ve already seen that sickness can be one result of sin in the flock.
4. This too, was Elijah’s goal for Ahab, I think. Elijah shuts down the heaven’s rain, literally. Oh, that the church would be in position to speak and act in power this way in our current day!
5. We also see God’s merciful provision when we take Him at His Word and obey. Knowing that civil forces would not be happy with Elijah, God arranges for His care and feeding supernaturally. Do we trust God to speak and believe for His provision? Or are we more concerned with being friendly with the world? (James 4:4)

### **The Confrontation with Ahab (1 Kings 18:1-19)**

1. In this part of the narrative, we find out a few things:
  - God in His mercy, commands the prophet to return to Ahab. Even in their rebellion, God was anxious to show Himself strong and eventually be merciful.
  - That there were godly people in Ahab’s wicked house (Obidiah), yet another sign of God’s mercy.
  - That Jezebel, Ahab’s wife, was truly wicked, persecuting and killing the prophets of God!
  - That the drought was devastating to the land and the people.
  - That in these desperate times, the King was desperately trying to find Elijah!
  - But one gets the sense that Ahab simply wanted the rain, not the repentance. He called the prophet “the troubler of Israel.”
2. Isn’t it ironic, that when God sends a prophetic word to heal, bless, and deliver His people, the prophet is often **blamed** for doing something wrong?
3. This mindset friends, hinders the blessings of prayer and short-circuits the power of confession and repentance!

### **The Confrontation with the Priests of Baal (1 Kings 18:20-40)**

1. Proof that Ahab didn’t yet “get it,” he assembles the purveyors of idolatry in the land; idolatry that he and Jezebel were responsible for! And incredulously, he assembles them against the Lord!

2. Of the many lessons one can learn from this powerful episode, here is the one I think most relevant for us as we look at James 5: **God sends His power when the fearless church seeks His glory and connects to His mission!**
3. Elijah defeated the 450 prophets of Baal because God desired the nation to repent (1 Ki 18:36-39). The church must preach the right message with the right motive if we are to expect divine power!
4. Elijah stopped the rain, humiliated demon-inspired prophets, then recalled the rain...all powerful prayers...because of God's desire for Ahab to **repent**. This is the heart of James 5:13-20!

#### **The Restoration of the Rain (1 Kings 18:41-46)**

1. After the people repent, God sends the rain!
2. God in his mercy, even mercy bestowed in the midst of evil leadership, blesses His people! Oh, that we might receive such in the coming days!
3. May we be overwhelmed by the great love and tender mercies of the Lord of Hosts; that He gives us what we do not deserve (grace) and withholds that which we do (mercy)!!

#### **The Weakness of the Prophet before Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1-8)**

1. But let the prophetic church be warned; there is always a **Jezebel**.
2. Bolder even than her husband, she was not afraid of the prophet, nor did she fear God.
3. Elijah had more courage facing 450 men than ONE angry woman! :)
4. Perhaps exhausted from the fight, but certainly fearful and despondent, Elijah looks again like the modern church, wilting before the Jezebels of our day.
5. Yet again we see the mercy of God, caring for him and showing great tenderness and patience with Him.
6. Point: even when we fail, God **loves** His people. Beware of Jezebel (contrary, threatening voices even in the midst of the Lord's powerful working), but be more aware of the great love of God!

#### **Summary**

- Jezebel went on to continue to make a wicked name for herself (1 Kings 20-21) but Ahab actually (and amazingly) repented! (1 Kings 21:17-29)
- Precious friends, God desires *repentant* individuals, a *repentant* church and *repentant* nations. He will sometimes send judgment (pain and suffering) to get our attention, but He remains **merciful**.
- Yes, Elijah prayed and his righteous prayers did "availeth much." But the context was confronting sin and working towards repentance as in James 5:13-20.
- May we remember that the next time we quote these verses, and **may Christ cause us all to walk in greater humility and contriteness of heart.**

In Jesus' Name, Amen.