

Touching Heaven – Touching Earth - Session 2

Study on Prayer by Cindy Smith

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Let's start out by reading our theme verse for this series: James 5:13-18 "Is any of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone of you happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other so that you may be healed. **The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.** Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain and the earth produced its crops."

Quick review of last week: "elders", "sick", "pray over him", "anoint him with oil", anointings, "the name of the Lord", "prayer offered" = "offerings" in OT and NT, "prayer in faith" and those major words were defined and searched out in several scriptures so we can understand better the meaning of this passage in James. This week and next we will explore the concept of "faith" in the OT and NT.

Let's start out by asking the God of our faith to bring clarity in our understanding of what it means to pray in faith so that our prayers are effective and powerful in bringing the Kingdom of heaven to earth.

Webster's dictionary says faith is allegiance to duty or a person, loyalty, fidelity to one's promises; describes someone who is faithful. It also means sincerity of intentions, it can refer to belief and loyalty to God. It can also refer to belief in the traditional doctrines of religion. It can be a firm belief in something for which there is no proof. It can be defined as complete trust or something that is believed with strong conviction.

The Thesaurus gives us some synonyms: devotion, piety, religion. Some related words: devoutness, piousness, adoration, reverence, veneration, worship. Antonyms are atheism, godlessness-near antonyms are doubt, disbelief, unbelief. So we are coming to an understanding, but because we are the people of the Book and we know that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Rom 10:17). In Hebrews 11-1:2 we find God's description of faith: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients are commended for." It goes on to say, "**By faith we understand** that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible." There is so much right here. We see God linking faith and hope-they are partners. If someone has no hope, does he really have any faith? If someone has faith, can they say that, without hope? Faith and hope are tied together in Ps 37:3-11.

In Galatians 5:6 It says, "the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself by love." So we add to the equation love. Interesting that Paul does that in his letter to the Corinthians" vs 13 of I Cor 13: And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. So I submit to you that if we are to study faith, our understanding will be incomplete without also considering hope and love.

So because God has partnered these fruits of the Holy Spirit together and also told us that the effective prayer of faith will accomplish much-we must also be praying for motives of the heart that include love and hope. So the prayer of faith rests on the word of God, the hope that it brings and is prayed out of a heart of love-love of God and love for His people. Someone recently told me that if your prayer is too big for you to accomplish without God and it is too big for you to accomplish without God's people, then it is probably God because that is the essence of faith.

Let's look at some other examples in the Word which both qualify and quantify this invisible quality in an invisible God. I Tim 6: 11-12 "But you man of God, flee from all this (worldly desires and evil) and pursue righteousness, Godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your confession in the presence of many witnesses." In I

Peter 1:6 it says: "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith-of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." One more scripture shows us that faith is necessary to live victoriously I John 5:5 "This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith."

So the qualities we see about faith it is enduring, it is overcoming and it is involved in spiritual warfare-there is a fighting, a contending that is characteristic of faith. In 2 Cor 1:24 It says "not that that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith that you stand firm. This is why we need to get into the Word daily-it builds our faith and without it we will be amoeba-like, wavering always between unbelief and faith. Let's look at James 1:2-8. We are encouraged to believe and not doubt!

It says that we should do a faith check. In 2 Cor 13:5 we read we are to "Examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith." So that means we could have no faith. It also means we could be acting or praying from presumption if we have not had an actual born again experience with the Lord. I asked last week if anyone here had not yet met the Lord, received His forgiveness and has assurance of salvation. It's the first base of learning to pray because prayer has everything to do with relationship to Jesus. God desires to complete or perfect your faith-in Phil 1:6 "being confident of this, He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." In Rev 21:6 "I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End." Rev 22:13, Rev 1:8. The First and Last!

It is a substance which causes us to live as it says in 2 Cor 5:7 "We live by faith and not by sight." Sometimes I feel my sight limits my faith-the things I know and understand about the world, and the way people live in this world, the way we receive education, our experience can either be limiting or freeing.

It is so easy to analyze, evaluate and compare instead of just living by faith according to God's Word. So many of our decisions and how we exercise our wills are by knowledge, instead of faith. We pray prayers of unbelief as we can see in our first reaction when we need healing is to grab a pill, when our reflex needs to be to cry out to God, the Healer. I am talking to all of us, including me. Perhaps that is why it says in our scripture in James 5:16 to confess your faults one to another that you may be healed.

I WOULD LIKE TO PRAY A PRAY FOR ALL OF US-SO IF WE COULD JUST AGREE A MOMENT AND ASK THE LORD TO FORGIVE US FOR SAYING WE BELIEVE ONE THING, BUT THEN OUR LIFE ACTIONS DO NOT REFLECT OUR FAITH. If we truly receive forgiveness, then we call that repentance-it means we turn around and go the other way. We begin to come to God with the big things, but also the small things-cultivating our relationship with Him instead of working things out apart from Him. That is the purpose of prayer anyway-to bring us into relationship and fellowship with the Lord.

Let's take a look at two fathers of faith, Noah and Abraham, by reading from Heb 11:4-18. So Abel achieved righteousness of faith by pleasing God with his sacrifice (Gen 4:4). Enoch also had relationship with the Lord (Gen 5:21-24) which was pleasing to God-so pleasing that he swooped him to be with him. Let's look at Gen 6:13-22 to see about Noah and start with verse 5-In verse 8 we find that faith brings favor with God! Anyone here want God to favor them? The Hebrew word for favor is "chen"-equivalent to the Greek word for favor which is "charis". Another translation for the word "charis" is grace. "For it is by grace that you are saved by faith" as it says in Eph 2 7-8.

For Homework:

Read the story of Noah in 6:13-22

Pray the prayer of faith in agreement with one other person - Pray for Tracy for salvation (Sharon's friend)