

Season 2, Episode 9: James: Grace that shapes our prayers (5:7-20)

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Felicity: Hello, everyone, and welcome to Two Sisters in a cup of Tea. My name is Felicity and I'm in America and this is my sister Sarah and she's in the UK.

Sarah: Hi, everyone. What's in your mug today?

Felicity: Just gone for a straightforward Yorkshire tea. Actually, it is teapot brewed, so I've got other people in the house needing a cup of tea, but pretty straightforward. I feel like my biscuit choice is actually unconventional because it's not a biscuit. I was upstairs making my cup of tea and I was thinking, well, I've got this Victoria sponge jam cake on the side, waiting for later on today. I thought, well, it does go well with a cup of tea. So I went for cake over biscuit. I don't know whether we restrict the biscuits or whether we can bring in a wider range of snacks.

Sarah: I think there's scope, but a couple of questions there. Did you cut into the cake for the sake of recording our episode today?

Felicity: Yes.

Sarah: The second question. Do Americans call cake sponges?

Felicity: That is an interesting question, because I don't know whether I've ever had a conversation about a victim sponge cake with American, but I should probably shut you're thinking that they might think I've got a bathroom sponge on my cake.

Sarah: I think it's a bit weird that we call a cake sponge.

Felicity: Do you think the Bake Off phenomenon might have wiped out any cultural difference on that front? Mary Berry may have just forged the.

Sarah: Way I would hate saying, but I think it's still worth clarifying when you offer people some funds, what you're actually offering. Well, I've gone to a tea that you had a few weeks ago. My friend dropped a tea background a bit sad that I haven't kept one of the JAMA toast teas when I sent it to you. So I've got it here and then I'm not convinced by the smell. And I bought the milk in the milk jugs. I wasn't sure what to do with that. And I've also got my backup.

Felicity: You got a backup? I'm pretty sure you gave me a hard time for having a backup and now you have. I actually had a second go at that toast and jam tea with a friend quite recently, and I've got to say, I enjoyed it more than I did the first time. And I did add milk and it was good. The smell is accurate, I think. I think it does smell like toast and jam and maybe not according to your no.

Sarah: I'm so sorry. I really don't like that. I really don't like that.

Felicity: I've got 40 tea bags of it upstairs.

Sarah: I'm so sorry. Right, well, we're on to the last bit of the letter today, and this isn't the last episode of the season. We're going to do one more episode of rounding up the book, aren't we, next time. But we are finishing off the letter today and as ever, there's a lot to cover in this, James, and we just wanted to kind of clarify what we're not doing again today, as well as what we are doing. Do you want to explain, Lisbe?

Felicity: Yes. So, as ever, we are not experts. And I think, as we've been digging into this passage, we have been reminded again that we are definitely not experts. And there are some tricky bits in this passage, but what we've been saying to each other is that we don't want those tricky bits to dominate our discussion and what is going on, especially because there's some really rich, good things to dwell on. Not that the tricky bits aren't good, but just that we don't want to get sort of side swiped by them. And the sort of questions we've been asking ourselves if we've been preparing is, why is James finishing his letter like this?

How does it relate to what's come before? How does it pick up on any of the patterns that we've been seeing? How does again, that same question we've been asking, how does it drive to our heart? What's the manifestation for us in our lives and what this means? How is James kind of impacting the way we live it out? Those are kind of ballpark questions. We'll see how we get on as we chat it through. But Sarah, why don't you read it for us? We are chapter five, verses seven through to 20.

Sarah: Let me read. Be patient then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. UT be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The judge is standing at the door, brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of jobs perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear. Not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple yes or no. Otherwise you will be condemned. Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you ill? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. 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. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and Effects of 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. Again he prayed and the heavens gave rain and the earth produced its crops. My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring back that person, remember this whoever turns a sinner from the era of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Felicity: Thank you, Sarah. It might be worth drawing the contrast with what has come just before. So last passage we had these two slightly different groups of people because they weren't addressed as brothers and sisters, were they? We had the people who are making their plans without any reference to God, just kind of thinking that they're in charge. And then we've got the people who are dependent upon their money, these rich people. And that mindset and that perspective that we saw in those two groups of people is in contrast to what we have here in versus seven to twelve, I think, because he starts by saying be patient than brothers. So brothers we're back into he's talking to those Christians, the church family, until the Lord's coming. So that is an entirely different mindset to what we've just heard about in the passages before.

Sarah: Yeah, definitely. And in the bit that we've just seen before this, the Lord's coming was a terrifying thing, wasn't it? Because they were deserving judgment, where we all deserving judgment. Judgment was coming on them for the way that they depressed people here. The Lord's coming is a good and right and positive thing to look forward to. And I'm assuming there's some connection here between actually if we've just looked at those who are oppressing, this is relation to those who are oppressed and so in their suffering and the connection there being this might well be the people who have been oppressed by the rich. Be patient, be steadfast in waiting because the Lord is in it, he will come and you can patiently wait for that. Yeah.

Felicity: And it's definitely a positive thing, isn't it? Because the farmer waits for the land to yield it's valuable crop and the farmer waits for rain with anticipation and anticipation of the fruit that it's going to yield. And so I think there's a longing for the Lord to come back because that is the end of the suffering, isn't it? But in the meantime, be patient, stand firm. And then again that reiteration because the Lord's coming, isn't there? Like you can as you hear this reality that Jesus is coming back, as you trust the words of the Lord that this is true, so you are able to wait patiently and anticipate ways to come.

Sarah: It doesn't mean it's going to be easy. There doesn't you think about that illustration of the land yielding is cropped. That takes a long time. That is the essence of patient waiting, isn't it, when it feels like nothing is happening in the ground. I mean, I'm no gardener at all, but I know that I get really impatient and I'm not waiting for them for food.

And I guess that's why he links into the example of Job, doesn't he? I mean, he is the essence of perseverance in the way that he endured so much suffering and yet kept his eyes fixed on the Lord, his Regina, because he knew what was going to happen in the end.

Felicity: Yes, absolutely. I love that line where he says, we consider blessed those who have persevered, but the definition of being blessed is for those who have persevered, which is I think I hear that and I think, oh man, am I able to persevere? Am I able to be patient? Am I able to stand firm? A bit of that same sort of James thing we've had all the way through. I don't know whether you think that the kind of the punch of like, oh, is this, am I doing this?

Sarah: And I think this really does ring back to chapter one, verse two, doesn't it, where he's saying persevere, consider it joy to persevere in trials because of what's happening as you do that because of how you're being made more mature and complete. And so it does prompt that question, doesn't it? But then in that chapter one bit, he says, if anyone lacks wisdom, ask God, pray, doesn't he? Like, that's the answer to how we understand how we can persevere in times of suffering. And then that's where he goes after this. Doesn't he then lead into a big last section on praying?

Felicity: Yeah, I think that's right. And I think it is actually quite a good almost decided that we're coming to it again at the end of James. So the first chapter of James, ask for wisdom, do this thing and ask for wisdom. And you're like, wow, that sounds really hard. And hopefully as we've been going through James, we're beginning to cultivate this mindset that we know we can't do it on our own. We need to ask God for the wisdom that we see ultimately in Christ and we kind of fall back on that grace. So hopefully as we read this and I think that as I come to the end of James, I want this perspective more, like I want to wait more patiently. I want to be the one who's looking forward to Jesus return. And as I want it, I think having come through James, I'm thinking, yeah, actually, I think I will ask God for wisdom on this because I'm more aware than ever before that I can't do it on my own. And I love that. Then the Lord is full of compassion and mercy. Like, what a release. Again, he is compassionate and merciful and that but more grace comes to mind again and again, even though you might.

Sarah: Not see it on the surface, because there's no doubt that you look at James light and you go, well, did it look like the Lord is full of compassion and mercy? There's questions there, isn't there? He enjoyed so much and yet he can say at the end, he looks back and go, yes. And I guess that's the same for us, isn't it? That as we're patiently persevering through trials and there's a big small anything in between trials, aren't they? Like, as we discussed all the way through, it is just life. We pray that we would be those people who say at the end, the Lord is full of compassion and mercy. And with the way we get there, I think, is by continuing to pray. And what he comes on to in verse 13 and 14 is pray like whether you're in trouble, whether you're happy, whether you're sad in all seasons for all reasons. Pray, like, bring your heart to God and let Him shape your perspective. And I think that's the kind of I don't know, would you say that's the driving force of this last bit of a letter?

Felicity: Oh, absolutely, yes, I think that's right. And I think chapter one convinces me of that all the more because we've been instructed from the very beginning to ask God for wisdom when we're struggling, when we're seeking to persevere. And so then 13 through to 20, I think the emphasis really is on the prayer and wonderfully. I think we get a really clear picture of God hearing our prayers here. I think you can't be any doubt that God does hear the prayers. That's why we're told to pray and not just pray on our own, but pray with others as well. The verse 14 and 15, I mean, that is the heart of the tricky bit that we were talking about, isn't it? But just before we kind of consider what's being said about the healing, that actually the fact that he should call elders of the church to pray over him together under the authority of the church, with the people of the church. Pray to the God who does hear and loves to give wisdom that we might persevere.

Sarah: Yeah. And then in verse 16, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other. And then right at the end, if one of you should wander away from the truth and someone brings them back. It's such a kind of community aspect of this, isn't it? Like. You're not on your own in your work with the Lord and he's really affirming that at the end of the book where I think it can feel you know. We were saying right at the beginning like. This feels like

it's a book that you do need to discuss with someone else because it can feel really hard on our hearts concert and it's been so valuable for us to do this together in community with one another. And actually he ends on that note of like the Christian walk, like the Christian life is praying together and seeking the Lord together to kind of keep going in that walk together, isn't it?

Felicity: Yes, I think that's just exactly right. Should we just try and navigate verses 14 to 15 because no.

Sarah: We were.

Felicity: Saying if you just read verse 15 and the prayer for them, faith will make the sick person well, you just left thinking, all right, that doesn't seem well, that's not my experience.

Sarah: Well, let's unpack that briefly because actually it's not our experience, is it? And it's not. So how do we read a verse like that? We have to read it in context of what the letter has said so far. What is the letter said so far? If we glanced back to the last time we would look at all, even the time before, no, last time, we were seeing that our life is but amiss. And that context means that we don't know whether we're going to be here tomorrow or not. And also he's just spent time saying perseverance and suffering. So this is not a quick fix. Click your fingers, demand the Lord makes you better and that's going to happen. That cannot be how we read that verse. Would you say that in terms of how to kind of quash?

Felicity: Yes, absolutely. So I think in that context we are a mist. So we know that we don't know what's happening. We're not God, so we don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. We also know that because we just say that we're a mist. It's not all about right here, right now, is it? And as you say, we're called perseverance suffering. So that means that suffering is not going to unlikely to disappear just like that. And I think what's really helpful is the Lord will raise him up, which is the second half of that verse and we've seen that phrase before and it's been in relation to the humble are raised up. From a worldly point of view, it looks like the rich are the ones who are raised up and on the plinth and are just doing really well. But actually in your humility, whatever your circumstances, if you're in Christ, you are raised up. So I think there's no doubt that we can pray to God to help us, to heal us. But actually there's more to that than just the physical healing. Ultimately it's a spiritual healing, isn't it? Like made well, it reminds me of Mark's gospel and the paralytic on the mat, like that kind of language that we're talking about a spiritual wellness as much as a physical wellness.

Sarah: And he does make that connection to me. He does talk about sin and forgiveness in the same breath, which, again, just needs to be caught. It's not that physical illness is always linked to sin, but I think it's just raising a question of if you're struck with physical illness, it's always worth asking the question, are there sins that I have not repented of? And as you do that, as you confess your sin, he says, you'll be forgiven. End of verse 15. They will be forgiven. It's grace there and there again, isn't it? Yeah.

Felicity: And I think that is the James' mindset, isn't it? Because you've got an eternal perspective as you're hearing that. If you hear it only from a worldly point of view, then I don't really care about forgiveness of sins. If I'm all about here and now, if I'm thinking about eternity, well, forgiveness of sins is way and beyond a better thing than physical healing. Not to diminish physical suffering, because how awful to suffer like that. But what a comfort to know that eternally speaking life to the full, spiritually speaking, is in good hands.

Sarah: Yeah. And I think that's really where we're running out of time already. And that's where this drives at the end, doesn't it? That actually his priority is for hearts to be wholeheartedly embracing the gospel truth of the Lord Jesus, isn't it? And so he ends with, if there's someone who's wandering away from the trees, bring them back, because ultimately you'll save them from death and covering their sins as they are forgiven. And I think that's his priority the whole way through, isn't it? He's wanting us to be whole hearted. He does not want us to be double minded because he sees the danger in it. And yeah, as a community, that's what we are called to do is to encourage others to keep going.

Felicity: Yeah.

Sarah: Through trials, you encourage one of them to keep going through praying, don't you? And that might be through healing, but it might be through the Lord not healing you and encouraging you to grow in perseverance.

Felicity: Yeah. And I think the call to that off the back of James, like, we know who God is better. We know that our hearts have been exposed, we know that we're to ask Him for wisdom and to pray. And so we're all the more likely to do that now at the end of James. I think so. I think there's a kind of comfort in that because it can feel like a bit of a punch again. But actually, we know that we can fall back on the grace. We should fall back on the grace that's been revealed all through the letter. And on that note, Sarah, why don't you pray for us as we crazily?

Sarah: I know. I'm so sorry. Everyone that's like literally only even touched the surface, but okay, let me pray on this note. Father God, thank you so much that we can pray to you. Thank you so much that the prayer of a righteous person, that anyone who trusts in the Lord Jesus is powerful and effective. And we pray tonight, this afternoon, this morning, wherever anyone is listening to this, we pray. Please, Lord, would you help us to believe those words and to cherish those words and to pray to pray when we're in trouble, to pray when we're happy, to pray when we're suffering, and to pray for our brothers and sisters who may be wandering away, who may be struggling. Lord, would you help us to pray? And would you help us to see that living wholeheartedly for you involves this kind of prayer and this kind of dependence on you? Thank you that we can, and thank you that you hear our prayers in Jesus name. Amen.

Felicity: Amen. So we will add some questions into the show notes when we hopefully push beyond the whistle stop tour and help to help us drive it to the heart. That's what we want to do, isn't it? Show notes?

Sarah: That felt like, yeah, it's been too quick today, isn't it? But we will be rounding up the series next week, and so we will kind of come back to this to touch on how it finishes in that, won't we?

Felicity: Yes, absolutely.

Sarah: Great.

Felicity: Well, thanks for listening, everyone, and nice to see you, Sarah. Until next time.

Sarah: All right, bye bye. Thanks for listening to this episode. It's sponsored by ten of those.com. Check them out for great discounted resources that point to Jesus.