

Wanderers

Proper 21

Pastor Josh Frazee

James 5:13-20

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

How many of you are wanderers? How many of you enjoy going to new places and new people and traveling from place to place? How many of you refuse to be content staying in the same place?

Not many of you, huh? Most of you have grown up right here and lived in the same house, or a close house, for most of your life? And yet, the Scriptures say that you—yes you—are a wanderer.

What is a wanderer? Dictionary.com gives several pertinent synonyms for the word: vagabond, nomad, rover, explorer, stray, ranger, straggler, adventurer, itinerant, vagrant, drifter, gypsy, gadabout, bum, traveler, gad, stroller, pilgrim, roamer, beachcomber. Each of those words casts a little bit more light on what it means to be a wanderer. Yet while some of the words give a pleasant or appealing tint to the word, the Scriptures do not.

You like sheep have gone astray. When you sin, you wander from the truth. That is, you are no longer at the truth, but away from it.

Verse 1

“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone among you cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.”

A few weeks ago we looked at prayer. Here James returns to it again, summing up his epistle. He tells those who are suffering to pray; those who are cheerful to sing praises to God, which is also communication with Him; and that if anyone is sick, the elders—that is, the pastors—should be called upon to pray for that person. James has already been demonstrating that a prayer will not be answered outside of faith. One outside of faith does not ask for that which is best. One outside of faith may pray for hurting to end—not to bring glory to God—but to get back to a life free from God. To this God replies in the negative, desiring that the one outside of faith would come to Him.

But for those of us in faith, we may still ask to have suffering end if it will bring glory to God. Yet even still God may not answer as we desire. God certainly works to bring us blessing—and when He does and things are going well, that is when we sing praises to Him. In faith, though, we can still give Him praise and glory as we endure suffering because we know that God works everything together for good for those who believe in Him—even suffering itself.

After all, can anything make us poor? Let me first ask you, are you rich? Hopefully you would answer yes. After all, you have received the forgiveness of your sins and eternal life, plus everything you need for this body and life. So again, can anything make you poor? No, not even suffering or having a challenging time with someone else—be it a boss, a neighbor, or even a spouse. So in all things, we are rich in our Lord Jesus Christ, and in all things we can pray the prayer of faith, knowing that God will give us everything we need, even if it is more suffering for the time being.

Yet so often our sinful natures want to wander from this truth. They want to claim to be made poor by the harsh words or problems we have with someone else. They want us to desire to be taken out of the

suffering—and that if we aren't, that God is somehow being "mean" to us. Dear friends in Christ, do not wander from the truth. Wandering from the truth is sin.

Verse 2

"(I)f he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit."

When we wander into sins, we need to be brought back. This is true of any sins; including those sins we do against one another. We heard this spring all about reconciliation; how we are to go to our brother or sister and confess the sin we have done against him or her. This is not to say that the sin you or I committed against anyone else has impoverished him or her—remember that we are not to wander from the truth of the riches we have in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Rather, it is so that we would be forgiven.

In the same way, one who is being confessed to is not to lord it over his or her brother or sister in Christ but you are to forgive your neighbor. How often? Seventy times seven times. Remember, no matter how your neighbor may have sinned against you, he or she has not robbed you of the eternal life which you now have in Christ Jesus. He or she has not robbed you of the forgiveness of your sins. You are still rich. And as one who has been made rich by Jesus, you ought to desire to forgive your neighbor, just as you were forgiven by our Lord Jesus.

This is as true for our brothers and sisters in Christ as it is for those outside of the Church. Certainly Satan will be there insisting that you might be able to forgive one outside of the Church who doesn't know any better, but that those inside the Church should know better. But what do the Scriptures tell us? Do they tell us that once we are brought to Christ that we no longer sin? Or do they tell us that while we have the desire to do what is good, more often than not we continue doing those very things we ought not to be doing?

Verse 3

"My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."

We are wanderers. We wander away from the truth time and again. Yet God does not quit seeking us. He has given us each other, the Church, that we might go to those who have wandered and restore them through confession and forgiveness.

God has sent His Son Jesus Christ to pay for our sins on the cross of Calvary. In the same way, God has made us new creations who desire to do what is right. Yet we remain sinners who wander from the truth far more often than we would care to admit. But God does not leave us to ourselves. He has given us the Church: brothers and sisters in Christ who know each other well and can gently bring back another when he or she wanders.

We are each other's keepers. As James makes it clear, when we go to speak to our neighbor about his or her wandering from the truth, we warn them that they are on a deadly course. If we are successful at warning them, God has used us to save our neighbor from death—not just physical death, but eternal death. When this

happens, our neighbor repents and his or her sins—even if they are a multitude—are covered by the blood of Jesus' death on the cross—the same blood which covers our sins.

We are all wanderers from the truth because we sin. Some sins are easier to repent of than others, but in faith, we repent of all of our sins so that we might be covered in the blood of Jesus. In this way, we are brought back to the truth and are on the path of righteousness which leads to salvation once again. In Jesus' Name. Amen.