

WHERE DO YOU STAND WITH YOUR FAITH? #12

“Faith brings Wholeness”

Psalm 41:1-4, John 5:1-15, James 5:13-20

November 19 & 20, 2022

“When people need to be cut out of cars after a bad accident, there is often a tool used called the ‘Jaws of Life.’ These big cutters can cut away doors to give access to people who are trapped. Even when drivers have had wrecks through no one’s fault but their own, rescue crews still employ the ‘Jaws of Life’ to get them out of trouble. Whether a driver was not paying attention as they talked on their cell phone or listened to the radio, when they end up in a situation where they are trapped and need help, the ‘Jaws of Life’ can still be used to get them out of a jam.

“**Christians are supposed to be the ‘Jaws of Life’ to one another.** When a person is trapped, whether through their own fault or through the fault of another, we should be ready to rescue one another. We should be willing to offer a lifeline to our brothers and sisters when they are stuck.”¹

That is the goal of the Christian Church, to touch the lives of people in such a way as to bring life to them through the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit of God, in Jesus Christ our Lord. We are to be a rescue station in the midst of our communities, bringing life to all who find themselves lost, or trapped, or enslaved by the things of this world.

There are so many ways that people can become trapped. When we are left to our own ways, we seek pleasure and enjoyment and entertainment. When we turn from the commands of the Lord our God, we turn to what we think is right and good, and we do whatever we see is fit to do. When we fail to give hope to the next generation by telling them all that the Lord our God has done for us, they are left with a God-sized emptiness in their lives that they go about seeking to fill.

Humans are interesting creatures in that we have to have a “god” in our lives. The one we make “god” determines the direction in our life. If we make pleasure our god, we go about worshipping pleasure in all forms and designs. If we make money our god, we pursue it with all our hearts. If we make power our god, that is the thing that drives our lives. If we make fame our god, everything we do

¹ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 252-253, #769)

points us in that direction. Whatever we put as “god” in our lives, we follow that god wholeheartedly. Unfortunately, the god we choose often leads us to our own destruction. So we find ourselves trapped by the very things that we have hoped would give us purpose and meaning in our lives, and we still find an emptiness within us that we crave to fill.

But if we put the Lord God as the number one person in our life, when we seek to follow His will and His ways with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, that emptiness is filled, and God guides us to fulfillment and purpose and meaning in our lives.

You see, **when we substitute the Lord God Almighty for the man-made gods of this world, we always find ourselves in need of rescue.** The gods of pleasure wreak havoc on our bodies and though they promise great enjoyment, there is still emptiness. Alcohol and drugs may give temporary pleasure, but they destroy our very bodies. Sexual desires make us so fixated upon satisfying our own bodily craving that we begin to denigrate others into sex objects just so that we can find that momentary delight. That craving drives us to even take what is not proper, causing rape and incest and adultery and homosexuality that destroys the lives of others just to satisfy our own cravings.

When the god of money is worshipped, all our attention is focused on the accumulation of material wealth. We work long hours, maybe multiple jobs, just to accumulate the things of this world. Yet, no matter how much we have, there is still that emptiness within us that drives us to get more, and more, AND MORE. More is never enough, so we work ourselves to death just to get something that never satisfies, and that is so quickly lost. One storm, one fire, one earthquake, one war, one bad turn of the market, can take it all away from us in a moment.

The god of power is an insatiable driver that causes us to make ourselves bigger than life, giving us the mindset that no one else is better than we are. We do whatever is necessary to get to the top of the ladder of power and authority, while at the same time, putting other people down, making them lesser in importance than us so that we can achieve the ultimate power and authority. Once we begin to experience the thrill of power, we tend to subject others to minority roles, and we treat them with less

dignity or respect. We become our own number one in our eyes, and we begin to demand that everything becomes our way or none. Then everyone else is left to serve us, and no matter what their lives look like, we have to be the all in all of the little world we seek to create. Yet, power is so fleeting, for who knows how long we have to live, and just one sickness, just one rebellion against us, takes it all away, and what are we left with?

When our lives are focused on fame as our god, we do all we can to be important in the eyes of our adoring fans. Whether it is pretending to be another person, or whether we do something so memorable that it keeps us in the minds of all the people, our pursuit is popularity and recognition and notoriety and prominence. Only then are we important to other people. However, fame is a vain god that can drive us insane attempting to get the acceptance of the people. It's here today, and gone tomorrow, and it leaves us empty, still craving for more.

All of the gods of this world leave us searching for more, and we find ourselves wrecked on the highway of personal pursuit of happiness, trapped in a soul-threatening situation, surrounded by carnage and destruction. And at that point all we can do is hope for rescue.

That's where the church comes in as the "Jaws of Life." When the pursuit of the gods of this world fail us, when we find ourselves trapped and in danger of destruction, where can we turn to find help and hope? It is the role of the church to encourage and support each other so that we might find access for ourselves to the healing and restoring power of the One who can do all things.

You see, **there is only one real God, the Lord God Almighty, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Maker of heaven and earth, and the giver of all life.** He is the One who has called us to live for Him, and worship Him, and to follow His commands in order that we find real life, especially when we make wrong turns or find ourselves upside-down and in need of help. And He is the One who has called us to trust Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength so that He can guide us so that we don't find ourselves in need of the "Jaws of Life."

But we are all human - broken and sinful people who often make mistakes and find ourselves in trouble. It doesn't take too long reading the Psalms that we find David calling out for help because he is in need of God's Jaws of Life. And God is there, ready to help us out when we need His help. Many times God will use another person to give us the assistance we need. Many times we will be called to bring life-saving assistance so that another person can see life in a different way than before because they have received the freeing from a deadly situation.

Psalm 41 lifts up those who are life-givers. "*Blessed are those who have regard for the weak,*" David writes in verse 1. They are the ones God chooses to become His "Jaws of Life" in a world hurting from life wrecks and wrong steps. They are the ones God takes special care of so that they might continue to reach out into the world and provide the healing and the help others need. God gives special protection to those who give aid to the hurting and dispossessed. He gives strength and wisdom to those are willing to reach out to rescue another from the gods of this world.

But sometimes during a rescue, pain might need to be afflicted in order to remove another from their dangerous situation. **Resolution of the person's condition may mean painful realization that they are in need of help.** We can't really help those who don't let us know they need help, so it demands that the person finding themselves in harm's way need to call out, and humble themselves into the hands of the ones who can release them from their crushing load.

Imagine a person in a car accident, unable to escape the wreckage, pinned under the collapsed steering wheel saying to one who offers help, "Hey, I'm good. I don't need help. I'll figure it out for myself. Thanks for asking anyway." They may be in great pain, but obviously they are in denial of the dangerous situation they are really in. At that time it is imperative that the rescuer take action, even if the other doesn't want their help.

But the helper can only do so much for the individual in trouble. The helper may get them out of the crushing situation, but the one must be willing to do what is necessary to bring themselves healing, and that may be where the hurt comes.

Listen to the way that James presents it. Here in the last few verses of chapter 5, **James calls for believers to cry out for help when they find themselves in trouble.** This is James 5:13-20. (READ James 5:13-20)

If we find ourselves in trouble, we are called to humble ourselves and pray to God for His help. We have to be willing to go beyond our own resources and our own wisdom and strength to seek the help of the Lord. Prayer is that 911 call to the Lord making the request for His assistance. God's 911 is even more effective than our 911 calls because God has access to unlimited help. I have heard countless accounts of people in trouble calling out to God in prayer and then, suddenly, a stranger shows up who brings just the right help and assistance we asked for. God uses His angels to intervene in our lives when we call out to Him. **But we have to make the call in prayer before God will send His help.**

And then, when everything is going well, it is only right that we "*sing songs of praise,*" (5:13) giving thanks for all that God has done in our lives to keep us from danger. **Praise is another form of prayer,** and when we praise God from whom all blessings flow, He is delighted to respond with even more blessings in our lives.

If we are sick, we need to recognize that it is time for a call out for help, too. James details the instructions, saying the sick person "*should call the elders of the church to pray over (them) and anoint (them) with oil in the name of the Lord*" (5:14). Now, that is James' way of saying, "Call your pastor." If your pastor doesn't know you are sick, then you cannot expect him to know about it. If your pastor knows you are sick because you called him, he will come right out to visit and offer prayers and comfort to you.

The term "*elder*" here refers to the ones called to shepherd the church of God, that is, to do the work of an overseer or pastor. They are the ones commissioned by God to come to pray for you in order to bring healing in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Other members of the church can also pray for that person, but James is calling the sick to include the leaders of the church to pray for them since they have received their own anointing by God to anoint others through prayer. The pastor also has the

contacts with other members of the church that they can pray together for the healing of the one who is sick.

Now, please know that I am not perfect. There may be times when I miss the opportunity to come pray for you in person, but please know that even if I miss calling on you in person, I am praying for you in the Spirit of God. I sometimes need reminders, too, so please be patient with me.

James then refers to anointing the sick person with oil. In the days when this instruction was given, oil was a tremendous medicinal tool that had healing qualities to it. Oil was one of the most common medicines of biblical times. But it was through prayer that God worked in order that the oil brought healing to the person. **So James is prescribing prayer and medicine to bring about the healing of the one who is sick.**

In verse 15, then, James tells us that the *“prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up.”* Again, God is the Master Physician, and when we pray to Him diligently for the healing of the person who is sick, God sees our faith and rewards us our faithfulness with His healing. He may not always cure the person, but He always brings healing to them. And sometimes that healing comes by taking them out of this life, and taking them into His presence, where they will find complete restoration and new life. The heavenly “Jaws of Life” are applied and the person is freed from their situation and brought into the ultimate healing facility that brings the one back into the very likeness of God. In heaven, there is no more sickness, no more pain, no more tears and no more sorrow (Revelation 21:4). It’s not that God needs these people in heaven, but rather He frees them from the pain and struggle and hardship in this world, so that they may find total restoration with Him in heaven. The *“old things have passed away, behold the new things have come. This is all from God...”* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

So if a person is sick because of a sin that they have committed, the prayers of the faithful will help guide them to confess that sin and find healing from their sickness. Not all sickness comes from sin, but those sicknesses that do come from sin are forgiven when we make the 911 call to God for

His help. *“If we confess our sins, (God) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (I John 1:9). And when we are cleansed from all unrighteousness, we find healing not only for our souls, but for our bodies, too.

Therefore, it is so important for us to confess our sins to one another so that we can pray for one another and find healing for our lives (James 5:16). The confessing of our sins need not be just to a priest or a pastor, but to one another. When I sin against you, my soul is grieved, even unto sickness and death. So in order for me to find healing for my soul, I must confess my sin to you, with the hope that you may forgive me and restore me to spiritual healing. If we refuse to forgive one another when they ask to be forgiven, we not only prevent healing to come to the individual guilty of the sin, but we also fail to find healing for our own selves. **Forgiveness is a powerful tool to bring healing of the soul.**

So if the sin has caused sickness, healing will come as we confess that sin and pray for forgiveness. In that way, by forgiving one another, we apply God’s “Jaws of Life” in that wrecked situation to bring healing and wholeness to the one whose life has been affected by that sin. That is both the sinner and the one sinned against. **Forgiveness cuts through the hurt and the anger and the rubble of a ruined life to open the doorway to freedom and rescue.**

Prayer is that powerful! And the ones who pray faithfully and diligently find God’s protection, God’s strength, and God’s mercy when we seek to restore one another. The righteous ones are the ones who have confessed their sins and been forgiven. They, in turn, bring healing to others by praying for them and forgiving them so that healing might continue.

James lifts up Elijah as an example for us to think about. In I Kings 17-18 we see him pray for the Lord to stop the rain as an example to King Ahab that the Lord God is Lord of all. God responded to his faithful prayer by granting his wish, and for 3½ years it didn’t rain. Then, when Ahab finally understood that the Lord was God, Elijah prayed again and God allowed it to rain.

But Elijah was a human just like us. He had no super-powers. He had no authority on his own to do what he requested. His power came through his faith in the Lord God, and when He prayed

faithfully, earnestly seeking to do the work of the Lord, God answered his prayers. It was his faithfulness to the Lord that brought about the mighty work. That means that such **answers to prayer are within our reach as believers, if we pray earnestly, having been forgiven of our sins through Jesus Christ. Therefore, we can do great works, too.**

It is the last two verses of James 5 that are vital for us to understand, though. They address the rescue of a person for eternal purposes. This involves the very tough work of freeing a person from the error of their ways by turning them back to the Truth. A person may have first surrounded themselves with the Truth of God's ways, but at a later time they turn from that truth and wander off into the ways of the world. This may have been a person who may have been involved in the church, maybe even have made a profession of faith, but that profession of faith was only superficial, with no meaning for them. The words by themselves do not bring a conversion to life. Their heart must be in it.

James tells us that if we invest the time and energy to restore this person back to the Truth so that they might receive wholeheartedly the Lord Jesus in their life as their Savior, then we will have saved them from an eternal destiny of death in God's absence. If the one who has wandered away from the Lord can be restored into the faith of Jesus Christ and confess their sin before the Lord, they can find eternal life, their sins having been washed away by the blood of Jesus Christ our Savior. **The "Jaws of Life" in Jesus' Name are used to free them from death, bringing them into life with Christ.** And the angels in heaven will rejoice at the salvation of another soul.

The Church of Jesus Christ is given the power and strength to bring life to those who are in danger of eternal death. Will you be the ones to apply God's "Jaws of life" to free them? Let's pray.

Father, thank You for the promise of Your Word, that helps us to understand our role in the saving of the nations. Give us Your heart of love for one another, so that we might bring life to them, not death. Lead us to those who need to find forgiveness and grace. Empower us the courage, wisdom and endurance to walk with them and free them from the grip of eternal death. Help us to follow Jesus' example of healing to all who will follow You. He has given us the authority to bring life to all who will believe and follow Him. Guide us, Lord, that we might earnestly pray and seek the forgiveness of all people. This we pray in Jesus' Name. AMEN.