



BELLVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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The Praying Church

James 4: 1-9

~ **Brent Russell** ~

- **Before I became a minister I was an engineer**
- As such I love **technical things**
- I also like **outdoor things**
- **And I remember watching a show on these divers that had been sent down from a ship to recover precious cargo from an old wreck**

- The diver **prepares** for the dive
 - Wetsuit
 - Shoes
 - Weight belt
 - Knife
- Then finally he put on this great **big helmet**

- Attached to the helmet was a **lifeline** back to the boat
- Now as I watched this I realized that this is a **wonderful metaphor for the Christian life**
- **Ephesians 6** speaks of the armor of *God* and this image of the diver readying himself is a little like this armor
- All sorts of things to prepare him for this dive

- But there is something else about this metaphor that might be useful that I want to focus on today -- prayer

Let us read James 4:1-9

- The **armor illustration is useful**
- but it is in relation to prayer that I find this illustration most useful
- **We as believers do not belong to the world we are in it but not of it - John 17**
- See the diver has been sent from the ship to the bottom of the ocean to search for sunken treasure
- He **does not belong** there
- He is a **visitor, an intruder if you like**
- We as believers are sent into the world by God to bring others to faith
- **Our treasure that we are to collect is other people**
- Like the diver we have a **purpose a goal**
- **Some reason** for being on the bottom of the ocean
- **But we don't really belong here**
- Both **Peter and Hebrews** tell us that we are **aliens** in this world
- We are in it but we no longer belong to it
- **We are citizens of God's kingdom**
- **Citizens of heaven**
- The diver **cannot survive in this foreign environment**
- so he diver is **connected back to the boat via this link**
- This **lifeline**
- It carries **air** to him so that he can breath
- it also allows him to **communicate** with the captain up on the ship
- It brings things from the surface where he belongs
- down to the bottom so that he can survive

- **It is this lifeline that so closely resembles our prayer life**
- And if we use the illustration in conjunction with James' comments on prayer I think we will find it most useful
- The book of **James list three things** about prayer that I believe are as important for us as the church as the lifeline is for the diver

You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God

1. We do not have because We don't ask

- We don't have because we don't ask God
- Sadly one of the **challenges** the modern church faces is a **body of believers who often have very little real prayer life**
- I am willing to guess that in any church there are **very few people who spend anything more than a minute or two a day in prayer**
- There is a **lack of vitality** in our prayer life that is terribly **dangerous**
- If we use our image of the diver can you imagine what where happen if his **supply line was cut??**
- Or if we **twisted** it like you twist a garden hosepipe?
- Many Christians today are doing exactly that..
- **committing spiritual suicide**
- They are **cutting off their own supply line from God**
- It is through prayer that we **receive our strength**
- It is as we pray that we **hear God** speak to us

- It is prayer that **keeps our devotion time healthy and vibrant**
 - Yet many **despair at the lack of excitement** they feel about their faith
 - Many complain about **the lack of dedication** they have to their quiet time with Jesus
 - **We don't have because we don't ASK**
 - **We don't have this dedication, vibrancy this excitement because we do not ask**
 - **For the diver the line brings this from above that keep him strong and healthy**
 - Without the lifeline it's gutgle gutrgle phhhhft!
 - He will die
 - We need our prayer life to **keep us in touch with home**
 - **Heaven, God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit**
 - **We need to remain in touch with home or we will die**
2. **When you ask you ask with the wrong motives so that you may use what you receive on your own pleasures**
- There seem also to be another group of prayers James tells us
 - **These are those who pray and pray**
 - **But their prayers sound something like: "Lord I need this Lord I want that Lord can you please do this for me"**
 - **We pray and ask for things for the wrong reasons**
 - The diver has been sent to the bottom with a **purpose**
 - He has been sent to **get treasure** for the captain of the ship
 - You can well imagine what the captain would do if he found this **diver stealing** some of the treasure for his own purpose
 - **We too are here for a purpose**

- **We are not here for our own good**, or for what we can get out of this
- **As we have been looking at our gifts we hear over and over again, service, sacrifice**

- The church is here for the purpose of **brining Glory to God** and to **share the Gospel** of Jesus with the world
- But sometimes this does not always go as planned
- I was sharing with the mission team on Thursday that a **church that is inwardly focused will die**
- **Christians that are inwardly focused will die**

- Churches and people that are like that have **forgotten that they do not belong here**
- They have forgotten that they are **ambassadors** for God's kingdom
- They have forgotten they have a **goal and purpose** for being here

- **When we ask God for money**
 - We need to want it so that we can bless others, not so that we can have lots of nice things

- **When we want more people** in the church
 - We must want it so that more and more people can worship Jesus as their Lord and savior not because we want our church to look important

- **When we ask God for spiritual gifts**
 - We need to ask so that we can serve others not so that we can serve our own ego

- When we ask God to **Bless us**
 - We should ask this so that we can be a blessing to others not so that we can have more for ourselves
 - When we are ask in prayer with the wrong motives we become like the diver stealing the treasure
 - **Sent to do a task but trying to use the opportunity for his own gain**
 - We need our prayer life to be **active**
 - But we need it to also have the **right motives**
3. Finally James tells us that if we love the World then we do not love God - this is the diver who has forgotten where he has come from
- *You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God*
 - People sometimes say that the church is **so heavenly minded** it is of no earthly value
 - But James is saying here too that we need to watch out that we do not become **so earthly minded that we are of no heavenly value**
 - **Jesus loved the world**
 - He **loved all those in it** - from the rich and famous to the down-and-outs he loved one and all
 - We need to **Love the world like Jesus did**
 - But we need to make sure that we are not sucked in to it
 - We need to watch that we do not become **so busy and focused on worldly gain that we forget to have an active prayer life**
 - We need to watch out that we don't fall into the worldly cycle of **greed and selfishness** so that our prayer life becomes **self focused and greedy**

- The diver was never meant to live at the bottom of the ocean
 - it is a foreign environment for him
 - But I imagine that it is sometimes so attractive he may wish to stay down there
 - He may even want to cut his lifeline so that he can explore a little further
 - Perhaps he begins to forget the task that he came for
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- **We don't belong in the world**
 - We have just come for a **short stay**
 - **We belong to heaven, we are God's people**
 - Eternal beings who through the resurrection have received eternal life
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- **And it is our prayer life - our lifeline that sustains us**
 - It is our prayer life that **Keeps us focused on our goal**
 - It is our prayer life that **keeps God's vision and mission** for us in the front of our minds
 - It's our prayer life that **keeps us connected to all that is important**
 - It is our prayer life that **reminds us where we come from**
 - **It's our prayer life that reminds us where we are going to when we die!**