

2024 09 29 Sermon **Pastor Vince Gerhardy** “When in Trouble”

Grace to you and peace from God our father  
and our Lord Jesus Christ.

This sermon for the Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, by **Pastor Vince Gerhardy**, is entitled “**When in Trouble**”, based on James 5:13:

*“Are any among you in trouble? They should pray.”*

*“Are there any among you who are in trouble?”* Trouble seems to be a constant companion in our journey through life. Some days it seems more intense than others; some days we are trouble free, but you can be sure that trouble will eventually rear its ugly head again and bring disorder and chaos back into our lives. We are all aware how sickness, an accident, a broken relationship, a misunderstanding, or financial problems, can change our happiness into worry, stress, and uncertainty in an instant.

The word James uses for ‘trouble’ here doesn’t just mean a particular distressing thing that can happen to us, but also the effect that this trouble has on us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The trouble affects our ability to cope, and it’s easy to feel as if we are about to be overwhelmed.

Sometimes the trouble that we face is disappointment in ourselves:  
Maybe a temptation that we can’t let go;  
maybe the way we react to a certain person;  
maybe worry and anxiety that takes a firm grip on our minds;  
or maybe a goal we want to achieve, but never quite get there.

When trouble comes our way, we try to find our own solutions to the trouble we are in:

we get advice from a counselor to solve our personal troubles,  
or go to a financial advisor to fix our money troubles,  
or a doctor to mend our health issues.

There’s nothing wrong with seeking these things.

But to only do this, and forget that we have a God who dearly loves us, and is deeply concerned about everything that happens to us, is to short-change the impact that God can have on the troubles that we face. To keep God at arm's length when we are in trouble, and not to turn to Him and seek His help first and foremost, is to turn our back on the One who truly has the power to help us in our time of need.

Trouble, on the one hand, can get us into a tail spin, and our lives can spiral out of control and lead us to despair but, on the other hand, trouble is an attention getter. For the Christian, trouble carries with it a message. The message is this – turn to God and talk with Him in prayer. Trouble should remind us to get in touch with God, call on His name in prayer, and draw on His strength and power.

A common thing we do when trouble comes, is worry, and worry leads to stress, and stress that gets out of control leads to despair and hopelessness.

How often do you catch yourself worrying over things that you don't have any control over to change?

How often do you find yourself worrying about the past and about the future, and these just keep wearing you down. Paul gives this advice, *“Don't worry about anything, but pray about everything”* (Philippians 4:6).

What a joy it is to be able to turn to God and talk to Him, when trouble comes our way. That's what Jonah did. His intestinal prayer was, *“When I was in trouble, Lord, I prayed to You, and You listened to me.”* Whether trouble comes because of our disobedience, as in the case of Jonah, or it comes even though we are innocent bystanders, it makes no difference. Trouble has a way of testing our character, our inner strength, our ability to endure. It can cause us to question and seek answers. It may even cause us to seriously ask if God truly loves us and why He allows this to happen to those He loves.

Remember I said at the beginning that the word for 'trouble' here isn't just the external physical problem that arises in our lives, but the inner havoc, distress, misery, and tribulation that this causes within us.

Sometimes God's answer to our prayers isn't so much to take away the external, physical problem, but to deal with the issues within us.

This may mean giving us the strength, the courage, the endurance, the faith, the ability to see the bigger picture, the inner peace and calm, the confidence to deal with the trouble, knowing that we have strength and the power of God on our side. For myself, when trouble arises, I have reassured myself that God has a plan for my life, despite the current problems.

In times of trouble, turn to God.

Commit the trouble you are dealing with to God.

Trust His love for you; trusting that He will do what is best for you;

trusting that He will always stand by His word of promise that says,

*“Pray to me in time of trouble. I will rescue you, and you will honour me”*  
(Psalm 50:15).

Pray to God, trusting in the love that He has shown to you through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. He has done so much to get you out of the trouble of sin and death, and He won't give up on you now in the present trouble that you face.

Pray, trusting that even though His answer may be different to what you might have wanted, or been expecting, His answer is always one given in love.

Pray, trusting that even though the external physical trouble may still persist, He will help you with the inner spiritual and emotional burden that the trouble is causing you. Let me explain this with an example.

Tony Campolo tells of a time He was called to come and pray over a man after a worship service. The man had cancer, he was bitter toward God, yet at the urging of his wife, he came to worship that Sunday, and had Tony and the worship leaders pray for him. Tony got a phone call about a week later. The wife reminded Tony of what had happened that particular Sunday; he was overjoyed to hear her speak about the cancer in the past tense. However, his joy was short-lived when she said that her husband had died. She went on to tell of his past, and his anger toward God, and his bitterness, but,

she said, after you prayed over him, he reconnected with God. The last few days were days of peace, they sang, they prayed, they read the Bible together, then she said some very profound words, “He wasn’t cured, but he was healed”.

Make no mistake about it, God does answer prayer in amazing and spectacular ways. One moment Jonah is sloshing around in the belly of a big fish and next thing he finds himself sailing through the air with all kinds of half-digested fish muck and seaweed, and all of it landing with a splat on the beach. His rescue was nothing short of miraculous. When we don’t see this kind of marvelous answer to our prayers for a sickness to be healed, or an accident victim to recover, or a fire or a storm to be averted, we become despondent, and question God's love and His intentions behind these apparent senseless acts of destruction.

Sometimes the healing is deeper and more hidden, as in the case of the man with cancer, whose healing was not a healing of his disease, but a healing of his relationship with God and his family.

We look at the situation of so many people in the world who are in so much need – people in war zones, people starving, people with no homes, no medical help, people trapped in human trafficking – so much misery, and where do we begin? We pray about it. Many of us pray about it every day, and yet we wonder, what good does it do?

James encourages us in the reading today, *“Pray for one another”*. Pray for the people who need help, whether you know them personally or not; pray for the people who can make a difference in the lives of those people – politicians, community leaders, churches, military leaders, and so on. Pray for world leaders. Pray for those who have the ability and means to help those who are suffering. Pray for a better world. Pray for those who are risking their lives to help others.

When we look at the human misery in the world, we could throw up our hands at the hopelessness. It’s way too hard and too big to be solved with a few words. Jonah could have thought of His situation like that.

In the guts of a fish – who would have ever thought of getting out of that alive? But he turned to God, he prayed, and he trusted. We are asked to do the same in our own lives, and for our world. When everything seems to be out of control, and way too big for us to handle, nothing is too big or way out of control for God to handle.

He urges us to turn to Him, to pray, and to trust His love. James says, “The prayer of a good person has a powerful effect”. Someone has said, “The hands that find themselves in prayer are the very hands in the best position to make a change”.

When it’s all said and done, there are lots of questions about prayer and God's response to our prayers that I don’t have answers to. I have a long list of questions that I want to ask God when I get to Heaven, about why He answered prayers the way He did, but my guess is that on that day, as I look back across my life, and that of the people in my life, I will say with some amazement and surprise, “Oh, I get it!”

All the cares and trouble and despair that had crossed my path through life on this earth were a part of a much bigger and grander picture to bring me and others, to this day around the throne of the Lamb. In the centre of the bigger and grander picture that is dotted with so much confusion and bewilderment, is the faithfulness and dependability of God. It is this faithfulness and dependability we can trust, even when we don’t understand the trouble in our lives.

Until that day, we are called to take all our troubles to God in prayer.

The questions that remain for each of us are these:

How can I, in an even greater way, take all my fears and anxieties to Him?

How can I trust God more, and rely on His faithfulness?

How can I frame each day with prayer – beginning, and ending, and surrounding it with God?

How can I prevent the busyness of each day overtaking the stillness that is required to talk with, and listen to, God?

Jesus says this about prayer, *“Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you”*. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,  
keep your Hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,  
as we wait expectantly for His coming. Amen.