

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

James 1:1-4

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. Starting this week, we will spend five weeks reading the Book of James. Today, we will read James Chapter 1, verses 1 to 4.

Before we dive into the text, let's introduce the author of the Book of James and its background. James, the author of the book, is the brother of Jesus in the flesh. Mark 6:3 records that Jesus had four brothers: James, Joses, Judas, and Simon. James is probably the oldest of the four brothers.

During Jesus' ministry on earth, His brothers did not believe He was the Messiah. John 7:3-5 specifically mentions that Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him and even advised Him to go to Jerusalem to show Himself.

It is not difficult to understand why Jesus' brothers did not believe He was the Messiah. Mary conceived Jesus through the Holy Spirit and knew He was the Christ. Although Mary did not fully understand everything Jesus said and did, she kept all these things in her heart and pondered them.

Therefore, Mary did not tell Jesus' brothers about His identity as the Son of God. Under God's sovereign authority, Jesus lived a humble carpenter's life in Nazareth for thirty years. During that time, His humanity was so perfect that He never made a mistake, said anything wrong, or did anything wrong.

Jesus' perfection caused great pressure on His brothers because they were vastly different from Him. Therefore, not only did they not believe in Him, but they also rejected Him to some extent. Even Jesus Himself once lamented, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house."

Later, Jesus began His ministry on earth, devoting Himself wholeheartedly to His work, to the point of not even having time to eat. As a result, in Mark 3:20-21, "But

when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, 'He is out of His mind.'"

But thank the Lord, after Jesus was crucified and resurrected, 1 Corinthians 15:7 specifically records that Jesus appeared to James. Perhaps it was at that time that James believed Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah of the Israelites. After James received grace and was saved, he recalled the long period of living with Jesus in Nazareth. Jesus' daily life was so perfect; this perfection, which once pressured him, was actually the best proof that Jesus was the Christ. Therefore, after James received grace and was saved, he also pursued a perfect life like Jesus', which became the center of his ministry – to live a life of good character in faith.

James particularly emphasized practice and led by example. Church history records that he was a man who often prayed on his knees, to the extent that his knees were covered with thick calluses. He drew strength in faith through prayer, enabling him to live a life of virtue. Perhaps because of his pious life, he quickly became a leader of the Jerusalem church after being saved. In Galatians 2:9, Paul specifically mentions James, Cephas, and John as pillars of the Jerusalem church. This James is Jesus' brother and the author of the Book of James. In the Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts 15, during the debate about whether Gentile believers needed to be circumcised, it was James who made the final decision, indicating that he was the leading elder of the church in Jerusalem.

James primarily ministered to Jewish believers, and this letter was written to the twelve tribes scattered abroad, a term often used in the Old Testament to refer to the Israelites. James himself lived a strict life, adhering to the law, and thus particularly received the support of the Jews in the Jerusalem church. These Jews following James did not understand that the ceremonial laws pointed to Christ and that Christ, having come, had fulfilled these laws. They did not understand that the ceremonial laws were now obsolete and continued to uphold them, which became a problem for the Gentile churches. Paul in Galatians 2:12 particularly refers to these people as coming from James, indicating that James somewhat supported them.

Nonetheless, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Book of James is included in the canon of the Bible. Although James' understanding of the ceremonial law might not match Paul's revelation, his description in the Book of James about the behaviors that should manifest in the lives of saved believers is completely correct and approved by the Holy Spirit, thus included in the canon.

In the Book of James, James particularly emphasizes that faith must be accompanied by works, as faith without works is dead. During the Reformation led by Martin Luther in the 16th century, the truth of "justification by faith" as stated in Galatians 2:16 was restored, helping people recognize that salvation is entirely by the grace of Jesus Christ, and no one can be justified by their own works, but only by the grace of Jesus Christ's redemption. Luther restored a fundamental truth of the Bible, and his contribution to the church is undeniable. However, Luther did not understand the Book of James correctly; he thought it taught justification by works and therefore called it an "epistle of straw," unworthy of inclusion in the Bible's canon. Even today, some theological schools devalue the Book of James, which is a misunderstanding of the book.

"Justification by faith" applies to the beginning of a person's salvation. One must fully rely on the grace of Jesus Christ's completed redemption to be justified by God. This is indisputable. However, what James expounds is not "justification by faith" but "being made righteous by faith." James talks about the sanctification process that starts after a person is saved. Their life must grow, and their life must have a testimony of righteousness. This is entirely consistent with Paul's exhortation in Philippians 2:12 to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." The Book of James does not tell people how to be saved but how, once saved and becoming saints, they should live a virtuous life in faith.

James was martyred in AD 62. The Book of James was written very early, though the exact time is not entirely certain, likely between AD 45 and 50. With this background understanding, let's read James 1:1.

Verse 1: "James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings."

Although James was Jesus' brother in the flesh, he does not mention this blood relationship when introducing himself. He introduces himself as a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. Firstly, he places God and the Lord Jesus Christ together, recognizing one as the Father God and the other as the Son of God. This Son of God is the Jesus with whom he grew up with in Nazareth, who is the Messiah sent by God, the Christ. James says Christ is also his Lord. Secondly, he calls himself a bondservant, indicating that he serves God and Christ, showing his absolute obedience and loyalty to Christ.

Next is his greeting; he greets those from the twelve tribes scattered abroad. These twelve tribes refer to the twelve tribes of Israel, who are dispersed around the world. James, an elder of the church in Jerusalem, ministers to the Jews. Devout Jews would come to the temple in Jerusalem three times a year to offer sacrifices and worship. Many of these Jews had contact with the church in Jerusalem, and these people were James's burden and the focus of his ministry.

In 1 Corinthians 10:32, Paul says, "Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God," categorizing people into three groups: Jews, Greeks (representing Gentiles), and the church. Paul ministered to the Gentiles, while James ministered to the Jews. Regardless of whether they are Gentiles or Jews, once they receive grace and are saved, they gather together to form the church, where there is no longer any distinction between Jew and Gentile. The teachings of the apostles—whether James's, Paul's, Peter's, or John's—are all for the benefit of the church. Therefore, as members of the church, we should heed and follow these teachings.

Verse 2: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials."

"Count it all joy when you fall into various trials" is a perspective quite different from human nature. Everyone hopes for a smooth life without disaster or illness.

When faced with difficulties, people quickly pray, asking God to protect them and swiftly remove their suffering. However, James here instructs people to consider these trials as great joy. James understands that these trials come from God, are positive, and aim to fulfill God's will and purpose in us. Therefore, we should view them with great joy. Through these trials, we can repeatedly experience God's faithfulness, protection, and power. Moreover, it becomes an opportunity to work with God or more accurately, to allow God to work in us, which fills us with joy.

Verse 3: "Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience."

The testing of faith produces patience. Patience means to steadfastly endure under long-term pressure. It is a fruit of the Spirit, emerging from faith through many trials. Upon receiving grace and salvation, the Holy Spirit dwells in a person's spirit, bringing the fullness of the Triune God, including the accomplishments of Jesus Christ's earthly ministry and the nine elements of the fruit of the Spirit. Faith is the ability to receive, allowing the riches of the Holy Spirit to be actualized in the human soul.

When God provides various trials in our circumstances, the soul feels suffering, but faith can draw help from the Spirit to supply the soul. This not only removes the feeling of suffering but also brings joy, enabling one to steadfastly endure the environment. This results in the fruit of patience in our soul. Hence, patience is not about gritting one's teeth to endure suffering; it's not about getting used to suffering through cultivation. Rather, it is the character produced through faith by drawing the Holy Spirit's help amidst trials.

Verse 4: "But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

"Let patience have its perfect work" means to persist in patience to the end, not being defeated by the environment, being able to coexist with it and stand firm,

even joyfully standing firm. The character of patience is a fruit of life developed through many trials. When patience is perfected, we become perfect and complete, lacking nothing. "Perfect and complete" indicates that we are flawless and whole before God, without any deficiency. God's perfection and completeness do not come from human effort but directly from the virtues of Jesus Christ, for God only considers Christ as perfect and complete.

In the Gospels, when Jesus began His ministry, He first went to John the Baptist to be baptized, where the Father testified, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Later, during Jesus's ministry, He took three disciples to the Mount of Transfiguration, where the Father again testified, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Thus, what the Father sees as perfect and complete must come from Jesus Christ.

When we fall into various trials, only by drawing from the Holy Spirit's supply through faith can the virtues of Jesus Christ be provided to our soul, allowing our soul to partake in the divine nature. This means organizing the virtues of Jesus Christ in us so that we may become perfect and complete, lacking nothing. James knows that the virtues acceptable to God can only come from Jesus Christ, not from the abilities developed through human suffering. That's not what James refers to as "perfect and complete." Only the fruit of the Spirit produced by drawing the Holy Spirit's supply through faith can receive God's commendation.

Let's pray together: Lord, help us over the next five weeks reading the book of James, allow us to truly understand what Apostle James is saying to us. Remove our biases and natural preferences, helping us humbly approach Your word. As the Holy Spirit inspired James, inspire us today, allowing us to see this book not as ethical teaching but as a call to live a life full of virtue in faith, being a good testimony to the saints and seekers around us. Thank You for measuring out many environments in our lives today, helping us learn the lesson of patience through these trials. Help us, let patience be perfected so that we may become perfect and complete before You, receiving Your commendation. Bless my life today, I pray in the Holy Name of Jesus Christ.