

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

James 2:1-7

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week, we are going to read James Chapter 2, and today we will read verses 1-7.

There are three stages of salvation for a person: the rebirth of the spirit, the sanctification of the soul, and the redemption of the body. Both Peter and James focus on the second stage, the sanctification of the soul, which Peter refers to as the salvation of the soul. We must grasp this point, otherwise, we cannot reconcile Paul's exposition on salvation. Paul's exposition is more comprehensive, including the regeneration of the spirit, the sanctification of the soul, and the redemption of the body.

Most people who hold a negative attitude towards the Epistle of James have not grasped this principle and think that James is talking about the salvation of a person. In fact, the Epistle of James is written to the saints who are already saved. James wants them to live a life full of virtues. Regarding the salvation of the soul, Peter focuses on the process of the soul becoming holy, and he presents eight steps of spiritual growth; James focuses on the outward manifestation, that is, the testimony of life after spiritual growth.

James himself was a very devout person who often knelt in prayer. The virtuous life he lived was the result of spiritual growth and the salvation of his soul. Therefore, when James encourages the saints to live a virtuous life, do not regard it as ethical teaching. Although it may seem similar on the surface, James leaves some principled hints to help us understand his true intention.

For example, at the end of Chapter 1, he mentions that a truly devout person will bridle his tongue and care for orphans and widows in their trouble. On the surface, this seems no different from worldly ethical teachings, and many charitable organizations are doing these good deeds. But James adds the phrase "and to keep

oneself unspotted from the world," which shows that the source and principles James talks about are different. In 2:1-13, James continues to teach people not to show favoritism, providing some examples that seem like simple ethical rules, but we must pay attention to the underlying hints James gives.

Verse 1: "My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality."

At the beginning, James addresses his readers as "my brethren." James's audience is the saints who are already saved. His burden is not to preach the gospel to bring people to salvation and regeneration; his burden is to help the saints live a life full of virtues. Now he reminds the saints not to show favoritism, which also seems like common sense. But in this verse, he tells us the reason for not showing favoritism is that we believe in the glorious Lord Jesus Christ. "信奉" in the Chinese Union Version translates as "have faith" in KJV, which actually means to believe.

Generally, after people believe in Jesus Christ, they have unspeakable peace and joy, but there seems to be no significant change in them; this is just the beginning. James does not tell us about the process of life growth, that is Peter's burden; James tells us the manifestation after life growth, which is that because you believe in the glorious Lord Jesus Christ, you should not show favoritism. Between the reason and the result that James proposes, we must add Peter's ministry, which is the process of life growth, to make the salvation of the soul complete.

The growth of life takes time. James himself spent a lot of time often kneeling in prayer before the Lord. He realized that believing in Jesus Christ is a great thing; Jesus Christ is so glorious. When you are attracted by His glory, you will hope to be like Him. You will also be able to receive the Word of Life with meekness. Through the Word of Life, your soul gradually sheds filth and evil; your soul's emotions will love God's word, your soul's mind will often think about God's word, and your soul's will will decide to obey God's word. This is the process of a soul being saved. James experienced this himself, but he does not elaborate on it in his epistle. James

directly tells us the result, which is to no longer show favoritism. Then, James gives a practical example to tell us that we should not show favoritism in church life.

Verses 2-3: "For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, 'You sit here in a good place,' and say to the poor man, 'You stand there,' or, 'Sit here at my footstool,'"

This example might be something James encountered in church life. James remained in the church in Jerusalem, which was a church mainly composed of Jews. Acts 6:7 tells us that at the beginning, the church's preaching was powerful, so much so that many priests were obedient to the faith. By Acts 21:20, after Paul returned to Jerusalem from his third missionary journey, the elders of the church in Jerusalem told Paul that there were many thousands of Jews who believed, and they were all zealous for the law. These Jewish believers, who were zealous for the law, were the ones James served. Their understanding of the gospel truth did not reach Paul's level of revelation and often became a problem for the Gentile churches Paul served. Despite this, these Jewish saints were James's burden, and James faithfully fulfilled his ministry.

At that time, some synagogues in Jerusalem also became places for Christians to gather, and those who came to the synagogue included Jewish saints and possibly some who adhered to Judaism. James uses the example of the synagogue, saying that if two men come to the assembly, one wearing gold rings and fine clothes and the other, a poor man, in filthy clothes, how would you arrange their seats? People generally would instinctively decide to arrange the man in fine clothes to sit in a good place, while telling the poor man in filthy clothes to stand or sit at a footstool. This is what the institutions of the world do, and it is what people themselves expect.

Actually, this is more or less the situation in today's church. Although the arrangement of seats in the church today no longer distinguishes between higher

and lower positions, a saint with a good background, high education, and high social status is more likely to be respected and easily assigned important positions and ministries in the church. This is a phenomenon that should not exist.

Verse 4: "have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?"

James condemns this phenomenon as partiality and judging people with evil thoughts. There should be no distinction of rich and poor or high and low status in the church. We are all brothers and sisters, all family members in God's house. The church is the body of Christ, a spiritual organism. Indeed, there are differences in spiritual maturity among saints, but this difference follows the opposite principle: the mature should serve the young; those with rich experiences should supply those in need; the gifted should equip those who need training. The goal is to ensure every member in the body can find their place in the church and play their role.

Verse 5: "Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?"

James says God has chosen the poor of this world. James's perspective aligns with Paul's, who wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:27-29, "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence." Human preferences are for the good and strong; but God chooses the foolish, weak, base, despised, and things that are not. Because when such people are perfected by God, they cannot boast in the flesh; everything is by God's grace, everything is God's work. You might think God deliberately does the opposite, but it's not so.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:3-10 defines the characters of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. The first characteristic in 5:3 is, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The term "虚心" originally means those who are spiritually poor. The direct translation is "those who are poor in spirit." Being poor in spirit is not others seeing you as spiritually poor, but you yourself feel spiritually poor, needing to be filled with the Holy Spirit. You feel insufficient, needing God's abundant grace; you feel incapable, needing God to work in and for you. You recognize your true condition, so you can let go of yourself and let God reign in you.

God likes to choose the poor because they recognize their true condition and can wholeheartedly rely on God. God then strengthens their faith, making them rich in faith. God is all-sufficient, all-enriching, and all-abundant. Those full of faith can fully receive God's abundance and share in His richness through faith.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is also true in our experience of preaching the gospel. Those who think they are wise are not easy to accept the gospel; those who think they are capable are not easy to accept the gospel; those who think they are rich are not easy to accept the gospel. Because they feel they lack nothing, their minds are proud and they do not seek God. Instead, those who are poor, lacking, weak, sick, and sorrowful know they need help and are willing to humbly seek the Lord and accept the grace freely given by Him. After being saved, it is the same; only those who continue to feel poor will pursue the Lord and love Him, thus inheriting the kingdom God promised. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Verses 6-7: "But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?"

Here, James contrasts the poor and the rich. We must remember, James was serving among Jewish believers, and the rich here likely refer to those in the upper Jewish society in Jerusalem, who were possibly not Christians, including priests, scribes,

Sadducees, and Pharisees. They were the rulers and officials in Jewish society and were wealthy. From the time Jesus began His ministry on earth, they persecuted Jesus and His disciples. After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the apostles established the church in Jerusalem, and these wealthy Jews continued to persecute the church, oppressing the Jewish saints, and dragging them into courts, blaspheming the noble name of Jesus Christ.

After the Jews believed in Jesus Christ, they still lived in the Jewish society of Jerusalem and were still under the jurisdiction of Jewish officials. Therefore, it was difficult for the Jewish saints not to be influenced by them. James, serving the Jewish saints in Jerusalem, really had a challenging task. On one hand, he had to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and lead the Jews to repent and believe. He was also an elder of the church in Jerusalem, exhorting the Jewish saints to live a pious church life. On the other hand, he did not want to have direct conflicts with the Jewish officials to avoid them increasing the persecution of the church. In this difficult-to-balance relationship, James still earnestly instructed the Jewish saints not to show partiality, to treat the poor kindly, and not to deliberately please the rich, because God has chosen the poor of this world.

In fact, the principles James spoke of are still very important in today's church. The church does not need to please those who are rich, or have status, or power in the world, as they will only bring trouble to the church. The church should be a group of people who sincerely seek God, praise and worship God together, seek spiritual growth together, learn together, and serve each other. The church should not be tainted by the world.

Let us pray together: Lord, bless my church so that we can uphold the principles mentioned by James, not being tainted by the world, and not showing partiality. Help us so that everyone who comes to the church can find a place of peace and stability, where they can learn Your word and grow in life together. Help us to keep worldly things out of church life, help us to maintain the purity of the church, and seek only to please You. Bless my church, I pray in the Holy Name of Jesus Christ.