

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

James 2: 14-17

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. We will continue to read James chapter 2. Let's read from verse 14 to verse 17 today.

James tells the saints in James 2:1-13 that they should not show partiality based on appearance, especially by favoring the rich and despising the poor, because God has chosen the poor, the weak, and the sick of this world to be rich in faith. Jesus also said the same in Mark 2:17, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." Therefore, we should not treat people based on their appearance in church.

James further points out that New Testament saints will be judged by the law that gives freedom, which is also the law of life, or the law of loving God and loving one's neighbor as oneself. This judgment will take place before the judgment seat of Christ at His return. Each saint, after receiving grace and salvation, will have their reward determined by their actions. If someone does not show mercy, they will face judgment without mercy. However, if their life is full of mercy towards others, mercy will triumph over judgment when that day comes.

Then, from 2:14-26, James addresses the issue of faith and works. This passage is the core of the Book of James and the most misunderstood part. Before delving into the text, I want to emphasize once again that the audience of the Book of James is saints who have received grace and salvation, Christians who already have eternal life. Therefore, James is not concerned with eternal damnation or the judgment of the lake of fire because every Christian has been spiritually regenerated and has already escaped this great death.

James is concerned with saints living a overcoming life, which relates to the salvation of each person's soul. The way to soul salvation is through faith, allowing

the Holy Spirit to supply various spiritual riches to our soul, renewing the mind, purifying the emotions, and enabling the will to submit to the Holy Spirit's guidance. In this way, our soul can be filled with the fruit of the Spirit, and we can live out a beautiful testimony in our lives. Following this thought, in 2:14-17, James tells us that faith without works is dead.

Verse 14: “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?”

Dear brothers, this is James warmly calling out to those saints who have received grace and salvation, his beloved brothers in the Lord. If someone claims to have faith but has no deeds corresponding to that faith in their life, what good is it? Faith is a conduit between the spirit and the soul, capable of supplying the flow of grace from the spirit to the soul. Therefore, faith is not just spoken words—it must be evidenced by the actual supply of grace. If this supply exists, the Holy Spirit will channel grace through our faith to our soul, transforming our mind, emotions, and will. When the will is submitted to the Holy Spirit, it will inevitably produce good deeds in our lives. This is certain and is the greatest function of faith.

If a person claims to have faith but does not live out corresponding deeds, what benefit does it have for him? Can such faith save him? The answer is, of course no. Saints, please note once again that the salvation referred to here is not about eternal damnation or the judgment of the lake of fire; as long as the spirit is regenerated, one has already escaped eternal damnation. The salvation mentioned here refers to the salvation of the soul, which is the process of sanctification for each saint. The judgment before Christ's judgment seat at His return concerns the salvation of our soul, that is, the degree of our sanctification. The judgment before Christ's judgment seat will determine whether we are overcoming Christians and whether we can reign with Christ for a thousand years.

Dear brothers and sisters, after being saved, we begin to walk the path of sanctification, and God will use various trials to help us learn the lesson of patience. If our patience is perfected, we will be mature and complete, lacking nothing. When

Christ returns, we will receive the crown of life, which is the reward we will receive before Christ's judgment seat. This reward is closely related to our deeds in life, which is why James places such importance on works.

True and living faith will inevitably produce good deeds in one's life. Conversely, good deeds in life do not necessarily come from faith; they can also come from pretense. The most obvious example is the Pharisees of that time. They made a show of being especially devout in front of others, even lengthening their tassels and widening the phylacteries on their foreheads—these were outward signs of piety that could be faked. Yet, behind the scenes, they oppressed orphans and widows and seized others' property. Therefore, Jesus called them hypocrites.

Similarly, today's churches also have some saints who appear very devout in front of others. They may have learned spiritual phrases and memorized formulaic prayers, giving the appearance of piety. However, in their personal lives, they lack genuine piety. When faced with trials, they cannot endure to the end. These acts of false piety do not benefit them at all.

Just as in James 2:1-13, where James instructs the saints not to show partiality based on appearance, this appearance can refer to materialistic appearances as well as spiritual ones. Material appearances are easily identifiable, but spiritual appearances are harder to discern. Perhaps we can reframe James' words to say that saints should not deceive themselves with spiritual appearances, because faithless actions are not beneficial. James then provides very practical examples to illustrate what faith without works looks like.

Verse 15-16: "If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?"

James served in the church in Jerusalem, where there were many poor saints. Acts 11:27-30 records how the church in Antioch collected money and sent it with Barnabas and Saul to the elders of the church in Jerusalem. Additionally, in 2

Corinthians chapters 8 and 9, Paul recounts how he collected funds from the Gentile churches to bring to the church in Jerusalem after his third missionary journey, to aid the impoverished saints there. Therefore, James specifically uses the example of poor saints to illustrate his points.

When a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and if wealthy saints merely say, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without providing what is needed for their body, what good does it do? They may sound spiritual in their words, but if they refuse to help with physical needs, it benefits them nothing. Don't you realize that God intends to supply their needs through your hands? Verbal blessings alone do not benefit them, and by not showing mercy in this matter, you become unsympathetic. At the judgment seat of Christ, you will also face His unsympathetic judgment—what good will that do for you?

James speaks very practically here. If you speak words of blessing with your mouth, appearing to have faith, but that faith does not lead to actions of helping others, then that faith is worthless. On one hand, it fails to assist those in need; on the other hand, it cannot help you in the judgment before Christ's seat. John also addresses a similar issue in 1 John 3:17-18: "But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth." Here, John reminds us from the perspective of love that love cannot be limited to words and speech alone; it must also be demonstrated in actions and truth. Truly loving actions stem from a lively faith.

Verse 17: "Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

Here, James draws a conclusion that faith without works is dead. I want to emphasize again that James is addressing saved Christians; for unbelievers, they do not have faith at all, let alone faith that can be considered dead. In Romans 1:17, it says, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'" Here we see that the righteous live by faith, meaning one must first believe in order to receive eternal life. Those who do not

believe have not yet begun this life. Believers, on the other hand, are already justified by God, and therefore they live by faith, from faith to faith.

This illustrates that faith is continuous, starting from the moment of regeneration and growing through various trials. As our faith is tested and strengthened, it creates a positive cycle: each trial strengthens our faith, and as our faith grows, it better equips us to endure the next trial. Through this positive cycle, we live by faith, from faith to faith, and the growth of faith leads to the growth of life.

Here, James reminds the saints that if you shut off compassion and mercy and encounter a needy fellow believer without providing timely help, your faith is declared useless and of no benefit. James decisively states that your faith is dead in such cases, meaning your spiritual life will not grow. We must heed James' reminder that faith without actions is dead.

Every saved saint's faith has once been alive, or they would not have been saved. However, in the trial of helping the poor, they failed, and their faith died. Because in this trial, they violated the royal law of "loving others as oneself," they sinned. Sin acts like an insulator, blocking communication between man and God, and this faith conduit is blocked. From spirit to soul, the flow of grace is cut off. Therefore, their spiritual life will no longer grow.

The method of restoration is actually quite simple—it is repentance and confession. Through the precious blood shed by Jesus on the cross, we seek God's forgiveness for our sins. After reconciling with God, we must also reconcile with others, so that our faith can come alive. A vibrant faith will surely produce good character in life, creating a beautiful testimony. This testimony strengthens our faith, enabling us to grow from faith to faith.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Book of James serves as a valuable reminder to us. It teaches that a truly faithful life is one filled with virtues, where our actions bear witness to God and bring Him glory.

Let us pray together: Lord, we thank You for the reminder from the Book of James that faith without works is dead. Help me to continually examine myself so that my

faith remains a channel open to You. May I receive the flowing grace of the Holy Spirit into my life, renewing my mind, purifying my emotions, and submitting my will to Your daily guidance, while bearing witness to virtue in my life. Prepare in the church some companions who love You sincerely, able to live the church life together with me and learn the lessons of growing faith. May the church be filled with the sight of brothers and sisters loving one another. Bless the church where I am, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ.