

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

James 2: 21-26

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 21 to verse 26 today.

A saint who has received grace and been saved begins to walk the path of sanctification. His spirit has already been regenerated, and God has already declared him righteous. He has received positional justification. At this time, he begins to experience the salvation of the soul and partake in God's divine nature. When a certain part of his soul is perfected, in that part, he bears the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and he attains dispositional justification. Dispositional justification has many aspects. For example, if he bears the fruit of kindness, he acquires a kind nature, which others can see and testify to.

In this kind nature, he is justified before people. Positional justification is towards God and is the starting point, while dispositional justification is towards men and is the completion. Paul's justification by faith refers to the beginning of salvation, while James' justification by works refers to the completion of salvation. Justification has two stages: positional and dispositional. Sanctification is similar, with two stages: positional and dispositional.

For example, when gold is placed in the market, it is common. When gold is placed in the temple, due to its change in position, it becomes holy; this is positional holiness. For everyone who serves God, first, he must place himself in the church. He attains positional sanctification and then, through daily life, serving God and the church, he experiences renewal and transformation, which leads to dispositional sanctification.

I hope we can all remember that almost all truths have these two aspects. We first attain them positionally, and then as we continue to experience God's grace, we also attain them in our nature. God first gives us the position, and then, in the

position God has given us, we accept grace and continue to be perfected, which will bring about a change in our nature.

Verse 21 : “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?”

We read this verse yesterday. We know that when Abraham was about 80 years old, God promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. Abraham believed, and God counted it to him as righteousness. This is Abraham's justification by faith. In the following 35 years, Abraham experienced many trials regarding having descendants. Initially, he failed, but he had positional justification. He could repeatedly return to God, re-experiencing God's grace, allowing his faith to be perfected through many trials.

When Abraham was 100 years old, he received God's promised descendant, Isaac. And when Isaac was about 15 years old, God tested Abraham, commanding him to offer Isaac on the altar. Although Abraham knew that many of God's promises to him were to be fulfilled through Isaac, he did not negotiate with God, even though he could have reasoned how God's promises would be fulfilled if Isaac were sacrificed. Instead, Abraham believed God. Even though he did not know how God would fulfill His promises, he, in simple faith, prepared to offer Isaac according to God's command.

In Hebrews 11:17-19, this experience of Abraham is explained: "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called,' concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense." Abraham truly experienced death and resurrection in this matter. Abraham's act of offering Isaac is called the testimony of his faith and is recorded in the Bible as an example for all. James says that Abraham was justified by works because his faith was effective and able to lead to action.

Verse 22: “Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?”

Here, James draws a conclusion that faith and works go hand in hand, and faith is perfected by works. James emphasizes an active faith, a living faith that can lead to action. Through these actions, your faith is further perfected. Faith that cannot lead to action is useless; such faith is dead.

Verse 23: “And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God.”

This verse speaks of Abraham believing in God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. This statement is recorded in Genesis 15:6, when Abraham was about 80 years old: "And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." As we discussed, this represents Abraham's positional justification. Later, after 35 years, when Abraham was 115 years old, he was able to offer Isaac in faith. He could testify to his faith through his actions, which represents dispositional justification.

Abraham believed in God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. This faith accompanied Abraham throughout his life's journey, during which he experienced both failures and weaknesses. Yet, he maintained a lively faith. At the age of 99, because of this faith, he gave warm hospitalities to God and was called God's friend. James specifically highlights this to illustrate that Abraham's faith was continuous and consistently led to action. Through such actions, his faith was perfected, and finally, in the act of offering Isaac, his faith was fully realized. He became justified, fulfilling the statement made 35 years earlier about being justified by faith.

Verse 24: “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.”

James' burden is the salvation of the soul. When he speaks of justification, he refers to dispositional justification. His conclusion is that justification involves not only faith but also the evidence of faithful actions. Dear brothers and sisters, dispositional justification requires both faith and the manifestation of that faith through actions. This teaching is one of the most urgent truths that modern churches need.

Due to the rise of mega churches or giant churches, many churches focus solely on leading people to salvation and increasing numbers. With more people, there are more offerings, leading to financial prosperity for the church and enabling the expansion of gospel ministries. As a result, churches are filled with new believers who are only taught the truth of justification by faith, focusing solely on spiritual salvation and avoiding future condemnation. They neglect the salvation of the soul and fail to understand why James emphasized that faith without works is dead. Consequently, the spiritual lives of new believers do not mature, and they lack a testimony in their daily lives. This leads to various forms of corruption within the church, making it indistinguishable from the world. This mirrors the condition of the church in Laodiceans, as described in the Bible.

In Revelation 3:17-18, the Holy Spirit speaks to the church of Laodiceans, saying, "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see."

The Holy Spirit warns this church to do three things: First, to buy gold refined in the fire, indicating that their faith needs to undergo trials to produce genuine and lively faith. Second, to clothe themselves with white garments, signifying that through lively faith, they should exhibit holy behavior in their lives, bearing witness to their faith. Third, to anoint their eyes with eye salve, symbolizing their need for spiritual vision and insight to see their true condition and understand God's will. James'

teachings perfectly complement the needs of today's church as outlined in this passage from Revelation.

Verse 25: “Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?”

James mentioned the example of Rahab the harlot, recorded in Joshua 2:1-21. After Moses, Joshua led the Israelites into the land of Canaan, crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Upon entering, their first target was the city of Jericho. Joshua sent two spies ahead to gather intelligence. They were quickly discovered upon entering the city and took refuge in the house of Rahab the harlot.

Rahab lived on the city wall and first diverted pursuers with a plan. Then she said to the two spies, as recorded in Joshua 2:11-13, "I know that the Lord has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath."

Here we see Rahab acknowledging the God of Israel, Yahweh. She knew that Yahweh would assist the Israelites in attacking Jericho, and she hoped for salvation for her entire family. Rahab declared her faith first, and then she helped the two spies by lowering them down from the window on the city wall. Before leaving, the spies instructed Rahab on what to do.

Recorded in Joshua 2:18, "When we come into the land, you shall bind this line of scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you shall bring your father, your mother, your brothers, and all your father's household into your own home." Rahab's entire family gathered inside the house, and a scarlet cord was tied in the window outside the house. This mirrors the Israelites' first Passover in Egypt

when families gathered inside their homes, and the doorposts and lintel were marked with the blood of a lamb. The lamb's blood then and the scarlet cord here both foreshadow Christ. Rahab's entire family was saved because of her faith and her actions in helping the two spies when the Israelites captured Jericho.

Not only that, but one of the two spies, Salmon, married Rahab and bore Boaz. Rahab became an ancestor of King David and is included in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. In Matthew 1:5, it states, "Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab." In the genealogy of Jesus Christ, only four women's names are recorded, and Rahab is one of them. James uses this example to illustrate that Rahab was saved not only because of her faith in God but also because of her actions in helping the spies. James emphasizes his point that faith cannot be separated from actions.

We believe that the book of James was inspired by the Holy Spirit, guiding James' hand as he wrote. The Spirit arranged these two examples together, indicating profound spiritual meanings. Let's delve deeper into these two examples. Abraham's example was about obtaining descendant, who is a foreshadowing of Christ. From the beginning, Abraham was justified by faith, and later justified by his actions, a process spanning about 35 years. This reminds us that from the moment we first believe in Christ, we are justified by faith, which is positional righteousness. We are born again, given God's life. From this starting point, to living out Christ's virtues in our lives, becoming a testimony for Christ seen and praised by others—that is experiential righteousness. Like Abraham, this process takes a lifetime of learning and sanctification.

The example of Rahab illustrates the salvation of her entire household. Rahab's decision to help the two spies and her belief in the Lord happened in a very short time, likely just a few minutes, before she took action. In the end, her entire family experienced salvation in what was probably only a few weeks. This demonstrates that after we believe in Jesus Christ, if there is a change in our actions as evidence of our faith, it can have a significant impact when we share the gospel with our families. Rahab's example shows us that her family's salvation occurred within a few weeks, reminding us that effective evangelism to our families requires not only faith but also a life that bears witness to that faith.

Verse 26: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

Chinese Union Version translate this word into “spirit and soul”, the Greek word is “pnévma”. The English translation is “spirit”. So it is more appropriate to translate it into "spirit". Therefore, it means that without the spirit, the body is dead, and faith without works is also dead. Let's first consider that without the spirit, the body is dead. Before being saved, our spirit is dead; though our bodies are alive, they are heading towards death, living without hope, much like being dead. This perspective holds from an eternal standpoint.

Our physical existence spans only about 100 years, and if during this time we do not obtain eternal life, in the perspective of eternity, these 100 years are merely a blink of an eye. Therefore, without the spirit, the body is dead. After being saved, the spirit comes alive and receives eternal life, and the body follows suit in living again. We all agree that without the spirit, the body is dead. Correspondingly, it should be said that faith without works is dead. The body is visible, corresponding to visible actions; the spirit is invisible, corresponding to unseen faith. Faith without works is dead, as is affirmed in the doctrine of justification by faith.

Before you believe, you may have had many good deeds, but because you have not yet believed, these actions cannot help you to be saved. Therefore, these deeds are all useless, they are dead, and they do not benefit you, nor do they have any effect. However, once you are saved by grace, you must continue forward, allowing your soul to also be saved, enabling you to attain righteousness of character. At this point, your faith should be lively, effective, and capable of producing action. In this stage, your experience confirms that faith without works is dead, which is James's primary concern. For the salvation of our souls, our faith must be accompanied by actions.

Dear brothers and sisters, the faith that saves and the faith that lives as a testimony are two stages of our learning journey: one is justified by faith, the other is by deeds. May we all learn the lessons of faith, first being justified before God through

faith, and then living lives full of virtues by faith in our daily lives. Let us bear witness to others so that our faith and actions may walk hand in hand.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for guiding us through the book of James, helping us understand that after receiving grace and salvation, we must live out good deeds through faith. May our lives be a testimony that strengthens our faith. Help me not only to be regenerated in my spirit but also sanctified in my soul, so that I may bear a beautiful witness in life to glorify Your name. Bless the church where I belong, with saints who love You sincerely and can testify together and glorify Your name. Bless our church, we pray in the name of Jesus Christ.