

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

James 3: 5-8

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. We'll continue to read James Chapter 3, and today we will read verses 5-8.

James is a very practical man; he focuses on the manifestation of man's works. He is not like the hypocritical Pharisees, who only do superficial work. James led by example and became a model of piety for others. In his humility, he confessed that he still stumbled in many things, especially in his words. From his personal experience, he tells the saints that if anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

When Jesus carried out His earthly ministry, He often used things around Him or experiences familiar to everyone to make metaphors, helping people understand the abstract truths. James learned from Jesus' way of preaching. He compared the tongue to a bit in a horse's mouth; the rider controls the bit and makes the horse obedient, thus directing the whole body. He also compared the tongue to a rudder of a ship; the helmsman controls the rudder, thus steering the ship according to his will, enabling it to transport and deliver cargo.

In these two examples, James seems to take a positive perspective, telling us that the tongue is an organ, and if controlled by the new man, it can make the whole person obedient to God and function according to God's will.

This new man is the soul transformed by the Holy Spirit, as mentioned in 2 Corinthians 4:16, 'being renewed day by day.' The word “内心,” if translated directly, is “inner man,” as also mentioned in Colossians 3:10, 'and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.' If this rider, this helmsman, is our gradually renewed new man, he will help us obey God and fulfill the functions that God wants us to fulfill.

The tongue is an organ of the body, and this organ is neutral. If controlled by the old self or the old man, it will lead to very corrupt results. James continues to describe the destructive consequences by using parables.

Verse 5: "Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!"

Similarly, the tongue is a small member of the body, but it can boast great things, just like a small spark can set a large forest on fire. In recent years, due to climate change, wildfires often occur in summer, with such large-scale events that they often leave national fire brigades helpless. For example, the smoke from wildfires in Canada can even drift thousands of miles to the East Coast of the United States. The cause of these wildfires is often something as small as a carelessly discarded cigarette butt or an unattended campfire. Once this small spark ignites, the speed at which it spreads, the vast area it burns, and the severity of the damage are all unimaginable. Similarly, a few words of slanderous gossip, once spread, become uncontrollable and cause enormous harm.

Verse 6: "And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell."

The tongue, like fire, not only causes great harm to the surrounding environment but also brings irreparable disaster to oneself. James says that the tongue is a fire, a fire that can set on fire the course of nature. The course of nature signifies that a person's life operates on a predetermined track, passing through seasons of life and experiencing various things. Originally, it was quite beautiful, but if the tongue is not controlled, it will ignite the course of life like a fire. As you pass through, it burns with intense flames, overloading the senses and preventing one from appreciating the beauty of life. After passing through, only ashes remain, and there is nothing left to remember. This fire that ignites the course of nature is kindled by hell.

Here we see that if the tongue is not controlled by the new man or the transformed soul, it will be controlled by the old self, whose flesh is derived from Satan. The fire ignited by Satan comes from hell. The fire in the world may eventually burn out, but the fire of hell never ceases. James vividly describes the disasters that the tongue, like fire, can bring upon oneself.

The tongue is not only like fire, but it is also a world of iniquity that can defile the whole body. James emphasizes deeds; when your tongue speaks impure words, it renders the whole body unclean, and what the tongue manifests is actually the impurity in the human heart. When the Pharisees condemned Jesus' disciples for eating with unclean hands, Jesus said that what goes into a person from the outside does not defile them because it eventually ends up in the latrine, but what comes out from within defiles a person as recorded in Mark 7:21-23, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man."

Jesus directly pointed out various impurities within the human heart, serving as a good reminder to oneself, because people are aware of their own inner conditions, but these inner impurities are not visible to others and thus cannot be detected. As an elder of the church in Jerusalem, leading a congregation of tens of thousands, James could not judge the hearts of people; he could only practically judge by their actions. When the tongue speaks impure words, the elders must deal with it to prevent one member from defiling the whole body. From this perspective, we can understand why James places such great importance on people's works.

Verses 7-8: "For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison."

In these two verses, James emphasizes that the human tongue cannot be tamed. The beasts, birds, reptiles, and creatures of the sea created by God can all be tamed. James here refers to God's initial creation, where all kinds of creatures, including

those that fly in the air, walk on the earth, and swim in the sea, were originally created for humans and meant to be managed by humans.

Genesis 1:26, "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'" God's original intention was for man to represent Him in managing all of His creation. This was the mission God gave to humanity. However, after the fall, humans lost the qualification to represent God in managing all things.

God then judged the earth and humanity with a flood, leaving only Noah and his family of eight to be saved through the ark. After the flood, the relationship between humans and animals was no longer harmonious. Therefore, God made a covenant with humans and all living creatures that came out of the ark, using the rainbow as a sign. God also told Noah and his sons, as recorded in Genesis 9:2-3, "And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs." God placed all kinds of living creatures into human hands and allowed humans to start eating meat. So, James says that all kinds of creatures have been tamed by humans.

Among these creatures are some that are large, like elephants on the land and whales in the sea; some are fierce, like lions and tigers; some are cunning, like snakes. All these have been tamed by humans, yet a small organ in the human body, the tongue, has never been tamed. Therefore, no one can boast that they are without fault in their words. The psalmists often remind people, as in Psalm 34:13, "Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit."

It is because people cannot tame their own tongues that we need God to repeatedly remind us through His word that the tongue is an unruly evil, and it does not cease. Whenever a person relaxes their guard, the tongue will come out to create trouble, saying things that should not be said. The tongue truly is an unruly evil, and whenever it gets the chance, it spews deadly poison. Once the poison is released,

it cannot be taken back and quickly spreads everywhere. The poison indiscriminately harms everyone who inhales it. James uses many metaphors to vividly describe the various harms and disasters that the tongue can bring to people and the environment. I hope we can all accept James' reminder to control our own tongues.

Let us pray together: Lord, what our hearts are filled with, our mouths will speak out. Truly, we should guard our hearts above all else. Help us on the path of sanctification, to bear spiritual fruit through the salvation of our souls. Let not the flesh and its sinful desires be expressed through our tongues. Help us learn to speak slowly and not react from the flesh when we encounter situations, but first bring them before God. Teach us to be mindful of the Holy Spirit and to speak with grace, doing everything for the edification of others. Keep and guide my daily living. We pray in the holy name of Jesus Christ. Amen.