

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

James 03: 09-12

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'll be reading James chapter 3, and today we'll read from verse 9 to verse 12.

James uses very vivid language and many metaphors to describe the human tongue. Verses 2 to 4 lean towards the positive side, showing that though the tongue is small, it can control the whole body. If our tongue belongs to the Lord, it can lead our whole body to obedience and function appropriately according to the Lord's will. Verses 5 to 8 are entirely negative, illustrating the tongue's tremendous destructive power, like a fire that can burn down a great forest; the fire of the tongue can ruin our entire lives. The tongue is something that no one can tame. From verses 9 to 12, James combines both positive and negative aspects and points out the source of the problem.

Verse 9: "With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God."

Using our tongues to praise our Lord Jesus Christ, who saves us, and to praise our loving Heavenly Father is the rightful use of our tongues; however, we also use our tongues to curse people. Men are made in the image of God, meant to represent Him in managing all of God's creations. If we genuinely worship and praise God, we should also respect the people God created in His image. We cannot praise God with our tongues and then use the same tongues to curse people.

James points out a common mistake that every saint often makes with simple words. On Sundays, we piously attend church worship, sing hymns to praise God, worship God through sermons, and offer our worship and praise to God with our tongues. However, when we return home, we use the same tongues to complain

about our spouses, scold our children, and even curse neighbors who offend us. What's worse is that we have become accustomed to this behavior. James, living a devout life, had a sensitive conscience and often knelt in prayer for his offenses. He also reminds the saints to pay attention to the details of their daily lives.

Verse 10: "Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so."

Praise and cursing come from the same mouth; we all know that this should not be so. But if the tongue is uncontrollable, what should we do? If it were an ethical teaching, given that the more you speak, the more mistakes you make, then the advice would be to speak less, hence the saying "silence is gold." However, if the saints followed ethical teachings and kept their tongues tightly shut, then who would praise and honor God?

James is merely using examples from daily life to first help us see our own problems, which is the first step. As for how to solve this problem, James did not provide ethical teachings; instead, he led us to the source of the problem.

Verse 11: "Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?"

Water is scarce in the Middle East, and most of it comes from wells. Digging wells is common, and knowledge about wells is widespread. In Genesis 26, we see Isaac digging several wells. If a well provided fresh, living water, it was invaluable, supplying water not only for people but also for livestock, which was crucial for their livelihood. Some wells yielded bitter water, and some sweet. A well that yielded bitter water would not produce sweet water, and a well that yielded sweet water would not produce bitter water; this was common knowledge at the time.

The source of the spring determined whether the water was bitter or sweet. Modern science tells us that the source of the spring comes from underground

water, and the geological structure around the well determines the mineral content of the water. If the calcium and magnesium content is high, the water tastes bitter. James uses common knowledge of the time to explain to the believers that whether water is bitter or sweet is determined by the source. Similarly, whether words of praise or cursing come out depends on the source of life within a person. This is not an ethical issue, nor is it about how much you speak, but about which source the words are coming from.

Dear brothers and sisters, we must recognize that people are complex, and Christians are especially so. After receiving grace and being saved, our spirit is regenerated, and we receive eternal life from God, and this life is within our spirit. However, on the other hand, our original human life still exists. Since Adam's fall, sin entered and dwelled in human flesh, bringing various lusts, which dominate the life of the flesh. The human soul is a person's individual personality and is the primary part of a person. Our soul defines our character, including whom and what we like, how we think when we encounter problems, and how we make decisions.

Before salvation, a person is relatively simple because the soul cannot resist the lusts of the flesh, and thus is always drawn by sin, ultimately dead in sin. After being saved, we have spiritual life within our spirit, and this life will oppose the life of the flesh, striving to lead the soul. This is what Galatians 5:17 says, "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another."

After a person is saved, at least within their spirit, there is a life that can oppose and contend with the life of the flesh. This struggle is quite intense and often brings great pain to the believer. As Paul writes in Romans 7:22-24: "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Here, Paul describes that when the law of sin in his members prevails, our soul follows the lusts of the flesh. At such times, we are indeed wretched, and our tongue speaks words of cursing.

The condition for spiritual life to prevail is that we must be in Christ Jesus. Paul states in Romans 8:1-2: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." When we are in Christ Jesus, the spiritual life leads our soul, freeing us from the law of sin and death. Our soul is purified and shares in the divine nature, allowing our tongue to speak words of praise.

Here we see that the key to victory is not a matter of personal cultivation, but rather a decision of whether you choose to be in Christ Jesus or in the world of Satan. Do you decide to live a spiritual life, or do you decide to live a life according to the flesh? This power of decision lies in the will of our soul and is in our own hands.

Verse 12: "Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh."

Salt water cannot produce fresh water. If the source is salty, it naturally produces salt water and cannot produce fresh water; this is common sense. Therefore, one must decide from which source to draw water: from the source of spiritual life or from the source of fleshly life. If from the source of spiritual life, you will receive joy, peace, and righteousness; if from the source of fleshly life, you will receive sin and death. The first thing we need to address is the issue of the source.

After addressing the issue of the source, James further uses plant analogies. Just as a fig tree cannot bear olives, and a grapevine cannot bear figs, this is also common knowledge. However, James here not only points out the issue of the source of life but also advances to discuss the issue of the outcomes of life.

An olive tree bears olives, and a fig tree naturally bears figs. Life must grow in order to bear fruit. Spiritual life resides in our spirit, but the fruit manifests in our soul. The journey from spirit to soul is the journey of life growth, which is certain and requires time. So, what does it mean for an olive tree to bear olives and a fig tree to bear figs? In James 1:2, James tells us, 'Count it all joy when you fall into various

trials,' because these are opportunities orchestrated by God for us to bear fruit. For example, if God intends for you to bear the fruit of peace, He may place you in contentious situations where you learn to draw from the spirit in faith, cultivating in your soul a character that empathizes with both sides of conflict and gains their trust. Based on this mutual trust, you can facilitate compromises and create enough space for acceptance, or at the very least, tolerance. Thus, you bear the fruit of peace in your soul—like an olive tree bearing olives, but not figs. In other words, such trials only yield the fruit of peace and not the fruit of self-control.

In order to further mature and complete your life, God will place you in another trial so that you can bear the fruit of self-control. From this perspective, we can understand why God allows us to face various trials and why we should count it all joy. Because in God's eternal purpose, He desires every saint to bear the full fruit of the Spirit in their soul as described in Galatians 5:22-23: 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.'

For this eternal purpose, God places us into various trials so that we may bear the fruit of the Spirit abundantly. Therefore, when we encounter every trial, the first thing we must ensure is that we have the right source—we are connected to our spiritual life.

Once the source is established, the next step is time. We must allow the supply of spiritual life to reach our soul and over time, bear corresponding fruit in our soul. This becomes our character, which brings forth a beautiful testimony in our lives. Dear brothers and sisters, James through his words and the organ of his speech, the tongue, leads us to the source of spiritual life and the key to spiritual growth.

Let us pray together: Lord, grant us spiritual sensitivity like James', to see improper behaviors in our daily lives. Especially in our words, help us to speak words with grace that edify others. Remind us to return to the source of spiritual life and through various life circumstances, help us grow and live out a beautiful testimony. Bless my daily life, I pray in Jesus Christ's holy name. Amen!