

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

James 4:1-3

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 4, and today we will read verses 1-3.

The Book of James appears to be about the teaching of virtues. Chapter 3 talks about controlling the tongue and true wisdom, while chapter 4 begins with exhortations to avoid lust, not to love the world, and to be humble. These different virtues seem unrelated, so interpreters often criticize the structure of James as loose and lacking rigor.

However, if we look deeper, based on the truths stated in Paul's epistles—like Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:10, “According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it”—we can see a cohesive picture. Paul indeed is a wise master builder; he not only laid Jesus Christ as the foundation but also described a complete blueprint for building in his epistles, especially in the prison epistles. Paul unveiled the long-hidden mystery: God's mystery is Christ, Christ's mystery is the church, and the church's mystery is God manifested in the flesh. Through Paul, God revealed a very complete framework of truth.

When people begin to build, John's ministry tells us it is a life-building process, sourced from the divine life received at regeneration. Peter's ministry explains that this life-building process allows us to partake of the divine nature, which is the salvation of the soul; it means developing Christ's character within our soul, making us more like Christ. James' ministry shows that experiencing the salvation of the soul will inevitably produce a good testimony, enabling us to live a virtuous life. With this comprehensive picture, we can better understand the context of James and see the coherent flow in his message.

James 3 seems to be about speech and wisdom, but its underlying logic is about the source and growth. First, every saved saint has two sources within, causing them to use the same tongue to both bless God and curse men. Therefore, we must ensure the source is correct, coming from the life born of the Spirit during regeneration, not from the old self. If our source is correct, coming from the spiritual life, it will bring forth true wisdom. True wisdom must pass through a clean conscience, planting seeds of peace-loving, gentle humility, and soft obedience in the soul. It makes us love God's word, think about God's word, and obey God's word, thus bearing the fruit of virtue in our lives.

Chapter 4 follows the same thought. Verses 1-3 deal with human lust.

Verse 1: "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?"

Those who are saved have two sources within them, which lead to true wisdom and false wisdom. James 3:13 says, "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom." This refers to true wisdom. James 3:15 tells us that false wisdom is earthly, sensual, and demonic. James takes this line to question the saints in the church, "Where do wars and fights come from among you?" When the saints have differing opinions, arguments arise, and when no one yields, it can escalate to fights, which is outrageous.

Do not think this does not happen in today's church. During election periods, church members often have conflicts due to different political party support, leading to constant disputes, and some even leave the church because of it. We often see the surface issue as political stance differences, but James brings us to the source. He says, "Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?" When man fell, the body's needs were magnified into the flesh, and the exaggerated demands of the flesh became human lust.

Regarding lust, James uses a very particular term, calling it "warring lusts." This emphasizes that the lusts from the flesh are aggressive and will result in conflicts. The wars and fights among the saints originate from these warring lusts within. Often, we beautify these warring lusts, cloaking them in white garments, describing them as defending Christian values, correcting societal customs, or even expanding God's kingdom. These are big banners that are hard to argue against. But is this really the case?

We must recognize that if something is from God, it must have its source in God, be of God throughout the process, and ultimately belong to God. God will never use any means to achieve His ends. You only need to look at the final outcome—whether God receives glory—to judge if it is from God. Therefore, James straightforwardly tells us here that anything that results in wars and fights, no matter how you beautify it, originates from the warring lusts in the flesh. In the church, we should not shout empty slogans but practically examine our hearts. Aren't our views and insistences often coming from these warring lusts within us?

Verse 2: "You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask."

James begins by saying, "You lust." "Lust" is a very strong word; in the Greek original, it is a combination of two words: "epi" and "thymos." "Epi" means to intensify, and "thymos" means passion or desire—what a person wants. So, the word "lust" means to infinitely amplify what a person desires, which is indulging one's lusts. When you want to get something every day but still do not get it, your lusts are further intensified, eventually leading to jealousy and even murder, yet you still do not obtain it. I sincerely hope that "murder" is an exaggerated term James uses, as it's hard to imagine actual murder happening in the church.

However, if we look back at the church in Jerusalem in the Book of Acts, especially after the martyrdom of Stephen, great persecution began. A large part of this persecution came from the jealousy of the Jews, who collaborated with Roman authorities to exert pressure—this was external persecution. I think part of it must

have come from within the church, especially from the priests who joined the church. Due to their unclear understanding of the truth and their hope to Judaize the church, there might indeed have been cases like what James describes as murder—not directly, but indirectly by collaborating with external forces, using those forces to eliminate saints who had different views. James says this comes from the warring lusts in the flesh.

Next, James tries to give an answer. He says, "You do not have because you do not ask." James himself was a Christian who often knelt in prayer. He truly understood that everything should be brought to God through prayer, even the things you lust for. James understood that the real value of prayer is not in obtaining what you ask for but in bringing you into God's presence, allowing you to have mutual communication with Him.

If it is driven by human lust, and this lust comes from human desires, Galatians 5:17 states, "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another." In your prayer and seeking, the Holy Spirit will contend with human desires, for they are enemies of each other. If we can communicate with the Holy Spirit in God's presence and allow the Holy Spirit to have sovereignty over us, we will naturally receive something. What we receive may not necessarily be what we initially asked for, but as we are willing to obey the Holy Spirit's guidance and pray according to God's will, God will naturally accomplish His purpose in us, and we will indeed have received.

Verse 3: "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures."

If we harden our hearts and are unwilling to submit to the Holy Spirit's leading, we will ask and not receive. Dear brothers and sisters, is this not often our situation? We have a strong desire in our hearts and often pray for it, but God does not fulfill it as we ask. Perhaps God wants us to learn the lesson of long-suffering, to keep praying persistently, but it is also very possible, as James says here, that "we ask amiss." At such times, we need to carefully examine what we are asking for. Is it in

line with God's life and nature? Is it according to God's principles of work? Is it for God's glory and testimony?

If what we ask for is not in line with God's will, and we are unwilling to turn and pray according to God's will, then we are asking amiss, and we will spend it on our pleasures. The translation of "宴樂" in the Chinese Union Version is inaccurate because the word often makes us think of luxurious feasts and indulgences in sensual pleasures, which are outwardly immoral things. This is actually a misunderstanding of James' meaning. The Greek word for "pleasures" here is the same as the word for "lusts" in verse 1, so it is better translated as "lusts." If you ask amiss, you will spend it on your lusts. The KJV translates both instances as "lusts."

Of course, human lusts have a moral aspect and an immoral aspect. But I believe that truly saved saints, having been born again and with their conscience restored, would not bring immoral lusts before God to pray for. If they did, it would undoubtedly be asking amiss. James is likely referring to more hidden forms of asking amiss, many of which we might not think are bad, which is why we repeatedly bring them before God in prayer.

However, James raises the standard for asking amiss, saying that anything asked not according to God's will is asking amiss. You might then ask, "How do I know what God's will is?" In fact, none of us fully know, which is why we need to bring everything to God in prayer. Through intimate communion with the Holy Spirit in God's presence, we will gradually understand God's will.

Let us pray together: Lord, use Your word to shine upon us again. Many times, we have hidden lusts within us that we are not even aware of, leading us to often ask amiss. Lord, help us to regularly examine our hearts, especially our hidden motives, so that the lusts of the flesh do not reign over us. Through constant prayer and seeking in God's presence, let us hear the still small voice of the Holy Spirit and give us the resolve to obey the Holy Spirit's guidance in our lives, so that we do not spend on our lusts. Bless my daily life, and I pray in the Holy Name of Jesus Christ.