

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

James 5:1-6

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 5, and today we will read verses 1-6.

The passage we are reading today might be the most severe rebuke of the rich found in the Bible. Being wealthy is not a sin. However, acquiring wealth through unjust means is sinful. Even if wealth is obtained legitimately, neglecting the corresponding social responsibilities that come with it is also a sin. James rebukes the rich from these two perspectives.

As for whether these rich people are saints of the Jerusalem church, Bible scholars hold different opinions. There are arguments for both sides, but I personally lean towards the view that they are saved saints. This is because James held the office of elder in the church in Jerusalem, and his authoritative scope should be confined to the saved saints. However, these saints might be only barely saved, with their spiritual lives still very immature, and their lives not much different from before they were saved.

We must understand that the Jerusalem church was a large church with tens of thousands of members. Many Jews repented and joined the church, becoming members, through Peter's heart-piercing sermon at Pentecost. Among these Jews were many who had once shouted "Crucify Him!" After the church was established, it continued to face persecution, and during this period, more Jews were moved to repent and join the church. We should recognize that repentance is a momentary event, but after repentance, the growth of spiritual life requires a good church environment: mature and experienced co-workers, healthy spiritual pursuits, and abundant life supply. Each of these is a challenge for a rapidly growing church.

The situation remains the same today. Many rapidly developing mega churches find it difficult to care for the spiritual growth of their saints, leading many to describe

such churches as a mile wide but an inch deep, indicating that most saints in these churches have extremely immature spiritual lives. Therefore, it is inevitable that there would be spiritually immature saints in the church in Jerusalem.

From Paul's early epistles, such as Galatians, we find that people from the Jerusalem church often caused difficulties for the Gentile churches, indicating that the spiritual atmosphere of the church in Jerusalem was not healthy. Additionally, 2 Corinthians 8 records Paul's active fundraising efforts in the Gentile churches to help the Jerusalem church, highlighting the inadequate care for the needs of the poor saints there. James, as the leading elder of the Jerusalem church, bore the responsibility to use his authority to help the wealthy saints recognize their responsibilities. James chose to rebuke them, indicating that the spiritual condition of these rich saints was ignorant and shallow, needing to be jolted awake from their spiritual slumber.

Verse 1: "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you."

The word "Come now" is used by James in 4:13 as well, meaning to listen carefully, reminding them to pay attention to what he is about to say. James' words here are addressed to the rich: "Weep and howl," which is a very severe warning. Why should they weep and howl? Because miseries are coming upon them. James successfully captures the attention of these rich people. The rich mostly live in comfort and lack nothing; they have not experienced misery. Standing from a spiritual height, James sternly warns them that if they do not repent, miseries will come upon them, and they will weep and howl.

Verse 2: "Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten."

James goes on to tell them the reason, which is that their riches are corrupted and their garments are moth-eaten. Riches are their means of comfort and enjoyment, and garments are the outward appearance and symbol of their wealth, the two

things they care most about. James declares that their riches will be corrupted and will no longer provide comfort and enjoyment, and their garments will be moth-eaten. Riches are useful today for buying desired things, but one day, riches will lose their function; their garments, accumulated in excess, will never have a chance to be worn and will be moth-eaten, no longer serving as a symbol of their wealth.

Verse 3: "Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days."

The reason lies in the last sentence: "You have heaped up treasure in the last days." After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the last days began, and one day, Jesus will return, ending the last days. During this period, God commands the saved saints to come together to build up the church. When the church is fully adorned, it will be ready to welcome the return of Jesus Christ. The most important benchmark for church building is the new commandment Jesus gave to the church, recorded in John 13:34, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

Paul describes the healthy church life in Romans 12:8-19, and in verse 13 specifically mentions helping the saints in need. James emphasizes this point in James 2:15-17, "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? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." James here also condemns those rich people who do not help the needy saints, stating that their faith is dead. Money must circulate to be useful; a miser who only accumulates money, letting it lie dormant, renders it dead, reducing it to mere numbers without function.

James says their gold and silver are corroded. Generally, gold and silver should not corrode. They are used as currency because their chemical properties are stable and they do not corrode. Perhaps this corrosion is metaphorical, suggesting that buying houses and cars with gold and silver results in houses aging and cars rusting,

just like gold and silver corroding. Gold and silver that do not circulate become stagnant, and this stagnant gold and silver will testify against you.

Because when others had nothing to eat, you did not help; when others had no clothes to wear, you did not help; when others were sick, you did not help; when others were in trouble, you did not help; when the gospel needed to be spread, you did not help; when the gospel messengers were about to depart, you did not help. You only accumulated wealth without letting it circulate, failing to fulfill the proper function of wealth. You withheld God's grace and blessing, and one day, the wealth you withheld will rise up to testify against you. At the time of judgment, the wealth you hoarded will burn your flesh like fire.

Therefore, Jesus says in Matthew 6:19-21, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Jesus tells us not to lay up treasures on earth but to lay up treasures in heaven.

How can we lay up treasures in heaven? Jesus gives a vivid parable in Luke 16:1-13. This passage tells of an unjust steward who wasted his master's goods. When his master caught him, knowing he could no longer be steward, he called all his master's debtors and altered their debts, reducing what they owed. Although his actions were unjust, the master praised him for acting shrewdly.

In this passage, Luke 16:9 tells us the purpose of money: "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home." The nature of money is unrighteous, and one day it will lose its usefulness. Therefore, we must use this unrighteous money while it is still useful, that is, while we are still alive. We should use this temporary money to preach the gospel, save souls, and help people grow spiritually, thus helping people obtain eternal life. Those who gain eternal life will then welcome you into eternal dwellings. This is what it means to lay up treasures in heaven.

James first dealt with the rich people who accumulated wealth without using it for good works, and then he dealt with those who obtained wealth illegally.

Verse 4: "Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth."

The rich own many fields, and during the harvest season, they hire laborers to help with the harvest but then withhold their wages. James here declares that not only do the cries of the laborers reach the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, but even the wages withheld cry out against them. God, the creator of all things, hears the voice of every creature, even those we think cannot speak. When we wrong others, we fear being accused by those we have wronged, but James says that even the things we wrong will rise up to accuse us, and God hears them. This further reminds us that we must not wrong others.

Jesus says in Matthew 5:26, "Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny." This means we must not wrong others, even for the smallest amount. In the simple commercial practices of that time, it was easy to determine whether one had wronged others, so it was relatively easy to maintain a clean conscience.

Today's commercial practices are intricate and complex, with pricing often determined by the market and profit distribution not always based on labor input. Therefore, it is difficult to determine after the fact whether parties have wronged each other. At such times, we need to have a particularly sensitive conscience, maintaining a clean conscience before God and having ears to hear any dissatisfaction promptly and deal with it immediately. James then focuses on the hearts of the rich.

Verse 5: "You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter."

The rich live lives of luxury and pleasure, indulging in earthly enjoyment and feasting, oblivious to the needs of the poor in the church. James says, "You have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter." The Chinese translation may not fully convey what James means. The word "嬌養" originally means "feed" or "nourish," which can be translated as feeding or fattening. In those days, livestock were deliberately fattened before slaughter to fetch a good price. James likens these rich people to livestock that are fattened, enjoying good food and feasting, making themselves fat, just like livestock ready for slaughter.

When our hearts are accustomed to comfort and enjoyment, it is very dangerous. We lose the ability to empathize with others and the sense of life, unable to feel the needs of the poor or the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Our hearts are covered with fat, and when Christ returns, how can we stand before Him?

Dear brothers and sisters, we must maintain a sensitive sense of life, tender and responsive, able to feel the promptings of the Holy Spirit and respond appropriately. This is crucial for keeping us from stumbling before God. If we do not intentionally maintain it, our hearts can easily harden, causing us to stubbornly follow our old ways.

Verse 6: "You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you."

When people's hearts are fattened and lose the sense of life, they commit great evil. James says they condemn and murder the just, who do not resist. In the church of Jerusalem, some Jews had participated in the crucifixion of Jesus, so the "just" could refer to Jesus. At that time, their hearts were hardened, and they killed Jesus, who did not resist. Later, the Jerusalem church continued to face persecution, with Stephen and James (the brother of John) martyred. Some Jews in the church in Jerusalem may have participated in killing other Christians, as their hearts were

hardened. James reminds them of these past examples to warn them that if they continue to fatten their hearts and lose the sense of life, becoming hardened, it would be dreadful, and a trap that rich people are prone to fall into.

Dear brothers and sisters, I wonder if you are considered rich in the church. If you are, the wealth God has graciously given you also brings corresponding responsibilities. You should use this temporary wealth to help people gain eternal life and grow spiritually. In doing so, you lay up treasures in heaven, and one day, those who receive your help will welcome you into eternity.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for Your reminder. In Your grace and mercy, You have allowed us to live abundantly. Help us not to indulge in earthly comfort and enjoyment but to maintain a tender and sensitive sense of life, seeing the needs of the saints in the church and allowing temporary wealth to become our eternal help. Bless the church life I am in, filled with the mutual love of brothers and sisters. We pray in the Holy Name of Jesus Christ.