

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

James 05: 13 - 16

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. Today, we will continue to read James 05: 13 - 16.

When James wrote this letter, the church was generally suffering from afflictions, so he particularly encouraged the saints to endure suffering, be patient, and wait for the Lord's return in faith, love, and hope. He also cited the examples of the Old Testament prophets and Job, to understand the Lord's purpose. That is, through these trials, they could, through subjective experience, better understand what the Lord's will is and be able to submit to the Lord's will.

Next, from verses 13 to 20, which is the last part of the book of James, he addresses the ministry of prayer in the church. Individually, we must have a prayer life before God, and as a church, we should have a ministry of prayer to take care of the needs of the saints within the church so that we can properly shepherd God's flock. Especially when a saint is sick, how should the church handle it? This is a very practical issue and one that every church will inevitably face.

Due to different theological systems and structures, there will be completely different interpretations of this passage, which will lead to different practices. Especially regarding healing through prayer, this is the only teaching in all the epistles, making it difficult to find other corroborative scriptures, which further intensifies the diversity of interpretations of this passage. I can only explain God's word according to my understanding and the commission God has given me. I hope the saints will receive it with clear minds and discerning spirits. If there are any inconsistencies, I also ask the saints to bring them before God in prayer, believing that God will give you the explanation most suitable for you.

Verse 13: "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms."

This verse is the opening of the section on the ministry of church prayer. First, James emphasizes the saints among you, meaning in the church life. The church is the body of Christ, composed of every member, and among the members, if any is suffering, he should pray. This is a responsibility every member should fulfill. When suffering, one should bring it before the Lord and pray about this suffering.

The word "suffering" is a special word, not the usual one for affliction. It is a different Greek word, which appears only three times in the New Testament, the other two instances being in 2 Timothy 2:9 and 4:5. There, Paul talks about suffering greatly for the gospel. The Greek word, *kakopatheo*, is composed of two words: *kako*, meaning evil, and *patheo*, meaning pain. It is generally translated as "suffer evil," referring to suffering from Satan's attacks.

Especially when someone does something for God's will, and it provokes Satan's resistance and attacks, making one feel uneasy and disrupting their fellowship with God. This type of suffering is a special kind of suffering. James says that at this time, he should pray immediately because this is not a general type of suffering. The saints at that time were all in affliction, but James is not referring to that situation. Instead, he is talking about a specific condition where one feels unrest, attacked, and disturbed by evil, bound, and unable to be free.

At this time, one needs spiritual sensitivity to immediately put down what they are doing and go before God to pray and inquire, as this is a spiritual warfare. It is not something that can be resisted by human strength and natural means but must be addressed by returning to the spirit and communicating with God, first examining where the problem lies. Sometimes it is due to one's own weakness, creating a breach that gives Satan an opportunity to attack. At this time, one must immediately confess and repent, apply the blood of Jesus Christ, and stand again in a position of righteousness to triumph over Satan.

If the problem is not within oneself, one still needs to pray, keeping oneself always living in Christ, fully receiving the supply of grace, to stand firm and not become a breach in the church.

When the church moves forward in God's will and grows, it will often encounter Satan's attacks. The church needs to put on the full armor of God. This armor is described in Ephesians 6:13-17: "Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." We must recognize that this is an ongoing battle, not something that can be resolved simply by asking God to remove the difficulties. The church needs to fulfill her ministry of prayer to stand firm and put on the full armor to protect every saint within the church.

James says if anyone is suffering, he should pray, and if anyone is cheerful, he should sing psalms. Joy is also a special Greek word used here by James, not the usual one for joy. This word also appears only three times in the New Testament, with the other two instances in Acts 27:22 and 25. The context of that passage is when Paul was on his way to Rome under arrest, and they had to sail there. Paul had warned the Roman officer, but they did not heed his words and ended up in a shipwreck.

When everyone was in despair, Paul encouraged them. Twice he said, "take heart," which is the same Greek word as joy here. Paul meant for them to be courageous, to cheer up. At that time, Paul and those with him were facing hardship, but Paul wanted them to be courageous and reassured.

So the joy in James here should correspond to the suffering mentioned earlier. The earlier suffering was due to Satan's attacks, but now it is about having God's promise, being able to cheer up, be reassured, and be joyful. At this time, one should sing psalms and praise God. When suffering, one should promptly pray to

God, and when receiving God's promise and release, one should promptly sing psalms and praise. Often, we continually pray to God in our circumstances, but when the circumstances pass, we forget to sing psalms and praise God. This is a common shortcoming, and we should ask for God's mercy.

Verse 14: "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord."

This verse follows the thought in verse 13, which speaks about enduring Satan's attacks. If someone falls ill as a result, they should call the elders of the church to anoint them with oil and pray for them. Here, let's pause to discuss the matter of saints falling ill. Generally speaking, there are three reasons why a saint may fall ill: the first reason is due to the natural law. After man sinned, sin entered and brought death. Therefore, falling ill and dying became part of the natural law.

Of course, this natural law can also be seen as a consequence of man's sin, which will remain until Christ comes again to completely remove man's sin, so that people will no longer face illness and death. But for now, this is part of the natural law. People cannot avoid falling ill: if they neglect hygiene and eat carelessly, their stomachs will naturally get sick; during the flu season, if they do not get vaccinated or isolate themselves, they are more likely to get sick. These are natural laws.

In response to these natural laws, God has also provided general grace, especially in today's advanced medical world. Medical treatments and medications can provide relief to combat natural laws, and this is how most saints are healed. In certain specific situations, God performs miracles to heal. When we call something a miracle, it should not be a norm but rather God's intervention in the natural laws for a specific purpose to allow healing. There are many such miracles recorded in the Gospels.

Every time Jesus healed someone, it was never just for the sake of healing but to manifest God's glory. Thus, Jesus healed individuals one by one and never healed a large group at once. The only exception is in Luke 17:11-19, where ten lepers were

cleansed, but only one, a Samaritan, returned to give glory to God. This example serves as a counter-narrative to mass healing, emphasizing that Jesus' healing is meant to bring glory to God.

Today, I believe there are still healing miracles. If you respond to God's call to preach the gospel in areas with inadequate medical care and someone falls ill, God will particularly care for and even perform miracles to heal, with the purpose being for God to receive glory and for your gospel to spread widely. Therefore, miracles are for specific purposes. Generally speaking, God prefers that we follow the natural laws He has set. For example, Paul's young coworker Timothy had frequent stomach ailments. Paul did not lay hands on him to heal him but advised him to use a little wine, as alcohol can kill bacteria, which aligns with natural laws.

The second reason for illness is God's testing and discipline. When we do foolish things and do not repent, sometimes God disciplines us to teach us to frequently examine ourselves. In 1 Corinthians 11:30-31, we see that there were saints in the Corinthian church who did not partake of the Lord's Supper properly, and God disciplined them. Some became ill, and some died, showing God's severe discipline.

Regarding God's testing, Job is a good example. Job was blameless and upright, feared God, and shunned evil. God allowed Satan to attack him to test him, and Job was covered with painful sores. God's purpose in testing was to empty Job so that his hands could be free to receive greater blessings from God.

The third reason for illness is Satan's attack. In 2 Corinthians 12:7, Paul says, "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure." The thorn in Paul's flesh was Satan's attack, but it was also permitted by God. When Paul prayed to God to remove this thorn, God did not agree but instead said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

With this general understanding of illness, we return to James 5:14. James does not definitively tell us the reason for the illness because the suffering mentioned in verse 13 is not general affliction, so this illness is probably not caused by natural

laws. It is likely due to Satan's attack or God's discipline. At this time, he should call for the elders of the church. Note that the word elders is plural here.

God entrusts the responsibility of shepherding the church to the group of elders. The qualifications for elders are listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. These qualifications primarily include maturity in life and upright character, and healing is not among the gifts listed. Therefore, calling the elders to pray for him is not about miraculous healing but about healing through shepherding of God's life into him.

The elders should pray for him, bringing his condition before God. Through intimate communication with God, they can understand God's will. If it is due to God's discipline, there needs to be a clear dealing with the sin that offends God; if it is due to Satan's attack, they must stand in the church's position, putting on the full armor of God to resist Satan.

Once the elders understand God's will, they should anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. There are two key points here: first, in the name of the Lord, meaning this matter is in accordance with God's will. When we say "in the name of the Lord," it is not a superficial statement but means that what you say and do is in accordance with God's will; only then can you do it in the name of the Lord. The second point is to anoint with oil. Oil represents the Holy Spirit, and through the outward anointing with oil, it should bring forth the reality of the inward supply of the Holy Spirit. This should not be a mere ritual but should use the outward sign to bring forth the inward reality. It is similar to the bread and cup in our Lord's Supper; through outwardly eating the bread and drinking the cup, we bring forth the reality of Christ's spiritual supply inwardly.

Verse 15: "And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven."

This verse consists of two parts. The first part, "And the prayer of faith will save the sick," indicates that this illness comes from Satan's attack. The elders, standing on the church's ground, draw on God's power through faith and bind and restrict

Satan's actions through prayer. Such prayers from the elders will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up, overcoming Satan's works.

The second part, "And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven," suggests that this illness results from God's discipline. This person has sinned, offending God and the church. Now the elders, representing the church, accept his confession and repentance, and together they pray for God's forgiveness. God will certainly hear the elders' intercession, forgive his sins, and heal his illness. The purpose of discipline is to restore the erring person. Through his repentance and the elders' acceptance and intercession, God will cease His disciplinary hand and heal his illness.

Verse 16: "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed."

This serves as the conclusion regarding the ministry of healing prayer within the church. In James's view, the objects of prayer for healing are often those afflicted by sin. We must recognize that James himself was a very devout man, frequently kneeling in prayer, with a highly sensitive conscience. In the large church of Jerusalem, with tens of thousands of members, conflicts and offenses among the saints were likely common.

From James's experience, he observed that among the saints, there were physical illnesses, psychological ailments, and many issues arising from unaddressed sins. These could lead to God's discipline or create openings for Satan's attacks, causing physical and mental disturbances among the saints. Therefore, he exhorted the saints to confess their sins to one another and pray for each other so that they may be healed.

Dear brothers and sisters, you might feel that such issues do not occur in your church. However, we must realize that our conscience is not as sensitive as James's, and our enlightenment is not as strong as his. We often overlook offenses among saints, but this does not mean they do not exist. May God grant us a discerning

spirit to see the true condition of the church and to foster genuine mutual confession and intercession so that the afflicted may be healed.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You that after we receive Your grace and salvation, You do not let us live in isolation but place us within the church to learn to confess our sins to one another and to intercede for each other. Strengthen the church's prayer ministry. When we follow Your will and face Satan's attacks, teach us to pray immediately. Help us receive Your promises and find release from Satan's bondage, prompting us to sing praises to You without delay. Grant us a discerning spirit so that whether the affliction comes from Your discipline or Satan's attacks, we can bring each saint before You and pray for them according to Your will. May those who are sick be anointed in the name of the Lord, so that the church walks in the light and becomes a beautiful testimony of You on this earth. Bless my church and our church life. We pray in the holy name of Jesus Christ.