

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

James 5:16–20

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. We will continue to read James chapter 5. Let's read from verse 16 to verse 20 today.

In the church's prayer ministry, we should pray for those who are suffering, sing praises for those who are joyful, and also pray for those who are sick, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. If the sickness is due to Satan's attack, the prayer of faith will heal them; if the sickness is due to God's discipline, through confession and repentance, sins will be forgiven, and the sickness will also be healed. Then James continues to exhort the saints.

Verse 16: "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

We read the first half of this verse yesterday. Today we will focus on the second half. It mentions here confessing sins to one another and praying for each other, which is a practice that a healthy church should have. This ensures that there are no grievances or barriers among the saints, allowing them to be of one mind and heart. In this way, the church will not have gaps for Satan to attack, nor will there be unresolved sins that bring God's discipline. Thus, everyone can be healed. Then James says, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much," This is an important foundation of the church's prayer ministry. James not only summarizes the prayer for healing but also connects it to the prayer for bringing people back to the right path.

Let's take a closer look at this phrase, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." "Righteous man" has two aspects. The first is objective righteousness: when a person believes in the salvation of Jesus Christ, God declares him righteous. The second is subjective righteousness: based on this objective righteousness, the person begins to walk the path of sanctification, obtaining the salvation of the soul, and living a life that conforms to righteousness.

Objective righteousness is absolute; it stands in the grace accomplished by Jesus Christ, and a person will certainly be declared righteous because Jesus Christ is righteous. Subjective righteousness is relative and is in the process of growth. As long as we confess and repent of our sins within our understanding, allowing our sins to be forgiven and our conscience to be clean, we are righteous. God does not listen to the prayers of sinners, but the prayers of the righteous are powerful and effective.

Dear brothers and sisters, James here is not saying that the prayers of apostles are powerful and effective, nor is he saying that the prayers of prophets are powerful and effective, nor that the prayers of elders are powerful and effective. These are the people we often think of as more spiritually mature and experienced, and we frequently like to ask them to pray for us. James does not mention these people; he says that the prayers of a righteous person are powerful and effective. This righteous person includes both you and me. Therefore, we must all take up the responsibility of our own prayers and pray as righteous people.

How can you obtain the status of a righteous person? First, you must be a saved Christian, and God has already declared you righteous—this is your objective righteousness. Second, you must fully confess your sins and apply the precious blood of Jesus Christ so that your sins are forgiven, and thus, you have a clean conscience—this is your subjective righteousness. If you can stand firm in both objective and subjective righteousness, then you are a righteous person.

The prayers of a righteous person are powerful and effective. Therefore, when you encounter difficulties, you don't need to seek others; you can stand in the status and position of a righteous person and pray for yourself. If your difficulties also

involve other saints, you should come together with those saints, confessing your sins to each other and praying for one another so that everyone can stand in the status and position of righteousness and fulfill the ministry of prayer together. God will surely listen to such prayers.

"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" is a transitional statement: on one hand, it concludes the discussion on prayers for healing, and on the other hand, it introduces the ministry of prayers for turning people back. James uses Elijah as an example to show us that everyone is capable of fulfilling the ministry of prayer.

Verse 17: "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. "

Elijah is widely recognized as the most powerful prophet in the Old Testament. He appears towards the end of 1 Kings 16. The background at that time was that King Ahab of the northern kingdom had married Jezebel and, along with her, began to serve the foreign god Baal, leading the Israelites into the snare of idol worship. At this moment, God raised up Elijah.

In 1 Kings 17:1, it is recorded that Elijah went to King Ahab and said, "As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word." Elijah made this bold declaration to the king that it would not rain. Such heroic declarations are momentary, but for the next three and a half years, no rain would fall on the land, and Elijah would need to pray earnestly. Throughout this period, he remained obedient to God's leading.

He was once hidden by the Brook Cherith, where he was fed by ravens. He also went to Zarephath to help a widow and brought her son back to life. He also confronted 450 prophets of Baal before the people of Israel, and by himself, he turned the hearts of the Israelites back to the Lord God. Elijah performed great miracles through prayer, proving that the prayers of a righteous person are indeed powerful and effective.

But James' focus is on the first statement: Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. He was no different from us. The God he served is also our God, and what he was able to do, we can also do if we are fully obedient to God's leading, just as he was.

Verse 18: “And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.”

Elijah first prayed that it would not rain, and the heavens were shut up for three and a half years. Do not think of this as a small matter. A continuous drought for three and a half years meant that crops did not yield, causing suffering throughout the entire nation of Israel, and he himself also endured hardship. During this time, King Ahab searched everywhere for Elijah, and his own life was indeed difficult. But he remained obedient to God and trusted Him, allowing the miracle of no rain to last for three and a half years. When the time was fulfilled, he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth began to produce crops.

James specifically says that Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. He prayed in the name of the Lord, and the heavens were shut for three and a half years; he prayed again in the name of the Lord, and the heavens began to give rain. Similarly, if we understand God's will and obey it, we too can do great things in the name of the Lord. Earlier, it was mentioned that anointing people with oil in the name of the Lord brings healing. Next, it will be discussed how to turn people back.

Verse 19: “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, “

If anyone among you strays from the truth, this refers to someone who has been saved by grace. He was once in the church life but later became weak and fell, losing his way in the truth. The church should pray for such a person and send suitable individuals to reach out to him and help him return. Dear brothers and sisters, if you have been in church life for some time, you will likely know of such saints who

have become weak, fallen, and lost their way. Although the reasons for each person's weakness and fall may be different, the outcome of losing the truth is the same.

This truth saved him, provided for him, and helped him grow. Now that he has abandoned the truth and made mistakes in it, becoming lost, the church must do its utmost to restore such a saint. First, pray for him, then send someone to help him turn back. God sees every saint in the church as precious and indispensable. We must not be indifferent or think it is of little importance, because Jesus has paid a high price to redeem him, and he once worshiped and lived together in the church.

Why did he fall? It is likely that the stumbling block was something that the church needs to grow and improve upon. A church that does not reflect on itself is a church that is proud and arrogant, thinking it is rich and in need of nothing, much like the church of Laodicea. Yet, it does not realize that it is wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. Such a church cannot be adorned with God's blessings and is not commended by Him. May God have mercy on us, recognizing that every saint in the church is precious, and that we are willing to make every effort to turn back each saint who has wandered from the truth.

Verse 20: "let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins."

"Turning a sinner from the error of his way" refers to when a person has strayed from the truth and lost a life of repentance and confession, accumulating many sins. He thus becomes a sinner. To turn such a person back is to save a soul from death. The term "soul" in the Chinese Union Version translates from the Greek word "psuche," which is rendered as "soul" in English. Thus, a more accurate translation would be "soul." We can be certain that this person was once saved, because an unbeliever's spirit has not yet been made alive. He must first believe to receive the regenerated spirit. If a person truly believes, his spirit is born again, receiving eternal life, which does not die; therefore, his spirit will not die.

After a person is born again, the transforming work occurs in his soul. Every believer, through daily reading of the Bible and prayer, grows in the truth, and his soul is renewed and grows each day. If he strays from the truth and no longer receives fresh supply, his soul becomes stagnant, as if it were dead. Therefore, if he can be turned back, it is to save his soul from death. Thus, James says, "This will cover a multitude of sins," meaning that his soul has come alive again and can continue on the path of sanctification. His soul will continue to be sanctified, helping him to stay away from evil and not repeatedly commit sin.

James says that it can cover a multitude of sins. Do not think that this means that one can do good deeds to atone for sins; this is not the teaching of the Bible. Good deeds cannot atone for sins; sins can only be forgiven through the blood of Jesus Christ. This is a free grace, and we cannot do anything to earn it. If a lost person is restored, he can continue on the path of sanctification and stay away from evil, no longer being ensnared by sin. Thus, we conclude the fifth chapter of James.

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you for your company. Over the past five weeks, we have read through the Book of James together. I hope each of you has gained new insights and received fresh understanding. Perhaps you can set aside a few hours to review these five chapters, identify the verses that have touched you the most, and write down your reflections and thoughts. This can leave a trace of your spiritual growth. May we all learn from James' example, becoming people who pray regularly, pursue a godly life, and let the virtues in our lives bear a good witness for Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together: Lord, thank You for guiding us through the Book of James and for helping us understand its value. Help us to be balanced Christians. Let us not only grasp the complete truth structure given by Paul, recognizing his charge to build up the church; but also, thank You for John's ministry, which teaches us that life-building is essential, and apart from life, we can do nothing. Through Peter's ministry, we see that this life must manifest God's nature in our souls. And through James' ministry, we see further that this transformed nature should be lived out in our daily lives with beautiful virtues. Thank You for giving us a complete Bible, helping us to be balanced Christians. Bless the church I belong to, that it may

receive balanced supplies, be filled with virtues, and become a beautiful witness for You, drawing many to Yourself. Bless the church I belong to, and we pray this in the holy name of Jesus Christ. Amen.