

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

Heb. 04: 11-13

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 Heb. 04: 11-13

The author of Hebrews introduces a new concept of rest, referred to as the "Sabbath rest." This rest is not a specific day, like the Sabbath observed by the Israelites, nor is it a physical place, because even when Joshua led the new generation of Israelites into the Promised Land, they did not attain this rest. This "Sabbath rest" is where man ceases from his own works, just as God ceased from His works, meaning that man can truly enjoy rest.

So, what exactly is this true rest? We can infer its meaning from the history of the Israelites. First, through the roles of Moses and Joshua, the Israelites were brought to God's promised land, gaining the position of rest. In this regard, what Jesus Christ accomplished is greater than Moses and Joshua. Jesus first completed redemption for us on the cross, freeing our bodies from the bondage of the world. Then, in the newness of resurrection, Christ helped us overcome trials, leading us out of the wilderness of the soul and burying the sinful passions and desires of the flesh in the Jordan River.

As Galatians 5:24 says, "And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." At this point, we become those who belong to Christ, enter the Promised Land, and gain the position of rest. According to the history of the Israelites in the Old Testament, after entering the Promised Land, they still had to go through years of battles to truly possess the land. Eventually, they were able to build the temple in the city of Jerusalem, giving God a dwelling place and establishing His testimony. At this point, God found rest, and the Israelites also attained true rest.

This part of the work corresponds to the role of the high priest Aaron. This is also the next stage the author of Hebrews seeks to address—how Jesus Christ, as the High Priest, is superior to Aaron. Sandwiched between the comparison with Moses and the comparison with Aaron is the passage we are studying today.

Verse 11: "Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience."

The author of Hebrews encourages us to diligently enter the true rest, which is the "Sabbath rest." Just like the Israelites, we must keep pressing forward. The Israelites experienced the Exodus, crossed the Red Sea, journeyed through the wilderness, crossed the Jordan River, entered the Promised Land, came to Jerusalem, entered the temple, and arrived at the Most Holy Place. Only then did the Israelites attain true rest. Similarly, for New Testament believers, we need to go through believing, salvation, baptism, being tested in the wilderness of the soul, settling in the church life, and building the church together so that the church becomes the house of God. It is only when we truly come before God that we will experience true rest. The key to obtaining this true rest lies in verses 12 and 13.

Verse 12: "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

The Word of God performs a work of division within us—a work that is full of life, power, and extraordinary precision. The Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword. This sword can pierce through joints and cut open bones, exposing the marrow inside. Likewise, the Word of God can pierce the depths of our soul, opening it to reveal the spirit hidden within. Why must the spirit be exposed? Only then can the thoughts and intents of the heart be discerned. This statement is not easy to understand.

To understand it, we first need to recognize what the heart is. The heart is a frequently mentioned concept in the Bible and represents a very important aspect of a person. Just as the physical heart occupies a central role in the human body, the abstract heart is the most crucial part of a person. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life." The heart is vital for everyone, whether they are saved or unbelieving. It determines the outcome and success of a person's life.

The Bible does not provide a precise definition of what the heart is. Different theological systems may define the heart differently. Personally, I believe this is not a problem as long as the definition is coherent within a given framework and does not lead to contradictions. From my theological perspective, I would like to share my understanding of the heart with the saints. The heart constitutes the core of a person and the main aspect of their personality. To some extent, it corresponds to the soul, encompassing emotions, thoughts, and will. The heart's position is between the material world and the spiritual realm.

Thus, the heart includes these two interfaces: matters from the material world can influence the heart's functioning through this interface. Similarly, spiritual matters can affect the heart's functioning through the interface between the spirit and the heart. The basic functioning of the heart aligns with that of the soul—achieving a balance between thoughts, emotions, and will. The primary difference between the heart and the soul is that the heart can receive influences from the spiritual realm as well as from the material world. In other words, the heart can incline toward good or evil.

Next, we will take a closer look at how the material world influences the heart and how the spiritual realm affects it. The influence from the material world involves worldly matters, which include "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." The influence from the spiritual realm comes through the conscience. For an unsaved person, their spirit has not yet been made alive. Therefore, the influence from the spiritual realm is limited to the perceptions of the conscience. Since their spirit has not been quickened, the conscience is weak and lacks any governing ability.

For a person whose emotions in the heart have become accustomed to following the lust of the flesh, their thoughts in the heart have also become accustomed to following the lust of the eyes, and their will in the heart is likewise accustomed to following the pride of life. When their heart makes a decision, their body acts accordingly, forming what the Bible calls the "old man," a collective term. A more individual term for this is the "old self." When the old self decides to do something, if it violates moral principles, their conscience will sense it and protest in their heart. However, because there is no support from spiritual life, this protest is weak and has no restraining effect on the decisions of the old self.

Thus, human society cannot rely on every individual acting according to moral principles. It requires laws that clearly define actions that violate the law and mandate proportionate punishment to restrain the heart of individuals. Generally speaking, the operating model of the old self is to maximize personal benefit within the limits of the law, satisfying the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Of course, each person's balance of emotional, intellectual, and volitional needs varies. Therefore, some individuals pursue wealth as their life's goal, others chase after fame, and still others seek power. This essentially encompasses the entirety of the "old man." Each person's "old self" operates according to these principles.

When a person believes in Jesus Christ and is saved, their spirit is reborn. Now they can have fellowship with God and directly receive light from Him. This light becomes their intuition. Through fellowship and intuition, they understand God's will concerning the matter at hand. This understanding becomes their conscience, which serves as the interface between their spirit and their soul. This conscience is no longer just a perception but also has governing power, influencing the will within their soul. Once the will makes a decision, it directs the body to act accordingly. This operating model is known as the "new man," a collective term, and for individuals, it is the "new self."

Of course, after a person is saved, their old self still exists. As Galatians 2:20 says, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me;"

the first "I" in this verse refers to the old self. The old self is crucified with Christ; its rightful place is on the cross. If this is the case, then it is no longer the old self that lives, but the new self—Christ living in me. Christ can work through my conscience to guide my will, which in turn leads to corresponding bodily actions. This is the operating model of the new self.

After understanding the function of the heart, we return to verse 12: the Word of God can pierce and divide our soul, exposing the spirit within the soul. Let us also consider the "thoughts" in the heart, or thoughts and ideas. Additionally, we examine the driving force behind these thoughts, referred to as "intent" or motive. In this way, we can discern whether the intent is guided by the spirit or by the flesh. Before salvation, people are deeply accustomed to the operating model of the old self. This almost becomes instinctual, requiring little thought—it happens naturally. Because of this, our soul cannot find rest. Therefore, the author tells us that true rest for the soul requires examining every thought in the heart.

But what is the driving force behind the formation of these thoughts? Is it guided by the spirit or by the flesh? Galatians 5:17 says, "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another," competing for dominion in the soul, as described in this verse as "intent." The result is found in Romans 8:6: "For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." Only when the thoughts in the heart are guided by the spirit can a person have life and peace—and thus find rest. This verse tells us that the Word of God must perform its discerning work in our hearts to ensure that our soul operates under the guidance of the spirit. This is a self-examination and self-correction that every believer must undertake. However, since people can sometimes be subjective or have errors in judgment, verse 13 becomes necessary.

Verse 13: "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."

First, the translation in the Chinese Union Version (CUV) is not very accurate regarding the phrase "in the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." The NIV

translates it more precisely as "before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." Thus, a more accurate translation would be: "before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."

For us, it is not easy to distinguish between soul and spirit; therefore, we need God's Word, which is living and powerful, to perform the work of division. Only by dividing soul and spirit can we ensure that our thoughts are directed by the Holy Spirit.

However, for Christ, all creation is naked and open before Him. Everything is clear and plain to Him; He sees through the hidden matters of our hearts at a glance. Therefore, when we come before the Lord, there is no point in concealing anything. Not only does He see our thoughts and intentions clearly today, but He will also judge us based on our deeds in the future. This is what the verse means by saying we must give an account to the Lord.

In 2 Corinthians 5:10, it is clearly stated, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." If we fail to discern between soul and spirit today, we will not only lose rest but also suffer loss when giving an account to the Lord in the future.

Let us return to the Old Testament and look at the history of the Israelites. The first generation who followed Moses out of Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, and entered the wilderness almost all died there. Although their bodies left Egypt, their hearts could not let go of the pleasures of Egypt.

For New Testament believers, this refers to those who have been baptized and proclaimed their death to the world but whose thoughts are still directed by worldly influences. As a result, they cannot settle in the church life, just like the Israelites who died in the wilderness and could not enter the good land. Such Christians cannot enjoy rest in the church life and will face judgment at the Lord's return.

The second generation of Israelites followed Joshua, crossed the Jordan River, and entered the good land. They buried the old man in the Jordan River, put off the old man, and entered the good land, which symbolized entering the life of the new man. However, they had not entirely shed the influence of the old man, and their thoughts were often led by the old man.

From a typological perspective, this refers to New Testament believers who, after receiving grace and baptism and entering church life, still struggle with unclear distinctions between soul and spirit. Their thoughts are often directed by the flesh, preventing the fullness of life and peace in their souls. They have not truly entered into rest.

True rest can only be experienced by accepting the ministry of Jesus Christ as the High Priest, who leads them through the outer court into the Holy Place and finally into the Most Holy Place before God. Only then can they experience true rest. This leads to tomorrow's passage, which begins to explore the ministry of Jesus Christ as the ascended and exalted High Priest.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for giving us Your Word. This Word works within us to distinguish and divide soul and spirit, thoughts and intentions of the heart. Help us not only to understand the literal meaning of Your Word but also to approach it with humility, allowing it to perform its dividing work within us. Help us to truly know ourselves, free from mixtures, so that every thought in our hearts is directed by the Holy Spirit. May this lead to a holy life that becomes a beautiful testimony of God on earth. Bless my church and its life. I pray in the name of Jesus Christ.