

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

Hebrews 12: 12-17

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 Hebrews Chapter 12, and today we will read verses 12-17.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for; conversely, hope is the realization of what is believed. Faith and hope are inseparable. Although this chapter expounds on faith, it also brings out the common hope of the saints—that is, the city in the better heavenly homeland. This city is designed and is being built by God; this city is the New Jerusalem in Revelation chapter 21. Prior to this chapter is Revelation chapter 20, which contains the most detailed account of the Millennial Kingdom. It is only after the Millennial Kingdom ends that in chapter 21, the heavenly holy city, the New Jerusalem, will be completed and will descend from heaven.

Then the new heaven and new earth for eternity will be ushered in. It is hoped that the saints can clearly distinguish between several different ages. We are currently in the church age, and Jesus Christ is the High Priest in the true tabernacle in heaven, interceding for us.

When Christ returns, the kingdom age will come. During those 1,000 years, the heavenly tabernacle will be built into the holy city of New Jerusalem. Christ is the cornerstone, and the saved saints from both the Old and New Testaments, as transformed living stones, will be built together by God into a spiritual house. This building work begins at the start of the Millennial Kingdom. After that, those saints who were called but not chosen—that is, those who received grace and were saved but did not overcome—will also be perfected during those 1,000 years and will be added to the building of the holy city of New Jerusalem.

When the Millennial Kingdom ends, this fully built holy city, the New Jerusalem, will descend from heaven and bring about the eternal new heaven and new earth. The common hope of us who are called saints is that built holy city—the New Jerusalem.

Chapter 12, when speaking of hope, begins with the fact that there are so many witnesses of faith surrounding us like a cloud—cheering us on, encouraging us, and urging us forward—so that we may run with endurance the race set before us. On the racetrack that God has tailor-made for each one of us, we must go through many tribulations. Some of these trials come from God's testing, and perhaps more come from God's discipline.

The author exhorts us to endure discipline with perseverance, for every child whom the Lord loves, He disciplines. Precisely because we are God's children, God disciplines us. We must submit to God's discipline so that we may partake of His holiness and bear the fruit of righteousness in our lives.

Following that, from verses 12 to 29, the author brings out the fifth section of exhortation and warning in the book of Hebrews. This is because tribulation produces endurance, and endurance must have its full effect in order to bring forth hope. Saints who are in the midst of tribulation especially need encouragement. Verses 12 to 14 are words of encouragement. At the same time, saints going through tribulation also need to be warned. Verses 15 to 17 bring out four aspects of warning.

Verse 12: "Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,"

After enduring tribulation for a long time, hands may hang down, no longer having strength to work for God, and legs may become weak, no longer having the strength to run the heavenly race. But the author encourages the saints to look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Trials of testing are meant to refine our faith; the trials of discipline are because God loves His sons and wants to produce the fruit of righteousness in us. Therefore, lift up the hands that hang down and strengthen the feeble knees.

Don't forget, the heavenly path is a race. Those who have run a long-distance race know that in the end, what sustains one to keep going is the will. When we

understand in our minds the purpose of God's work in us, and when our emotions rejoice and are willing to cooperate with God, then with a firm will, we must rise up to do what needs to be done and walk the path that must be walked.

Verse 13: "and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed."

Make straight paths for your feet. If the road before us is winding and uneven, our feet can easily be twisted or sprained. Therefore, we must make the road straight, which means we need to choose the path of uprightness. As mentioned earlier, the race we are to run is Jesus Christ Himself, because He is the Way. At every turning point in our life, we need to consider: what would Jesus Christ choose? Then we choose to walk with Christ, and in doing so, our path will naturally be straight.

On one hand, the heroes of faith before us are our examples; by following their example, we can choose Christ as our straight path. On the other hand, we also need to become examples for those who follow after us. If we continually walk on the straight path, those who come after us—if there are any among them who are lame—will be encouraged by us and also walk on the straight path, and they will not be disabled.

The word "disabled" has two meanings. The first meaning is dislocated, which is how it is translated in some versions. The lame person describes one whose faith is weak, who already walks with a limp on the path of following the Lord, and it is already very difficult for him. If we do not choose a straight path, and he follows us onto a rough road, his foot will be twisted—dislocated—making it impossible for him to continue walking.

The second meaning is deviation or detour. A lame person already walks with difficulty; if he follows us onto a detour, wouldn't it delay him further? But if he follows us onto the right path, God will also heal him, making him whole so that he can fully submit to God's leading.

Verse 14: “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:”

In addition to lifting ourselves up and walking on the straight path, we must also pursue peace with all people. The word "pursue" here is like a hunter chasing after his prey—quickly and with all his strength in order to capture it. Using such an urgent word in the context of pursuing peace with others is quite unique. It shows that peace with others is not something naturally found in our human disposition. Each of us tends to want to expand our own sphere of interest, so in any group, friction between people is inevitable. But the church is God’s household. Every saint in the church must actively pursue peace with others—this is the constitution of the kingdom of heaven that the citizens of the kingdom should abide by.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:9 says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” We are sons of God, and we are to be peacemakers. In the church, being a mediator or peacekeeper is the responsibility of everyone. If we are aware of unresolved issues between saints—even conflicts between spouses—we must always use appropriate means to maintain peace among everyone.

Besides maintaining harmony in horizontal relationships between people, everyone must also pursue holiness—this is about the vertical relationship with God. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord. Therefore, each person must regularly deal with their own uncleanness. We must develop the habit of daily scheduled confession and prayer to remove any uncleanness, so we can maintain a close fellowship with the Lord.

A person who often sees the Lord will naturally stay away from sin. Even if he accidentally sins, he will easily notice it and promptly confess and repent, thus restoring a close relationship with the Lord. Peace with others and holiness before God are two things every saint must earnestly pursue. Following this, from verses 15 to 17, the author gives warnings. In this passage, the author specifically presents four aspects of warning.

Verse 15: “looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;”

We must also be watchful—that is, carefully examine ourselves and frequently reflect. The first warning is this: lest anyone fall short of the grace of God. That is, we may fall from the position of grace or lose the opportunity to experience grace.

Everyone’s salvation is completely and entirely by the grace of God. It is because of Christ’s redemption that we have been given this position of grace. We must never fall from this position. In other words, we must always remain in the realm of grace—this is the first step to not losing God’s grace.

Next, we must experience God’s grace in everything. No matter what hardship comes our way, it is an opportunity to experience God’s grace. Therefore, we must not let the flesh take over. For example, when a conflict arises between husband and wife, those who know how to experience God’s grace are the ones who take the initiative to apologize and make peace. The worst scenario is when neither party draws upon God’s grace, and they both remain in a state of hostility. This gives Satan a foothold. Once Satan enters, he will destroy the grace between husband and wife.

The second warning is this: lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble and by this many become defiled. A root of bitterness is when bitterness stays in the heart for a long time and takes root. If it’s not dealt with in time, it will lead to bitterness. When bitterness lingers, it will eventually produce roots. Once there is a root of bitterness, not only is the person troubled, but also others who come into contact with him will be affected—resulting in many becoming defiled.

Dear brothers and sisters, we must take our negative emotions seriously. We must deal with offenses—whether we have offended others or have been offended—through confession and forgiveness. Do not allow unbalanced emotions in your heart to develop into hatred, suspicion, and so on. When bitterness remains in the heart for a long time, it will take root.

A root of bitterness in the church often manifests as seemingly correct but misleading teachings, heresies that deviate from Scripture, or unaddressed sins. As 1 Corinthians 5:6 says, it is like leaven that causes the whole lump to be leavened.

Verse 16: “lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.”

The third warning is this: lest there be any sexually immoral person. Physical sexual immorality refers to sexual acts outside of the bounds of marriage. Paul made this very clear in 1 Corinthians 6:18–20: “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” All the saints must keep their bodies pure and respect the Holy Spirit who dwells within us—we must glorify God in our bodies.

Spiritual immorality refers to having other lusts besides Christ. This leads us into the fourth warning: lest there be anyone who is profane, who lusts after the world. We have been redeemed by Christ at the cost of His own life—we are no longer our own, but belong to Christ. Christ desires that we be separated from the world. If we lust after the world, we will end up like Esau. Esau sold his birthright for a some lentil stew. This event is recorded in Genesis 25:29–34. Although Esau was the firstborn, he did not value his birthright. After returning from hunting, tired and hungry, he sold his birthright to his younger brother Jacob for a bowl of red lentil stew. Because he despised his birthright, he brought upon himself consequences that he could not bear.

Verse 17: “For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.”

The blessing from the father refers to the blessing of the birthright. Later, when Isaac was old and his eyes were dim, he wanted to bless Esau before his death. This event is recorded in Genesis chapter 27. In that record, Rebekah made various plans for Jacob and helped him deceive Isaac in order to obtain the blessing of the birthright. However, the author of Hebrews, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tells us that the key reason behind the whole event was that Esau despised the birthright. For a bowl of lentil stew, he sold his birthright cheaply, and thus he lost the blessing that came with the birthright.

What is the blessing of the birthright? Let us look at the blessing Isaac gave to Jacob. In Genesis 27:28–29: “Therefore may God give you of the dew of heaven, Of the fatness of the earth, And plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother’s sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who bless you!”

This blessing is indeed wonderful. It includes blessings from heaven, and also authority and dominion on earth. After Esau lost the blessing of the birthright, he wept and pleaded bitterly with his father, but he could not change the outcome. Jacob received the blessing from God, and from him came the twelve tribes of Israel, who became God’s chosen people in the Old Testament.

In the Bible, those who were born as the firstborn but later lost the birthright can be considered examples of the transfer of the birthright. Such events occurred four times in the book of Genesis. The first time is the one we have just seen—Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of lentil stew.

The second time is recorded in Genesis 38:27–30. Judah had twins with his daughter-in-law Tamar. One of them reached out his hand first, and the midwife tied a scarlet thread on his hand and said, “This one came out first.” But in the end, the one who came out first was actually Perez; the one with the scarlet thread on his hand, Zerah, became the younger brother instead. This seemingly insignificant event resulted in Perez being included in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. A seemingly minor action ended up having a very profound impact.

The third time is recorded in Genesis 48:8–22, when Jacob, before his death, adopted Joseph's two sons so that they would inherit a double portion of land. This meant that Joseph replaced Reuben and became the firstborn of Jacob. This is the third instance of the transfer of the birthright.

The fourth and third instances of the transfer of the birthright actually occurred in the same event. Among Joseph's two sons, Manasseh was the firstborn, and Ephraim was the younger. But when Jacob blessed them, he crossed his hands and placed his right hand on Ephraim's head. To Joseph, this meant Ephraim became the firstborn. The previous four times all occurred within the family of Israel as transfers of the birthright.

In God's eternal plan, there is an even more important transfer of the birthright. In terms of chronological order, God's chosen people in the Old Testament—Israel—were God's firstborn. In Exodus 4:22–23: "Thus says the LORD: Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me." God acknowledged that Israel was His firstborn, and that they were to be separated out to serve Him.

But in the New Testament, when the Son of God came to the earth, the Israelites did not recognize Him. Therefore, during Jesus' ministry on earth, He spoke two parables regarding the elder son and the younger son. The first is in Luke 15:11–32, the well-known parable of the prodigal son. In this parable, the elder son represents the Israelites, and the younger son represents the Gentile believers. This order still follows God's recognition from the Old Testament—that Israel is God's firstborn.

However, in the final week of Jesus' earthly ministry, as He entered Jerusalem and prepared to go to the cross, He told the Jewish people another parable of the two sons in Matthew 21:28–32. In this parable, the elder son obeyed the father's command, while the younger son said he would go but did not act. Jesus likened the New Testament believers—including tax collectors and prostitutes who believed—to the elder son, while the Jews became the younger son. This is the transfer of the birthright between the saints of the Old and New Testaments. This is the fifth time—and for us, the most important—because New Testament believers will enter the kingdom of God first.

Why speak so extensively about the transfer of the birthright? Because in tomorrow's passage, there is a section of Scripture that is particularly difficult to understand and involves the issue of the birthright. Today's explanation serves as a foundation for what is to come.

Let us pray together: Lord, have mercy on us. On this heavenly path, You want us to endure with perseverance. Let us lift up the hands that hang down and strengthen the feeble knees, so that we may continue to walk in the way of truth, pursuing peace with all people and holiness before You. Lord, help us not to fall from the position of grace, not to miss the opportunity to experience Your grace, not to let the root of bitterness grow in our hearts, not to be defiled by immorality, and not to be enticed by the world. Lord, we confess that in these teachings, we often fail to live up to them. We ask for Your mercy—to uphold us constantly with Your grace. Grant us a humble heart, one that is always willing to examine ourselves, to learn the lessons of confession and repentance, and also to learn the lesson of forgiving others, so that negative emotions will not grow into roots of bitterness within us. Bless my daily life, that I may become more and more holy, and more and more pleasing to You. We pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.