

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

Hebrews 13: 18-25

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. Let's continue to read Hebrews chapter 13. We will read verses 18-25 today.

Hebrews chapters 1 to 7 speak of Christ's identity and status as being more excellent than the angels, more excellent than Moses and Joshua, and also more excellent than Aaron. Chapters 8 to 10 speak of Christ's work and ministry, establishing the new covenant with the blood of Jesus, which is far more excellent than the old covenant based on the Law of Moses. From chapters 11 to 13, the author exhorts the saints to hold fast to a life of faith, hope, and love.

The purpose of the author in writing Hebrews was to encourage the Hebrew saints not to shrink back and return to Judaism because of suffering and tribulation. The author was likely a Jew, who was familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures and fully aware that the rituals and traditions the Jews had upheld for 1,500 years were not easy to let go of. Therefore, throughout his discourse, he inserted five passages of exhortation and warning.

For example, in 2:3, "how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" In 4:11, "Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience." In 6:7-8, "For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned." In 10:25, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." In 12:28-29, "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire." The author likely worked alongside Paul, had a clear

understanding of the ministry of Christ in the new covenant, and possessed a transcendent insight into it.

The book of Hebrews is perhaps the most complete integration of the Old and New Testaments in the entire Bible. The Old Testament is a foreshadowing of the New Testament, while the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old. The Old Testament is a picture, using people, events, and objects to richly and vividly present God's will before our eyes. The New Testament is the truth, precisely revealing God's will through His Son and enabling people to understand it through the power of the Holy Spirit. Hebrews provides us with an excellent example of how to stand on the truth of the New Testament to understand the pictures in the Old Testament, as well as how to use the pictures of the Old Testament to grasp the application of New Testament truths in our lives.

The book of Hebrews is not only a bridge between the Old and New Testaments but also the adhesive that binds the revelation of God's new covenant. The New Testament reveals God's Son, Jesus Christ, and His ministry. This revelation in the New Testament is built upon the ministries of three apostles: in chronological order, first the apostle of hope, Peter; then the apostle of faith, Paul; and finally, the apostle of love, John. Though Hebrews consists of only 13 chapters, it fittingly expounds on faith, hope, and love—three pillars that uphold the Christian life—and does so from a Hebrew perspective, perfectly complementing the revelation of the New Testament. We ought to thank God for placing Hebrews within the canon of the New Testament, for without it, our doctrinal understanding would be incomplete, and if a saint does not study Hebrews, his Christian life will lack balance. Today, we come to the conclusion and final greetings of the book of Hebrews.

Verse 18: “Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably.”

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the author wrote the book of Hebrews, and now, having laid down this burden, he asks the Hebrew saints who received the

letter to pray for them in the conclusion. Here, we see that the author and his ministry team were familiar with these Hebrew saints. It is very likely that the author and his team had previously ministered among them. Perhaps they were even the ones mentioned in verse 7 of this chapter—those who had once preached the word to the Hebrews but later had to leave due to arising circumstances. Now, he says, "Pray for us, for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably."

First, when those who serve ask those being served to pray for them, it not only demonstrates the humility of the servants but also shows that they understand their ability to serve comes from God. They must have God's protection, care, and provision in order to serve effectively. However, what is particularly noteworthy is that the author adds these two statements: "we have a good conscience" and "desiring to live honorably." The conscience is the window between the soul and the spirit; it is the means by which a person can contact God. A person with a hindered conscience cannot come before God at all. Therefore, whenever we pray, we must first confess our sins so that our conscience may be cleansed by the precious blood of Christ, allowing us to come before God.

Now the author takes this concept a step further: for others' intercession on your behalf to be effective, you must also have a clean conscience. If you are aware of guilt in your conscience, even if God hears others' prayers for you, His grace cannot be supplied from your spirit to your soul. As a result, you will be unable to receive God's grace in your thoughts and emotions, making such intercession ineffective for you. Not only must you have a clear conscience, but you must also be willing to live honorably in all things. This means that in your will, you have already determined to walk in righteousness in everything.

So what is the right path? Of course, it must not deviate from the teachings of the Bible, but in a more subjective sense, it is the path that God moves you to take and the work He leads you to do. That is the right path. When others intercede for you, you must first make a decision: no matter what that path is or how things should be done, as long as it is God's guidance, no matter how difficult it may be, you are willing to obey. Only then can intercessory prayer be effective.

Dear brothers and sisters, how often do we ask the saints to intercede for us in times of trouble, yet we feel as if God is not hearing our prayers? Perhaps the issue lies within us. Therefore, we must examine whether our conscience is clear and whether we are truly willing to follow God's leading, or if we have already made our own choice, insisting that God must answer in a certain way before we will submit. If that is the case, we have placed ourselves above God—so how could He grant our request?

Verse 19: “But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.”

The author first requests the Hebrew saints to pray for his team, and then he asks them to pray for him personally, that he may return to them soon. The author desires to return to their midst quickly; he is also concerned for those Hebrew saints who are still wavering, hoping to serve them face-to-face and strengthen their faith. Nevertheless, he is unwilling to act on his own accord hastily. He first asks the saints to pray for him, so that God may reveal His will and confirm it clearly through the circumstances. At that time, Christians were already undergoing widespread persecution, and long journeys were not safe. Although the author is eager to return to them, what is more important is that God's will must be made known.

In fact, today it is the same. A preacher is a servant of God. From a human perspective, there may be many tasks to do, and the prospects may seem very good, but God's servant cannot act on his own authority; he must seek the will of the Master. When I was young, I was often taught in the church that when I grow up, I should not become a wandering preacher, doing work based on my own preferences. This would only go against God's will and bring disaster to the church's ministry. Since we are God's servants, we must listen to His calling.

Verse 20: “Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, “

After the author asks the Hebrew saints to pray for him, he leads into a prayer of blessing for the Hebrew saints. There are at least four passages in the Bible regarding prayers of blessing. One is Moses' blessing in Numbers 6:24-26, "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace." The second is Paul's blessing in 2 Corinthians 13:14, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen." The third is another blessing from Paul, found in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The fourth passage is in Hebrews 13:20-21, which says, "Now may the God of peace..." Peace is the greatest blessing a person can have in this world, and the source of peace comes from God. Only the peace that comes from God is true peace. Money, status, and power in this world cannot guarantee peace; only God governs everything, and only God can grant true peace. However, after the fall, unrighteous people are not worthy of God's peace. Therefore, for God to give peace, it must be through His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. The new covenant established by the blood of Jesus Christ is the eternal covenant between God and man. Only those who enter into this eternal covenant through the blood of Jesus Christ can receive true peace. And the channel through which God gives peace is through Jesus Christ.

Here, there are two descriptions of Jesus Christ. The first is that Jesus rose from the dead; the second is that He is the great Shepherd of the sheep. The greatest disaster in human life is death, and no one can escape it. The most surpassing power is resurrection from the dead. Jesus has already risen from the dead, and all the difficulties we encounter in life have been settled by His death. All problems, in light of death, are no longer problems; Jesus' death solved all our issues and troubles. While death is the end for humans, it is not the end for Jesus. Jesus,

through the power and might of the Holy Spirit, rose from the dead; the same power and might have granted us new life. This life, which conquers death and endures forever, is within us today.

Indeed, at the beginning, our new life is small and needs to grow under care. This brings us to the second description of Jesus Christ: He is the great Shepherd of the sheep. In the Bible, there are three titles for Christ as the Shepherd: the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, and the Chief Shepherd. Each of these titles carries its own distinct meaning, but all refer to Christ. Some saints may use these titles to call their respected pastors, but personally, I do not agree with this. If the saints understand the spiritual significance behind these three titles, they may also agree with my perspective.

First, let us look at the Good Shepherd. In John 10:11, Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep." The good shepherd is one who lays down His life for the sheep, and therefore, this is a title unique to Jesus Christ. Psalm 22 is a psalm that describes how the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. Next, let us consider the Chief Shepherd. In 1 Peter 5:4, it says, "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away." Here, Peter encourages those who share the office of elder with him to shepherd God's flock according to God's will. When the Chief Shepherd appears, they will receive the crown of glory. Therefore, the Chief Shepherd is linked to the second coming of Christ. Psalm 24 is a psalm that praises the Chief Shepherd, specifically in verse 7, which says, "Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in." Christ is that glorious King, and He is coming, so the gates are to lift up their heads.

We will now look at the Great Shepherd, as mentioned in Hebrews 13:20. Why is He called the Great Shepherd? Because the Lord Jesus Christ preserves us and supplies all of our needs. The well-known and beloved Psalm 23 describes Christ as our Great Shepherd. Psalm 23:1-3 says, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." In this closing section of Hebrews, the title "Great Shepherd" speaks of how Christ,

as the Great Shepherd, supplies all our needs. In the next verse, four specific things are highlighted.

Verse 21: “make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

This verse brings out four aspects of blessing. First, it is that God will perfect us in every good work. We are to be witnesses for God in our lives, and not only must we avoid partaking in evil deeds, but we must also be perfected by God in every good work. This means that the source and motivation for doing good works come from God, and as we cooperate with God, we will be perfected by Him. The second is to do the will of God. God's will is for us to do good works. However, human good works are often motivated by impure intentions, and even a desire for recognition, which frequently leads to evil results despite appearing good. Therefore, saints should do good works not out of their own will, but by following the will of God.

Third, Jesus Christ works in us to do what is pleasing to Him. The ability to keep the covenant and do God's will is the result of Jesus Christ working in us. Jesus Christ enables us to understand what pleases God and helps us to love and obey His will. Only when we are submissive within can we bring forth good works on the outside. Fourth, glory be given to God. As Jesus Christ works in us, He enables us to love God's will and to be willing to obey, and as a result, we are able to perform all kinds of good works. In this process, we are also perfected. God receives a beautiful testimony in us, and glory will be given to God forever and ever. Amen.

Verse 22: “And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words.”

At the beginning, he says, "Brothers, I have written to you in few words." The book of Hebrews is so rich, yet the author says it is written in few words, indicating that

there is much more richness and expression within him that has not been written down. In other words, his experience and knowledge of the Lord are far greater than what he has written. Dear brothers and sisters, this is also the principle for us when speaking for God. In our daily lives, we must store up God's words and meditate on them repeatedly, as this deepens our knowledge and experience of God. However, when it comes to expressing ourselves, we must consider the needs and abilities of the audience, and within God's control and restraint, only speak words that are helpful and edifying to others. Although the author wrote only briefly, there are five major sections of exhortations and warnings in his letter, which he sincerely hopes the Hebrew saints will listen to. This is also the main burden behind his writing of the book of Hebrews.

Verse 23: “Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly.”

The author directly refers to Timothy as "our brother." It is clear that these Hebrew saints were familiar with Timothy. Timothy was a young co-worker of Paul, his father being a Greek and his mother a Jewish woman. He originally lived in Lystra and joined Paul's team during Paul's second missionary journey. In order to bring Timothy into the Jewish synagogues, Paul had Timothy circumcised. Paul also referred to Timothy as his true son and specifically wrote the books of 1 and 2 Timothy to teach him how to serve in the church. Clearly, Timothy was also serving in the author's team. At the time, Timothy may have just been released from prison, and the author was eager to visit the Hebrew saints with Timothy.

Verse 24: “Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.”

The leaders who guide you, as mentioned in verse 17 of this chapter, are the ones currently serving the Hebrew saints, including the preacher and his team. They may have been the ones succeeding the author's team in serving the Hebrews. The

author first greets them and then sends greetings to all the saints, adding that those from Italy send their greetings as well. Perhaps at that time, the author was still in Rome, while the believing Hebrew saints were in Jerusalem, and the author sent greetings on behalf of the saints from Italy who were with him.

Verse 25: "Grace be with you all. Amen."

"Grace be with you all. Amen!" Paul often ends his letters with words of gratitude and peace. Grace is our experience and enjoyment of Christ, and it is also God's will for us. May glory be given to God.

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank the Lord for leading us through Hebrews chapter 13, and I also appreciate the fellowship of the saints. Personally, during this reading of Hebrews, I have gained many new insights and revelations, and I am especially grateful to God. I also recognize my own limitations, and in my sharing, I may not have been able to express the surpassing greatness of Christ as clearly and thoroughly as I would have liked. If there are any parts that are unclear, I hope you will bring them before the Lord and seek His guidance. Those who are willing to meditate on God's Word repeatedly will certainly receive blessings from God. Through Jesus Christ, He will reveal new insights to you, and through the Holy Spirit, He will give you the most suitable explanation.

If, during these 13 weeks of reading Hebrews, you have truly gained something, let us together give thanks and worship God. If it were not for God's Son, Jesus Christ, doing all of this for us, we would have no ability to come before God. If it were not for the Holy Spirit working in our hearts, we would not be able to understand God's will. I hope that through this book, we can all recognize how surpassing and beautiful Jesus Christ is. I believe that, to some extent, every saint has some recognition of the surpassing greatness of Jesus Christ and has a heart that treasures Him. Starting next week, we will return to the Old Testament and read the Song of Solomon, so let us learn together how to love this even more surpassing and beautiful Jesus Christ.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, we thank and worship You for the past 13 weeks of reading the book of Hebrews. If it were not for Your guidance, if it were not for the Holy Spirit's stirring, we truly would not have been able to understand and absorb such a rich book. In this process, the light and revelations we have seen, Lord, we ask You to guard them for us. May we become the golden vessels of manna, so that when the time comes, we can be supplied. Help us to be regulated by Your Word in our daily lives; let our living, actions, and conduct be governed by the Spirit of life. May we experience death and resurrection in our lives, and let life reign in us. We ask You, Lord, to continue leading our Bible-reading lives. Although we only set aside a little time each day, You pour down heavenly, abundant blessings in proportion to what we offer, enabling us to know You more, love You more, and be more willing to follow You. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.