

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

Numbers 5: 29-31

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. We continue to read Numbers chapter 5. Today we read from verse 29 to verse 31.

Verses 29-31: "This is the law of jealousy, when a wife, while under her husband's authority, goes astray and defiles herself, or when the spirit of jealousy comes upon a man, and he becomes jealous of his wife; then he shall stand the woman before the LORD, and the priest shall execute all this law upon her. Then the man shall be free from iniquity, but that woman shall bear her guilt."

This passage is the summary of 5:11-28, the content of which we have already discussed in great detail over the past two days. Today we will focus on the application of this passage to the saints of the New Testament.

First, in the Chinese Union Version, the terms are translated as "the ordinance of suspicious hatred, a heart of suspicious hatred, suspiciously hating his wife"; the word "suspicious hatred" (yi-hen) is translated in all the English versions as "jealous" or "jealousy," which is in fact the meaning of the original Hebrew. Therefore, I do not like to use the term "suspicious hatred," but prefer to use the word "jealousy"—the law of jealousy, the spirit of jealousy, or the husband being jealous of his wife.

"Suspicious hatred" means resentment arising from suspicion. The term "suspicious hatred" is more negative than "jealousy." If resentment has truly arisen, then sin is already present, and it would not be as verse 30 says, "the man shall be free from iniquity."

Although once the spirit of jealousy is stirred up and goes uncontrolled, it will bring forth sinful deeds, God established the law of jealousy to provide a way out, so that though a man is jealous, he does not fall into sin. He is to bring the matter of his jealousy before the priest and offer the offering of jealousy, asking God to bring the hidden things to light. Once God has revealed and God has judged, he must also fully accept God's judgment. If the wife is proven innocent, he must be reconciled with his wife as at the first, without any further suspicion. And if the wife has indeed defiled herself, she must bear the curse; but if the wife is innocent, she will receive from God the special blessing of childbearing and the blessing of nursing.

Jealousy speaks of the exclusive and singular nature of love. According to Genesis 2:24, God's definition of husband and wife is: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Since the two are to become one flesh, this declares that the love between husband and wife is singular and exclusive. If either party in a marriage has another love, it will provoke the jealousy of the other party. Therefore, coming to the New Testament, Jesus says in Matthew 19:6, "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

Jesus spoke very clearly: "What God has joined together, let not man separate." The "man" here refers not only to other people or a third party, but also to both the husband and the wife themselves. Therefore, in the New Testament, if we follow God's will, there is no such thing as divorce by mutual agreement between husband and wife, and they cannot separate on the grounds of incompatible personalities. If their personalities were truly incompatible, they should not have married in the first place. Now that they are married, this declares that it was God who joined them together. God has the power to make the relationship between husband and wife harmonious. Therefore man, including both husband and wife, must not separate them.

Here we see that the origin of jealousy is legitimate; it is man safeguarding his rightful claim—namely, the singular and exclusive nature of the love between husband and wife. But man's nature is fallen, and once the spirit of jealousy is stirred up and goes uncontrolled, his reaction in the soul is often excessively

intense, and thus it brings forth sin in the body. Therefore God, through Moses, established the offering of jealousy, whereby a man could present the offering of jealousy through the priest, asking God to bring things to light and asking God to judge. The Bible tells us that God is also jealous, and in the divine nature He is perfect, without any fallen element. Therefore, God's jealousy is also holy.

In Exodus 20:4-6, God revealed to Moses the second of the Ten Commandments, that we must not carve idols for ourselves and must not bow down to idols. In 20:5 God specifically said: "For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God." The Chinese Union Version translates this as "a God who abhors evil," but the English versions all translate it as "I am a jealous God"—that is, I am a God of jealousy. God wants man to put God in first place; that is, man is to love the Lord our God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his strength, and with all his mind. In other words, our love for God must be singular, and no other love may surpass our love for God. Among all the people and things we love, if any one of them surpasses our love for God, that thing becomes our idol.

The Bible tells us that Christ loved the church and gave Himself for the church. It was through Christ's laying down of His life that the church could be brought forth. Christ today is still earnestly longing for the church to become holy and without blemish. When Christ returns, He will take the church as His bride. Therefore, as Paul was serving the church in Corinth and saw the saints living in the city of Corinth, which was full of fornication and corruption, he wrote 2 Corinthians 11:2-3, "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." The word the Chinese Union Version translates as "indignation" is in English simply "jealousy."

So Paul was jealous over the saints of the church in Corinth with the jealousy of God. Because he served these saints with all his heart and strength, it was precisely to betroth them, as a chaste virgin, to one husband, namely Christ. Paul feared only that they might lose that simple and pure heart toward Christ.

If the ordinance of Numbers 5:11-31 were to be followed, Paul would have to act like the priest, offering the offering of jealousy on behalf of Christ, causing the saints all to stand before God, so that through the offering and the drinking of the bitter water, the hidden things in the saints' hearts might be brought to light. Those who are chaste toward Christ would have the blessing of childbearing and the blessing of nursing—that is, they would be able to bear spiritual fruit. In this way, the church would surely flourish. This also declares that a church that bears no fruit has, in all likelihood, lost that singular and pure love for Christ, so that its thigh has wasted away and its belly has swelled. Such a church must immediately repent and confess its sins in order to become a blessed church.

The church is the bride of Christ; we have already seen the application between Christ and the church. Finally, let us apply this passage to husbands and wives today. If a spirit of jealousy arises in one party of a marriage, and he suspects the other's chastity but has no evidence, he should ask saints in the church who hold the priestly office to mediate. The suspecting party must then offer the offering of jealousy.

Remember, we have said that when Boaz first encountered Ruth, he gave Ruth an ephah of barley. This offering of jealousy is meant to cause husband and wife to recall the time when they first met and fell in love, how both were full of grace toward each other, willing to give the other an ephah of barley. Then they must ask themselves: why is only one-tenth left now? To offer the offering of jealousy is to ask God to reveal and to decide, with the goal of recovering that first love.

Of course, besides offering the offering of jealousy, there must also be the test of the bitter water, to eliminate the suspicions between the two parties concerning chastity. Husband and wife must take an oath before God to prove their own innocence, and must truly recognize that God is not to be trifled with. If anyone acts falsely, God will surely bring it to light, and will surely repay. After the test of the bitter water, if innocence is shown, both husband and wife must accept it completely, and there can be no more jealousy or suspicion.

Of course, speaking practically, once a husband and wife have come to this point, to return again to that original beautiful and sweet relationship requires not only that both parties lay down every grievance and every suspicion, but also that they seek God's grace and mercy. Perhaps it will also take a period of time to learn anew to understand the other and to love the other. Perhaps this is also a long road.

In the Bible, we are given an even better example, and this is also a most beautiful picture at the juncture between the Old and New Testaments. Joseph and Mary were already betrothed, only Joseph had not yet taken her in marriage. In the Jewish society of that time, they were already counted as husband and wife, and would only come together after the wedding. Just at this time, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her wonderful news: she would conceive by the Holy Spirit and bear a son, and she was to name Him Jesus. He would come to save God's people.

Later, Mary gradually began to show signs of pregnancy. Joseph had the right to bring Mary to the priest and offer the offering of jealousy. But Joseph did not do so. In Matthew 1:19-23, "Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.' So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us.'"

We see that Joseph did not exercise his rightful power to offer the offering of jealousy. That would have publicly shamed Mary; he had intended to put her away secretly, and just at that moment, he received the appearing and speaking of the angel. It turns out that God wanted to use Joseph as Mary's covering, to accomplish God's eternal purpose, and to accomplish the greatest salvation in human history.

Joseph did have the spirit of jealousy, for he intended to put Mary away secretly, but he did not proceed to the next step; his hesitation gave God time and space to speak to Joseph. And once Joseph had God's speaking, he willingly became Mary's covering.

Dear brothers and sisters, what Joseph did is truly the best solution for husbands and wives today when jealousy arises. Though the spirit of jealousy has been stirred up, we must bring these matters before God, pray to God, and ask God to bring things to light. Do not let your suspicious thoughts be infinitely magnified in our fallen humanity; that would very easily bring forth sin in the body, causing us to say inappropriate things and inflict wounds between husband and wife. Rather, be willing through prayer to ask God's grace to fill our hearts, so that we may see God's will for us in the whole matter. If the other party is without fault, God will prove her innocence and expose our excessive suspicion. And even if the other party has truly done wrong, God is all the more pleased when we are willing to forgive and restore our spouse. May God speak to each one of us in this matter.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord, marriage was established by You, that husband and wife, the two, should become one flesh, and that those whom God has joined together must not be separated. How greatly You value marriage—help us also to have this understanding. The wife is to submit to her husband, and the husband is to love his wife and give himself up for her. Bless every couple in the church, that they may have this reality. Even if one party is occasionally overtaken in a trespass, may the other be willing to forgive. Just as we, as members of the church, are still often weak and often fail, yet Christ as the Husband forgives us and pardons us again and again, His purpose being to restore us. Since we have experienced such a great salvation, how could we not forgive those who have offended us?

Bless every couple in the church, that they may bear with one another and learn the lessons of confessing sin and forgiving. May they together build a family full of testimony, for Your salvation takes the household as its unit. May every family in the church rise up to serve You. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.