

Good morning, it's good to be with you. This morning we're going to continue our study through the book of James. So if you would, please turn with me to the book of James chapter 4, beginning with verse thirteen.

13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. 17 If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.

James begins with a word that seems directed at the travelling merchants and traders among his Christian community. The majority of early Christians came from rather meager backgrounds, they were farmers or workers in various trades – James was probably a carpenter like his brother Jesus. Peter, Andrew and the Sons of Zebedee were fishermen. Paul, Priscilla and Aquila were tent makers and Onesimus was a slave. There were some Christians who had resources. Clearly Joseph of Arimathea, from the gospels was one, Chloe and Lydia, two women found among Paul's letter were others. To travel from city to city trading goods, probably meant these folks were doing pretty well.

What we discover in this section is that James has some strong words for these merchants. We see it in his opening statement "Now listen" (AGE NUN in the greek) It loses something in translation, but at its time "Now listen" (Age Nun) was a strong attention getting phrase that usually precede stern rebuke. It's kind of like when you're younger and your mom calls you by your full name – first, middle and last. You immediately know...uh oh. I'm in trouble.

If you look ahead in your bibles to the beginning of chapter 5 verse one, James uses the phrase again in delivering some strong words to the wealthy. The issue in chapter four, thirteen through seventeen isn't the trader's wealth, per se. It's related to how they plan for the future.

Verse thirteen, if written for today, could just as easily read "Now listen, you who say today or tomorrow, or in the year to come I'm going to get a promotion, I'm going to take a new job. I'm going to go back to school or buy the house. In this next year I'm going to get married, I'm going to start a family, or retire." James' words are for anyone of us who make plans or set some goals for our future.

There are those of us, who've got our five-year or ten-year plans. At the start of the year we write our goals, and have our months and weeks planned down to the minute. *We plan a time for planning*, and that's our favorite *time* of the week.

And then there are others who think that sounds like a cruel form of punishment. We don't believe in a purgatory, but if there was one, for you that would be it. Some of you are married to the super planner, and it drives you crazy. You cry "can't we have one moment of spontaneity." They respond, "yes spontaneity is on the schedule for this Thursday, 3:15-3:20,

it'll be spontaneous and great." But even the non-planner has a sort of rough idea in their heads, of where they want their life to go, what they want it to look like...even if what it looks like is never having any plans to stick to. Wherever you find yourself in that, James has a word for you, for us.

His word for us isn't don't plan. God's Word isn't anti-planning. In fact, it seems to paint those who have *no* plan as foolish. Some have taken what Jesus said in Matthew 6 "**Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?**" And they've turned it into a maxim. One that assumes that it's unspiritual to plan for our future because God will provide. But Jesus' point is clear from the way he continues, "**Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life.**" It's not a prohibition against planning, but a prohibition against worry.

God's Word is pro planning. It's for planning. Maybe not to the extent that some of us take it. But it's pro planning. The book of Proverbs is filled with examples of this. Proverbs 6 tells us "**Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest.**"

Nobody tells an ant what to do yet, it plans and prepare for the future. Jesus points to the wisdom of planning in Luke 14

"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? 29 For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you."

Jesus doesn't dismiss planning as sinful. It's not planning in James that's the problem.

The problem is the posture of our hearts.

Look at the type of claim the merchants make "I will go to this place, at this time, for this amount of time. There I will conduct my business, and I will make a profit." The issue is this worldly sense of self-confidence. What are they confident in? They are confident in their control and capacity.

This was written over nineteen hundred years ago, in Israel. But it just as easily could be written today couldn't it. It sounds pretty American to me. Don't these merchants sound like many of us. Many of us we were born and bred with this sense of independence and self-determinism. From the time we were in kindergarten people having been telling us if you work hard enough you can be anything you want to be, do anything you want to do. There's the American myth of the self-made individual who pulls themselves up by their bootstraps. We believe we are the masters of our own destiny.

James, is calling that belief an illusion. It's foolishness. That's not to say hard work and effort don't matter. Proverbs has lots to say about the Sluggard and none of it's good, but this perception that's we're the masters of our own destiny is foolishness.

In essence, James' response is seriously? You're going to go do this, you're going to go do that? **What is your life? You are a mist.** In other words, you are the morning fog that when the sun rises high enough, burns away. Like the Psalmist says

"You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure. 6 "Surely everyone goes around like a mere phantom; in vain they rush about, heaping up wealth without knowing whose it will finally be."

Not only is our life short, our pursuit of the treasures this world has to offer is vanity. It's only for a moment. Here one moment and gone the next.

We don't know what's going to happen tomorrow much less next year. If we're really honest, we don't know what's going to happen later this afternoon. Think about how quickly life changes, with one phone call or text. One doctor's visit. One left turn into traffic. Our sense of control is a fiction. A fantasy. Life is so short, and so fragile, how could we possibly make the claim to be able to control it?

We're going to move forward to verse 16 and come back to 15. In verse 16, he claims ***"As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil."***

Boasting in itself is not evil. It is a neutral term. It's what you boast in that matters. Jeremiah 9 tells us

"This is what the Lord says "Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the Lord.

When we boast in something in a biblical sense, we are giving words to the thing in which we have the deepest confidence. Hence, don't boast in your wisdom, strength or riches. Don't put your confidence in those things, that's just sin. In the New Testament what did Paul boast in? He boasted in the cross, he boasted in his weakness, which wasn't so much confidence in his weakness, but implied the correlative trust, that God's strength embraced and working through his weakness.

These folks in James, were boasting in their arrogance schemes, which is pride. They put their deepest trust and confidence in their own supposed self-sufficiency and the cleverness of their plans. And in their arrogance they had left God out of the picture and placed themselves, and their trust in themselves at the very center of it. There is a sense that, I wish I had better language for it, it's atheistic planning. They were practical atheists in their planning.

I'm sure they remained orthodox in their theology, and maybe even passionate in their worship. But when it came to the question of who was the director of their life, who was their provider, they were living as if there was no God. They assumed that should they achieve some sort of profit or accomplishment it would be the direct and sole reflection of their own effort. And they wore that as a badge of honor for all to see. They were practical atheists, because they were living and planning as if there is no God.

There's another sense where they were more than practical atheists. They were idolaters. They were living as if they were their own gods. Often theologians, in talking about God's nature they will talk about things like God's omniscience, that is God is all knowing. Or his Omnipotence, meaning that God is all powerful.

In a way, these merchants were boasting of these two things: they boasted in their knowledge of what the future held, and the necessary power to control the future they desired. They were claiming God's traits for themselves and boasting in them. Which is why James' response in verse 14 is so perfect: You are going to live as if you are god of your own life. You are going to sit in God's seat? He is the eternal one, you're no God, you are a vapor.

How many of us, if we're honest, when we reflect on our own lives are guilty of living, maybe not all the time, but for seasons of time as if God doesn't exist. Sure, he exists on Sunday when we gather for worship. In our quiet times in the morning or when we attend our life

group. But when it comes to making the decision that make up our lives, we act as if there is no God. We act as if it all hangs on us.

Our careers, finances, and relationships, our gifts and abilities, even our free time, it's all ours, isn't it? To be managed and disposed of as we see fit. Sometimes we'll give God a consulting role, but for the most part, all this is dependent on us. And deep down we're proud that it's us. Because it makes us feel good to look at what we've done or what we've accomplished.

It makes us feel good until it doesn't. Until things start to fall apart as they inevitably do, because our feet aren't big enough to fill God's shoes. Or things don't fall apart. We succeed, and it's empty – because we were created to be a part of a bigger story. We were created to worship at the throne, not sit on the throne.

If you're not sure if that's you or not, there are two easy diagnostics for how you're doing with this: our worry and our prayer life. Like the indicators on our dash board, they can tell us how we're running. Worry is a great test – because it shows where your trust is. If you're continually worried about your career, finances, health or any of the other things I listed, it's probably tied to the false belief that you're ultimately the one responsible for your life.

In the same way, if you're never praying for God to give you wisdom and direction, if you're never asking God what's your will in this, or God I really need you to come through on this one– it's pretty good evidence that you don't really think you need God in your life. And James calls that kind of living evil.

But he doesn't just leave us there. In verses thirteen, fourteen and sixteen, James lays out the problem. We are sitting in the wrong seat. We are living and planning our lives in a way that is forgetful of God or living as if we are God. Verse 15, is his proposed solution.

I'm not sure if you picked it up on our first read, but notice the structure – verse 13, he says ***“Now listen you who say today or tomorrow, we're going to go do this or that...”*** and in verse 15 he gives the corrective - Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.”

I don't think that what James is suggesting is that you and I need to begin every sentence with “Lord willing.” If I ask you after the service, what are you doing this afternoon, I don't think you need to add “Lord willing I'm going to go to Trader Joe's.” Maybe “Lord willing” the kids are going to take a nap, since that's sometimes truly work of the Lord...but it doesn't work if we're just sprinkling some christianese over an otherwise secular life.

Rather James is advocating a perspective shift, that *as* we live and plan, set goals and even hope that we do so recognizing that our lives are ultimately contingent upon God's plan. He's not just presenting us with a phrase to use, but an attitude to embrace. With a posture of heart – that is humble and thankful.

This is the right posture of heart to make plans from. Not in our arrogance, in the recognition of our dependence on God. In the recognition of our own finitude. We don't know everything and we're not in control.

I love how obvious James makes it. He doesn't say...if it's the Lord's will, we will do this or that. Rather, if it's the Lord's will and we live. Meaning...don't take life for granted. We're not promised tomorrow. If we do live, it is only by the Lord's will. The very fact that we live and breathe and move and plan, is a gift. As James says in 1:17, every good and perfect gift (it's not from ourselves) it's from above.

Some of you're thinking, that's great Andrew, I can start being more thankful for my life. But you're talking about seeking the Lord's will, not my own... how do I know if something is the Lord's will? I want to be obedient. How do I know it's God's wants me to take the job, enroll in school, buy the house...or whatever it is that you're facing.

This may sound insensitive, but...I don't know if God cares. Of course he cares about you, He cares about you so much that he sent his son to die for you. But I think most of the time I think God gives us a lot of latitude in the choices we make.

Doing the will of God, isn't so much about what road we take – it's about the kind of person we're becoming on the road. The will of God is loving the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and loving your neighbor as yourself. It's believing in the one he sent, Jesus, and making disciples of all nations, and being a witness in the Jerusalem, Judeas and Samarias of your life. The will of God is to seek first his kingdom and righteousness. It's to praise and worship him, and to take up your cross and follow him. The will of God is that we would be sanctified and Holy and reflect what he is like to the world. The bible is not going to tell you what school you should go to, or what job you should take. It will tell you about the kind of person you should be at that school or in that position. Ultimately that's what it comes down to **God's will is more about who we become than where we are.**

Practically speaking, when we're trying to determine, is this God's will or not...we look to his word. We pray for His guidance. We seek Godly counsel from wise believers. And we think through it asking questions. Not just how much am I going to make, but if I take this job, is it going to pull me away from my family? Are the long hours going to take me away from my church community? If I buy the house, am I going to be able to be the generous person God's called me to be? If I enroll in this school, will I be nurtured in faith, or will my Christian worldview come under attack? There isn't a right or wrong all the time, but just faithfully put all these things on the table – and we say God – this life of mine is a gift, and I'm not sure how many days I have – but the one's I do I want to live them for you.

I ran out of time, so you're going to have to look up verse 17 on your own this week and let me know what you learned.