**James 4:13-17 Our Future Plans and the Providence of God**

Good morning. Please open your Scriptures to the Epistle of James. Today we are discussing chapter 4 verses 13-17 and the subject of our discussion is planning for the future and the providence of God. Before we begin looking at the Scripture, I have a few questions for us to consider. The first question is this, is it a bad thing for people to plan for the future? Secondly, should we be concerned about what will happen tomorrow? Finally, what is the proper balance between planning for the future and having faith in God? Now that we have discussed these questions, let us see what God’s Word has to say about planning for the future and the providence of God. Let’s read together James 4:13-17.

**4:13 “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.”**

* This verse is addressing the arrogance of man in thinking that he is the master of his life. James wants those who have this opinion to really think carefully assuming that they can control what happens in their lives. The statement begins with the assumption that we can do things exactly when we want to do them. We will go today or tomorrow. If we really think we can control what happens in our lives and we then do not include God in those plans we are missing the mark.
* When we look carefully at these plans, we see that God has nothing to do with any of them. To have a worldly pursuit or endeavor, but to not include God in those plans is a costly error.
* Another error in this way of thinking is that many times we place our hopes and joy into the plans we have. This also is not right thinking because we cannot determine what will happen in the future. Only God knows the future, so to not include Him in our plans is a big mistake.
* The assumption this businessman has in making a profit is also an error of thinking. Assuming that we will be able to secure all our desires without considering God’s will is not wise. Jesus taught that if our treasure is only in those things that we can get in this world, those treasures will eventually rot, be destroyed or be stolen. Only the things that God gives us can last eternally and should therefore be the things we should be desiring.

**4:14 “Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. For you are just a vapor that appears for a little while, and then vanishes away.”**

* We need to remember that we are just a creation of the Lord. Our lives are very short and in the overall scheme of things are very low. We have no guarantee what will take place in our lives in the future, nor should that be our major concern.
* In what ways is our life like a vapor? Sometimes real early in the morning when it is still very cool, we can see the vapor of our breath, but we notice after we see the vapor that it disappears very quickly. Our lives are very short just like that vapor. This concept has been shared several times in Scripture. Here are few examples: In Psalm 102:11 we read “My days are like a lengthened shadow, and I wither away like grass.” Life is short and we have a limited amount of time on earth to live for the Lord. When King David was dedicating the temple, he said these words in his prayer “For we are strangers before You, and temporary residents, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope.” He goes on to say that there is hope only with the Lord who has given us all that we have.
* How long do we have left in our earthly lives? That is something that none of us knows. Every day we read in the obituaries about people in our community who passed away. Some of these people are at ripe old ages and then some are just in their teens, 20s, 30s or 40s. The point James wants us to accept is that assuming we are going to have the next year in our lives to do what we want to do is misguided arrogance. We cannot assume anything, but we must live every day we have as if it were going to be our last taking every opportunity to show the love of Christ to others.
* Proverbs 27:1 “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.”
* Matthew 5:34 “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”
* Adrian Rogers “Lord, I don’t know what the future is. I don’t know how much more time I have. So, Lord help me not to waste time. Help me to apply my days unto wisdom. And, Lord, may I live out the rest of my days, whether they may be few, whether they may be many, may they be used for you.”
* This life is too short to only live for our own needs and desires. Let us use the time we have here to glorify our Lord and Savior through the way we live. May we love, share the gospel, enjoy the blessings He continually gives us and treasure our loved ones.

**4:15 “Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.’”**

* Everything that we have and everything that we are is because of the Lord. Therefore, we do everything only because of His grace. When we are planning things for the future may we place those plans into the hands of God acknowledging that it is He who is in control of all that happens. James is teaching that rather than thinking we have the control; we need to remember that God is the One who is in control.
* We need to remember that God appoints all things to happen according to His will and His plans, therefore we are to submit to the will of God. The length of our life is determined by God as well because we cannot determine how long we will live here.
* Even though we do a good job of making a lot of plans in our lives, we must acknowledge that God’s plans trump our plans. He has the final say on all things, so when making plans or determining what may happen in the future, we must submit all those plans to Him.
* The Apostle Paul exhibited this kind of faith in his writings. Here are a couple of examples: In Acts 18:21 he said “I will return to you again if God wills.” Also, in 1 Corinthians 4:19 he writes “But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills…” Paul placed all his trust in God and allowed Him to be in control of every situation. May we follow that example.

**4:16 “But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.”**

* Having the arrogant attitude of being in control of your life is evil and against God.
* For us to boast about all of successes and not give any of the credit to God, that is an evil thing to do. Also, to assume there will be success in life without paying any credit to God or including Him in the plans is an evil thing to do.
* Rather than have this attitude, James is teaching that we should rejoice in the fact that all our lives and the time we have are in God’s hands. When we place all things in His hands then we are relying on the wisdom, power and providence of God rather than our own strength.

**4:17 “So for one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, for him it is sin.”**

* This final verse today is returning us to the topic we discussed a couple of weeks ago regarding convictions. When we place our lives and everything, we are into the hands of God this also means that we are going to allow Him to guide us into the right way of living. Therefore, when we surrender ourselves to the Law of God our minds are filled with the right way of living that God has established in His Word. We know what the right thing to do is because God had made all of this very clear in His Word. Since we know what is right, we are expected to follow those commands. When we know what the right thing is to do and then choose to go our own way this is a sin.
* James is discussing here sins of omission rather than sins of commission. A sin of commission is when we do things that are in direct violation of the teachings of God. Any violation of the Ten Commandments are sins of commission because I have done something that is in opposition to the will of God. On the other hand, sins of omission are when I refuse to do what God commands and by ignoring such a command I am sinning against God as well. For example, God’s Word teaches that His people should not ever neglect to gather when the opportunity is given to them. So, refusing to attend worship and being part of God’s family in a church is a sin of omission. If I say I can just worship online and experience the same as if I were attending in person that is a rejection of God’s Word and is therefore sin.
* What we need to remember is that we can be guilty of sin whether it be things that we do against His Word or things that we refuse to do which are commanded in Scripture.

Today we will conclude with three points of application to sum up what has been learned today:

1. Firstly, we need to guard our hearts and minds against the arrogance of being self-centered in our planning for the future. Rather than think we have the ultimate power to guide our future, we need to place everything into the hands of God and trust that He will guide us into the way He wants us to go. When making plans we need to always say that if the Lord wills for this or that to be done then it will be accomplished. Also, if things do not work out exactly how we have planned them we need to not become bitter at God and blame Him for not doing things the way we want. God is perfect, we are not. Therefore, His ways are perfect. We must rely on His perfect will to guide us in all our ways.
2. Secondly, we also need to guard ourselves against presuming that we can accomplish whatever we desire based only upon our own strength. There is a teaching regarding Philippians 4:13 that has infiltrated the church which has had a very dangerous impact on the way that people see their own efforts and the will of God. Philippians 4:13 reads “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” When this verse is taken out of its context it can become very human focused. Paul is instructing the Christians in Philippi that they can overcome the persecution and challenges of this life if they place their trust in Christ to strengthen them to face it. Paul was writing this letter from prison, and he wanted the people to know that he was able to face adversity because God gave him the strength to do so. This verse does not mean that we can ask God to help us succeed in any plan we have, and He will automatically help us to succeed. If that were true, then man would have the ability to manipulate God. When planning the future let us always place our trust in God that He will direct our paths and guide us in the way we should go.
3. Finally, we need to be on guard not to ignore God’s will when we are making those plans. We have access to the Scriptures and can read them whenever we like. Having that access comes with responsibility in living out what the Word teaches. Since God has made known to us all things in Scripture, we need to live a life honoring to Him we are expected to do what it says. Sins of omission, or refusing to do what God commands, is just as dangerous as sins of commission. Let us be the people of God who do what the Word commands to the best of our ability and live in a way that shows others we trust the Lord to guide and sustain us.