

XX. James in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel Life According to James
“True Religion and God’s Will”
James 4:13–17
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This is our 20th study in the Gospel life according to James. James 4:13-17 says [13] *Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—[14] yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. [15] Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” [16] As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. [17] So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

James 4:13-17 brings us to an interesting point. Before I get into the text I want you to think of two things. The theme of James is very simple. James is teaching us the Gospel life of persistent ministry and joyful maturation in a sin-cursed world informed by the God-sent gift of wisdom from above. Remember James has written this fourteen years after the ascension of Jesus and fourteen years before his martyrdom. He pastors a mega-church in Jerusalem. In it he continually calls those whom he is writing to ‘my brothers, my beloved brothers’ and by doing that he is addressing those who have addressed faith in Jesus Christ and he is taking them at their word. That means you have Gospel foundation, a right relationship with God and because of that you have a Gospel motivation in life which is the love of Christ constrains you. Now you live in a sin-cursed world and all of the brokenness of that sin-cursed world is encountered by believers. Believers encounter deaths, sicknesses, closed businesses, disappointments, re-arranged plans and all those things happen to everyone because we’re in a sin-cursed, broken world.

Now how you respond to that is a gift from God. God is sovereignly using these trials of life as tests to show you what you already know out of Gospel wisdom in your life view, to show you what you need to know and to show you any strongholds of idolatry in your life. These trials will affirm your world and life view that is consistent with the Gospel wherever it is consistent – wisdom from above. In our response it uncovers what we yet need to know and it shows any strongholds of self-absorption, self-adulation and self-reliance. Here is what we are about to learn. The way you view life, you’re world and life view, will ultimately determine how you respond to the trials of life.

Here is something else we’ll learn in this study. This is a crucial point for James. James is about to show us that not only will your life view give you the grid through which you respond to life trials, but your life view is the grid through which you make your life plans. So when life comes you respond with your life view to it, the trials of life and as you go into life, made in the image of God, you plan and do things on purpose. Your life plans reflect your life view. So your response to life trials reflects your life

view. So your life view determines your response to life trials and the content of your life plans.

There is one more thing I'd like to mention before we go into the text a little bit further. When I was in college I had a double major of history and theology. My major area of history was the 19th century. When I did projects I would have to do primary research and part of this research would involve reading journals and letters from people who lived in the 19th century. So many of these things I read at the end of the sentence would have 'd.v.' and then they would start writing again. The reason they did that comes from the text we're looking at in this study. So at certain points in a letter or a journal from people in the 19th century there would be the initials 'd.v.' so let's start and look at this text.

James 4:13 starts off [13] *Come now, you who say...* The translation is 'come all ya'll who say...' It means further 'listen up ya'll.' He will say it again in James 5:1. Who are the ya'll? Who is he talking to? Normally James has been talking to professing believers but here he seems to be narrowing it to a singular group of professing believers when he says "Come all who say..." They are people who are saying something. Look at the text. James 4:13 says [13] *Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"*— So who is he talking to? I want to give you a couple of points on this.

James is talking to people who make plans and those who make very specific plans. This is what we call a business plan. The people who have made this business plan, not only plan but it is a comprehensive business plan. This plan has their occupation for they are going to trade, they are merchants. This plan has their destination for they are going to such and such city. It also has their process of evaluation. When we make a profit then we'll leave that city. Their length of stay in that city will be measured by the profits that they make. Then there is a sense of personal commitment as they say 'We will trade, we will go to such and such a city, we will make a profit.' So there is personal, bold, committed engagement to a comprehensive business plan.

Pastor James has heard this business plan announced and has recorded a generic representation of it for us. James then very boldly evaluates their business plan. James 4:13-16 says, [14] *yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. [15] Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."* [16] *As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.* He has just announced their business plan as arrogant and evil boasting.

Why has James made that evaluation? He has made that evaluation according to the text for two reasons. Reason number one is because of what that business plan contains. Reason number two is because of what that business plan does not contain. What does the business plan contain? It is not only comprehensive but it contains its world and life view. I will go. I will stay. I will trade. I will make a profit. I will, I will, I will, I will... That is arrogance of self-absorption, self-reliance and self-confidence. What is absent from the plan? The problem is not planning. What's in the plan? You not only have the sin of commission, I will, I will, but you have a sin of omission. What is left out of this plan? It is 'if the Lord wills.' If the Lord wills then I will go. If the Lord wills I will trade. If the Lord wills I will make a profit.

James 4:14 says *14] yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.* He says you have no idea what tomorrow will bring and you don't even know if you're going to be living tomorrow. Man knows not his time. It is the Lord who gives life and the Lord who takes away life. So somewhere you're plan ought to reveal not self-absorption, self-reliance and self-confidence but God-confidence, God-reliance and God-absorption. So the plan has your arrogance and it doesn't have your humility.

I attribute this to Alistair Begg. Do you know what the number one song requested at funerals is in secular funerals? It is the song "I Did It My Way." It is the height of arrogance and it is utter stupidity. I even see Christians tear up when they hear that silly song sung. The believer knows that it is in Him that I live and move and have my being. The believer knows that I am what I am by the grace of God. What about an unbeliever? He is what he is by the common grace of God, maybe not redeeming grace but common grace. So what is lacking is that acknowledgment of humility and reliance upon the Lord Himself so that there is this declaration of the Lord's will.

The text now tells us that there are two categories of God's will. One is that 'if the Lord wills' is referring to God's providential will. Every day you encounter God's providential will. God's providential will for me at 2am this morning was an experience I was not prepared for. As I prepared this sermon I had no idea what I was going to go through this morning at 2am and I can become impatient at those moments. Lord, do You know how much time I have put into this and now I'm not going to be able to preach it? I can just see the Lord up there probably shaking his head at me and then my life view has to take over.

My life view is that God is sovereign and God never promises good things all the time. In fact He promises you'll encounter bad things everyday but He does promise that all things will work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose. So God has a plan in the plan that I wouldn't have planned and that's His plan. So as I planned to get here this morning I did what I was supposed to do and I have to say 'if the Lord wills' then I have to put my confidence in His providential will.

God's providential will is secret until you encounter it and then there is His revealed will and we see that in Deuteronomy 29:29 when it says [29] *"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."* This verse includes God's revealed will. James 4:17 says [17] *So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.*

So what is he teaching? First of all, with knowledge comes culpability and accountability. To whom much is given, much is required. My illustration on this is from a Q & A time with R.C. Sproul. A lady had asked him "Mr. Sproul where are all the innocent Bushmen in Africa going to spend eternity?" Sproul replied "Madam I can assure you that all innocent Bushmen will spend eternity in heaven but there is one problem for there are no innocent Bushmen." All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Some have sinned against God's revelation and creation. Some have sinned against the shadow of pulpits preaching the Gospel to them and rejecting it. So we're all culpable but some of us have greater culpability. It's one thing to deny the glory of God in creation as you worship and serve the creature but it's another thing to deny the majesty and glory of God that you have heard from a pulpit continually that God

has loved sinners and given His Son and you have said 'no' to that. That is even greater culpability.

Here he is looking at the fact that you have made your plan and he has told you that your plan was arrogant, boastful and evil because of what it contains of self-absorption and what it does not contain, the humility of God-reliance and God-focus. How did you know that? It is because God's Word has come to you. Now you know how to plan for life. Now you have a different category for life-view from which you develop your life plans and if you reject now, knowing it, then it's acknowledged sin.

How do I know that I'm going to encounter bad things in life? God's revealed will told me in His Word. How do I know that God causes all things not to be good but to work together for good? It is because God has told me. In other words, how do I know about God's providential will? It is because God's revealed will told me about it. Now I need to go to God's revealed will to frame my life's plans, to fill my life's plan, to direct my life's plans and then shroud them with contentment in the providence of God. That God's providential will, will take me through a sin-cursed world working all things together and I can be content with that. Why should I be content? It is because God's revealed will tells me to be content. How can I be content? It is because God's providential will says that He is working all these things together for good to My people and for My people.

Where will this lead us? I want to give you five takeaways in conclusion. The first one is the tongue again and again. Here's what we have learned. Out of 83 verses in the book of James, 23 of them deal with the tongue. The tongue like the bit in the mouth of a horse and a rudder on a ship, does two things. It directs lives and reveals what's in the heart. When you speak to people you are affecting the direction of their life and when you speak you are affecting the direction of your life. Man also speak from what fills the heart. If you talk long enough eventually the preoccupation, the occupation and the condition of our hearts will be revealed. It will come out.

We have another tongue lesson here. Not only what we say will direct and reveal the condition of our heart but what we don't say reveals the condition of our heart. When they announced their plan verbally in James 4:13 it not only revealed where they were in their heart with the "I wills" but they also revealed what was in their heart with what they omitted and that is God's will.

The second takeaway is life plans and life views. There is nothing wrong with planning. God made us in His image. God does things on purpose. We live life on purpose. The Bible says that David after he had served the purpose of God, fell asleep in his own generation and was laid among his fathers. So there is nothing wrong with planning. Can't you just see this as the Lord's Supper is over at the church of Jerusalem and some of the entrepreneurs have gotten together with their business plans and maps and saying these items would probably sell in Antioch so why don't we go there and when we make a profit we'll leave. You can almost see them putting together these business plans but when they do this they reveal their arrogance, boasting and evil, not because they were planning but because of the content and intent of the plan. They are self-absorbed, self-reliant, self-confident and God dismissive. There was no place for God in the business plan whatsoever.

There are a lot of different kinds of plans in life. I wonder why when James decides to give us this lesson that life views not only affect our response to trials of life

but also to the plans of life that he picked a business plan. There are other kinds of plans. There are diet plans, exercise plans, home improvement plans and all kinds of plans in life. I think the reason he picked out the business plan is that the business plan really gets to what we believe. My dear friend Randy Pope and I were talking long ago about stewardship and resources of the church and how we wanted them to go where our heart was and not get syphoned off into good things but the best things. He made a comment that has never left me. He said “Harry I have come to realize if you want to know what people believe in their heart, what churches believe in their heart, then take a look at where they put their prime money, their prime people and their prime time.

In other words, I can look in my check book and tell you what is important to me. I can look at my calendar and tell you what’s important to me. Business plans deal with time, people and resources. Whenever you deal with time, a non-renewable resource, then after it’s over it’s gone. You don’t get it back. You came into this world with a finite number of sunrises and sunsets and when this one is done you don’t get it back. You don’t get \$10 back if you spend it. You don’t get a day back either. So how do you spend your days and resources? Now you see what people really believe, their operational faith and not just their confessional faith. So here is the life plan reflecting the life views as the life view is expressed of ‘I will,’ profits and temporal advancements and there is nothing about eternity or God at all in the business plan of perhaps what are professing believers and entrepreneurs in the church at Jerusalem.

The third takeaway is two possible life views and life plans. In other words, when you make a life plan it will come from your life view. There are basically two types of life views. One is “I will” and two is “God’s will.” One of those is directing your life today. It is either ‘I will’ or ‘God’s will.’ In Matthew 16 Jesus is telling His disciples about when He is going to the cross and will die in three days and Peter says “God forbid that this should happen to you.” Jesus says to Peter “Get thee behind me Satan for you have set your mind on man’s interest and not upon God’s interest.” We either have a man-centered life view that is self-absorbed and self-reliant or we have a God-centered life view. It is one or the other.

If it is a God-centered life view, it doesn’t mean we’re passive. It just means that all that we do is resting in the power of God. Without Him I can do nothing but I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. The third vow when parents bring their children to be baptized is ‘in reliance upon God’s grace and the power of the Holy Spirit I will endeavor.’ It is not just ‘I will’ for the ‘I will’ is resting in God’s power and God’s grace. So it is with the believer. There is doing but the believer doesn’t do and then ask God to come behind them but the believer goes before the Lord to determine what God is doing and what God has called them to do in His perceptive will, His revealed will and then the believer rests in His providential will. So I will endeavor because I am relying upon God’s grace and God’s power.

Proverbs 16:9 says [9] *The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.* There is nothing wrong with a man planning his way but God is the one who directs His steps and establishes the plans of our life. So you take God’s perceptive will, His Word, to frame and fill your plans and then you take God’s providential will as you put your trust in Him alone. So instead of an ‘I will’ it is God’s will and that’s what enables me to do what God would have me do for Him. Anytime that we make our plans you can be assured that God will rearrange your plans.

Here is a question I want you to ask yourself. If God doesn't exist, if Jesus is not the Savior, and if God's providence of sustaining His people day by day, are not true then would your life change at all next week? Would your life change at all if God's not real? Would anything where you might show up at 11am Sunday morning change or have all of your endeavors rested in the absolute fact that without Him I can do nothing but I can do all things through Him who strengthens me? God if You don't show up next week then all my plans will fail because God alone is who I rest in.

The fourth takeaway is two essential features of Biblical, Christ-centered, grace-derived, God-glorifying life view. One it has a right view of man and life and two it has a right view of God and life. Right from this text James said instead you ought to say 'if God will' for you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life for you're a mist that appears for a short time and then vanishes? In this world what is a right view of life for me? Life is fragile. I don't know my time. I'm not assured of tomorrow but it doesn't mean I don't plan. It does mean that I realize the fragility of life. I realize the unpredictability of life and brevity of life.

I have this privilege of staying at this place at the beach at least once a year. I can actually see the sunrise and sunset from my back porch. The sunrise seems to take forever. Climbing the sky takes forever. Then the afternoon starts going faster and I'll say to my wife "Let's get home so we can see the sunset" and we have about thirty seconds then it's gone. That's your life. Those who are younger probably think it takes a long time for things to happen but believe me it goes rapidly. We don't know how many days the Lord has given us but He has numbered all of our days. Life is fragile.

Life is unpredictable. I have two illustrations of the unpredictability of life; the Chicago airport and the Atlanta airport. Every time I have to make travel plans I tell my wife and secretary not to send me through those two airports for I can promise you that I will not make a connection when I have to fly through those two airports. I can promise you I'll sit on the tarmac for two hours. I can promise you with the Midwestern storms and southern storms that delays will happen at these two airports. I confess my own impatience with it but eventually my life view starts taking over and I realize I'm here for a reason. You see all these business men with their business plans going to such and such a city and they say 'I will go there' and they hear but we're not going there for there is a tornado there. Then they will go up to the poor reservationist and say "What are you doing? Why did you cancel this flight?!" "Because there is a tornado there" and they blame the reservationist as if the reservationist sent the tornado there. You are finding out that life is unpredictable for it's in the hands of God.

Not only is life fragile, unpredictable and brief but another thing is your inability to control life. You have absolutely no ability to control life. That right view of man and life must be joined with the right view of God and life. Who is God? God is sovereign. God is certain. God is sure. All of His promises are 'yes' and 'amen.' God says when you think of life, you think not of this mist but you think of living life in light of eternity. Matthew 16:26 says [26] *For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?* Yet many of us don't sell our soul for the whole world for we have a lot cheaper price. The right view of God is life is that He is sovereign, certain, sure and eternity is forever.

Final takeaway is the last thought and that is don't miss the opportunity. Whenever you make plans for life it will give you the opportunity to respond to life. As

you respond to life it gives you the opportunity to be a witness, as one's whose contentment and confidence is in the Lord and that God's will is perfect. Without Him I can't do anything but I can do all things through Him. So I will not boast with my plans saying 'I will... I will... I will...' but if God wills.

Earlier I said in my study of history journals and letters that many would put the initials 'd.v.' in various places of their writings whenever they would make a statement about the future. D.V. is Latin for Deo meaning God and Volente meaning *willing*. James is not talking about doing speech therapy where next time you make a plan just throw in some 'God willings.' He is not giving us rabbit's foots or punctuation marks or clichés by telling us to do this but the absence of trusting and framing your life by God's will and trusting in God's providential will, when people hear your life and see your life in action what are they seeing? Are they seeing the stupidity of 'I did it my way' with 'I will... I will... I will...' or will they see the humble courage and humble reliance upon God's grace of 'I will endeavor'? Instead of our plans, words and life being arrogant and boasts that are empty, we will boast only in the Lord. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the privilege to be in Your Word. I think of all the conversations where these witnessing opportunities from this many people could be engaged as people ask us questions and we share and then from our hearts we acknowledge 'God willing.' God's revealed will is directing me. God's providential will gives me contentment. Instead of the arrogant boast of evil where we are exalting ourselves with self-absorption and self-reliance, there would be a God-absorption and a God-reliance and the glory of God would be our boast. If you are reading this today and you have not yet come to this Savior, this Savior has humbled Himself with His plan that you might be His boast and He will take you to glory. He has come to do for you what you could not do for yourself, even though you didn't acknowledge your need of Him and He did not need you, He wanted you even though you did not want Him. Now would you come to Him? My brothers and sisters, may the words of our mouth and the plans of our life be easily read by the world that our boast is the Lord for I pray in Jesus' Name, Father, Amen.