

STUDIES IN THE EPISTLE OF JAMES – PART 8

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

Date: 03-03-2024

Scripture: James 4: 13-17

We are in James. I'm sure none of you thought that 7 weeks in, we'd still be in James. We always read the book through in about half an hour – that is done! But here, we are just taking all that we can get out of it. Just as James is keen to point out, we've looked at what kind of behavior emanates from a man or a woman of faith. We claim to be Christians, then what kind of a person do we showcase to the world? And he's been showing us quite a few things. I'll recap the last six.

- Men and women of faith are obedient to the Word.
- We're not just hearers of the Word, but we are doers of the Word. We also remove discrimination from amongst us.
- Faith proves itself by the works that we do. There must be good works that come from the fact that we are connected into the vine.
- Faith controls the tongue.
- Faith acts in godly wisdom – that everything that we do must come from the fact that we are using the knowledge that God has given us, and using it widely.
- Faith produces humility, doesn't act in pride and arrogance but is in humility.

Today, we're going to look at how faith must produce dependence on God.

James 4: 13-17

¹³ Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." ¹⁴ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." ¹⁶ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ Therefore, to one who knows the ^[e]right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

Heavenly Father, open our hearts and our minds. Illumine our thoughts through the power and presence of Your Holy Spirit, and maybe have those things upon your heart for us. Settle upon our hearts and upon our wills Lord, that can sometimes be so stubborn. But today, we pray that we will yield to You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Five verses that are pretty unique. I was looking at them and thinking they seem like stand-alone verses. We look at paragraphs in scripture, and then one leads to another, and then we come to the climax or the gist of what it's saying at the final. But it seems like each one of these can stand alone. you can build a sermon on each of these verses. Let me go through each one and just pull out one point that we're going to be spending time on as we go through.

v. 13 – talking about making presumptuous plans which are based on assuming that our tomorrows are assured.

v. 14 – we don't know what will happen in the future. Only God knows the number of our days. So, to presume on a tomorrow is to think that we actually have all the resources God has at our disposal.

v. 15 – he shows us the right way to make plans which is, it is better to add 'if God wills' to our plans.

v. 16 – presumptuous plans are based in arrogance. To presume is arrogance and pride, because we presume we are in charge when really, we are not.

v. 17 – defines sin by saying that if we know something is wrong, and then do it, then it is sin. So doing something that we know is wrong deliberately, intentionally is sin.

So those are the 5 points that come out of these 5 verses. But let's kind of synthesize them together and see if we can take just about 2 or 3 points out of them.

1. MAKING PRESUMPTUOUS PLANS

The definition of presume is to act without complete knowledge, permission or the right to do so, or to dare to act in a certain manner. When one presumes, action is being taken with limited or incomplete information.

Proverbs 27:1 *Do not boast about tomorrow for you do not know what a day may bring.*

Don't boast about what will happen tomorrow because you don't know what that day could bring. But a life of faith looks outward and upward to God and relies on Him. Presumption, on the other hand, looks inward and finds confidence and assurance in our self and our own abilities.

James is talking to a group of men who presumed on what they will do when they went to another city. They were probably businessmen. Jesus also alluded to this in Luke 12:16-20. Jesus talks about a farmer with a similar attitude. He told them this parable saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' and he said, 'I will do this. I will tear down my barns and build larger ones and there I will store all my grain and my goods, and I will say to my soul: You have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink and be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool, this night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'" Presumption.

Proverbs 16:3

*Commit your works to the Lord
and your plans will be established.*

Proverbs 16:9

*The heart of man plans his way,
but the Lord establishes His steps.*

James was expressing concern about these believers who did not consciously make all their plans in the Lord. "Today or tomorrow," they said, "we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." They were so sure of what they were going to do. Their success, they felt, was guaranteed. Nothing could go wrong for them. It was only boasting and bragging.

It's extremely important to note at this point, that James is not condemning the possession of wealth or wise planning for the future. Wealth can be essential for furthering the kingdom of God. And planning is an essential part of good stewardship that God requires of us. James is really condemning the idea that money can bring any security to us outside of God. The wealth we possess today could be lost in an instant. It is fleeting just like our lives which are like vapor. It brings us no real security and we cannot boast in it. rather, we must trust all that we have and all of our future into the hands of the Lord who alone determines what shall come to pass.

So the key here is not that we should not make plans. The key here is that we should make plans that include God. We shouldn't make plans to the exclusion of the Lord. God needs to be part of the equation when we make our plans.

Let me give you an example of a person who says to somebody: 100% I'll meet you here next year. We'll meet. No problem at all. I'm in good health; I exercise daily, I've gone for all my checkups, I'm in good physical shape. One year from now, I'll meet you here. And then COVID happens. And all of that is 'empty words'. Or a tsunami hits, or an earthquake, or a drunken driver gets on the road. That is why he says in v.15, "we ought to say 'if the Lord wills, we shall live, and also do this or that.'" if the Lord wills, and we have breath, if we are alive, then we will do this or that.

We therefore make plans in our finiteness, but we always include the infinite God in those plans. We make plans in our finiteness, in our mind, the things that we know and all of that, but we always invite the infinite God into the equation. So a warning for us is don't make presumptuous plans that are based on an arrogant view of self-knowledge.

What's the right way to plan? James says it's better to add 'if God wills' to our plans. Paul did it in Acts 18:21 – When the Jews in Ephesus wanted him to stay longer (he was preaching in the synagogue and they loved it). They said, "Please stay," and he said, "No, I have to go. But I will return, if God wills."

In 1 Corinthians 4:19 he further writes, "I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills." For most of his life actually, Paul didn't know whether this place would be his burial place or not. he didn't know whether he would get to any place or not because there was so much antagonism towards what he was doing. If the Lord wills.

Many of you may have seen the initials DV that is put after somebody sends you a message or maybe on a marriage invitation, a greeting card. DV = Deo Volente. It's a Latin word which means God willing. So when people put that, they're saying this is going to happen, God willing. By using this phrase, we are acknowledging God's sovereignty and our own humanness. We are agreeing with James that we are a mist or a vapor or a fog, here today and gone tomorrow.

That's why he says in v.15, instead, he says, you ought to say if the Lord wills, we will love and do this or that. our tomorrows are all in His hands, and we shouldn't forget it. But there is a deeper problem here than just being presumptuous. James seems to think so.....

2. BOASTING

v. 16 James says, "You boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil." The root problem is arrogance or pride. And the expression of that arrogance is boasting.

Proverbs 11:2 says, "*Proud and boastful people will be shamed, but wisdom stays with those who are modest and humble.*"

Boasting is showing pride and glorifying yourself. It takes the glory away from the Lord when we try to take the glory for things. And the Bible is so very clear, and I've mentioned it many times from this pulpit. God is very serious about anybody usurping His glory. Twice in Isaiah, He says, "My glory I will not share with another." We need to be very careful when we try to take the glory for the things that God is doing.

Scripture reminds us in many places not to boast.

Jeremiah 9:23 says, *“This is what the Lord says: ‘Don’t let the wise boast in their wisdom, or the powerful boast in their power, or the rich boast in their riches.’”*

Psalm 75:4-5

*I warned the proud, ‘Stop your boasting!’
I told the wicked, ‘Don’t raise your fists!
Don’t raise your fists in defiance at the heavens
or speak with such arrogance.’*

Proverbs 27:2

Let someone else praise you, not your own mouth – a stranger, not your own lips.

3. INTENTIONAL SIN.

v. 17 James gives us this definition of sin. He says, *“So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”*

In other words, James is saying: Maybe till now you didn’t know that what you were doing was wrong. From this point on, you know. And if you then continue to do what you have been doing, you are sinning. He makes it so very clear. When you know that this is wrong and you do it intentionally, deliberately, you are sinning before the Lord.

QUESTIONS FOR US TO PONDER UPON

1. Are there areas in our lives or in my life where my plans have been made presumptuously and in arrogance to the exclusion of God? Are there areas where we have made plans presumptuously? I was reading David’s life and the way God loved him. And this phrase is associated with David. “David inquired of the Lord.” nine times it occurs over and over and over again. David inquired of the Lord. are there things in your life, plans that you have made, steps you are taking that are not what the Lord has assured you is from Him? Are there those kinds of plans in your life? are you tired of waiting? Just wanting to go ahead, impatient?
2. Is there any area in our lives where we are taking the glory from God, where we are usurping His glory, where we should be saying, “look what the Lord has done,”? instead we go about thumping our chest and say: I’m the man, I’m the woman. I did this. Are we failing to give God His due?
3. Are we guilty of not doing something that we know we ought to? Are we guilty of that? because that is sin before the Lord. is there an area of your life that you know you ought to be doing and you’re not? That is sin. Or an area that you know you should not be doing but you are? That is sin.

Just three questions, beloved, from these five verses that I think would be a wonderful segue to the Lord’s Supper. Let us pause and allow the Spirit of God to search our hearts and see if there’s any of these three areas that need addressing. And if there are, to be reminded that He’s a God who is just. He forgives, He cleanses, if we will confess to Him.

Let us bow our heads. Spirit of God, would You rest upon us, and do what You need to do to bring to the surface those things that we need to deal with. And then may our wills align with Your will, Lord, in the quietness of these moments.

Amen.

