

How many of you have plans for lunch today? How about plans for this afternoon? Do you have a trip planned in the coming weeks? Do you have plans for Easter? What about this summer? We all make plans; it's in our human nature. This morning, let's continue our study of the Book of James, and see what James has to say about plans in the fourth chapter, verses 13 through 17:

Read James 4:13-17

Now one of the first things that jumps out to me as you read these verses is that we only have today, tomorrow is not promised. James states a fact that many of us at our age realize; life is short, our days are numbered. Charles Barkley, a former basketball star, was once asked if a certain basketball player who was approaching 40 years old should retire. To which Charles replied: "Old people don't get better, they just die." Somebody once told me that at his age, he doesn't buy green bananas. James compares our life to a mist that is here one moment and gone in the next. This fact was brought home to me several years ago with the untimely death of my younger brother Billy. In an instant he was gone due to a fatal heart attack; not able to enjoy his retirement or his first grandchild who was born a few months later.

I think that the point that James is trying to make is that we must make the most of each and every day we have and not waste the precious time that God has given us. In verse 14, James offers a serious thought-provoking question: "What is your life?" Take a moment and seriously reflect on this question. Look back over your life and the time God has given you. Now I don't mean that fancy new car that you have parked outside, your big home, your large bank account, or your previous career. I mean have you made a difference in the lives of your family, friends, community, and church. Are you leaving this world a better place than you found it? Have you made a positive difference for the Lord? That's a serious question, but one we need to consider when we realize that our remaining time here on this earth is limited.

This reminds me of the song "Thank You" that we have used occasionally as special music. It's about a man who gets to heaven and people, one after another keep coming up to him, thanking him for changing their lives by teaching them in Sunday School, praying for them, contributing to mission projects and countless other little behind the scenes acts of kindness and witnessing for Jesus Christ that while they were not acknowledged here on earth, they were in heaven. Think about this, at your memorial service will there be anybody willing to come forward and say thank you for how you have touched their life or will people only be there out of respect for your family or to make sure you are really dead?

There was a funeral in which the minister was praising the deceased. He went on and on about how great a man he was, and how kind and loving he was. After a while, the widow turns to

her oldest son and whispered: "Joe, go up there and look into the casket and make sure that's really your dad in there." The point is that we should live so that the preacher does not have to lie at our funeral.

If we are to make the most of our life and also make a difference for the Lord then our primary focus must be on God. In verse 13, James condemns those who think that they can control their own lives without any reference to God by saying: "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business, and make money." Certainly, there is definitely nothing wrong with making a living, but when our pursuit of money and material possessions becomes our main goal in life then we are living on dangerous grounds. In Mark 8:36, Jesus states: "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?" In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us to not worry about what we are going to wear or eat, but to seek first God because He will provide everything we really need.

In this passage James is also addressing our pride. You know in life we like to take credit for all our accomplishments, and blame God for all our failures and mistakes. However, when we boast that we will do this or that we are basically putting a limit on our potential, because by ourselves we can do nothing, but by walking in faith with God the sky is the limit. In John 15 Jesus tells us that He is the vine and we are the branches, and unless we stay connected to Him, we cannot accomplish anything worthwhile without Him.

There's an old saying that if you want to make God laugh tells Him your plans. Now James is not saying that making plans is wrong, but he is pointing out that there is a right and a wrong way to plan. In reality, we are dependent upon God for every good and perfect gift, and when we forget this, we are truly living on dangerous ground. When we state in the Lord's Prayer "Give us this day our daily bread," we are acknowledging two things: first, that we depend upon God for our daily needs, and secondly, that God will supply what we need; not too much and not too little, but just what we need for each day. We need to remember that God knows what is best for us and always wants the best for us. Remember those encouraging words from Romans 8:28 – "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called to His purpose." Then in Jeremiah 29:11, God said: "For surely I know the plans I have for you, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."

There's another old saying that you don't hear much these days: "God willing and the creek don't rise." When we say this, we are also acknowledging two things: God has a purpose for our lives, and God will help us carry out that purpose if we trust Him and walk in faith. So, based on these statements, how many of us make plans without first consulting God? Now think about that. When we have a decision to make do we take time to pray and seek God's guidance or do we flip a coin to determine whether it's heads or tails? This is especially critical

when there is a major decision in our life because there can be consequences in a hasty, ill-conceived decision.

In the book *Swiss Family Robinson*, the family had just been shipwrecked, but managed to safely get to the shore on a nearby island. After a good night's sleep, the father and the oldest son prepared to explore the island. They collected some supplies, weapons, and some food, and were prepared to head out, when the father said: "We still have one thing to do before we leave." "What?" asked his son. The father replied: "We need to pray and not forget God to whom we owe all things." As we make decisions and plans, we must not forget to consult God and involve Him in our everyday life. Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."

Once upon a time there were three monkeys playing on a seesaw; above them hung a bunch of bananas. The three monkeys all scampered toward the high end of the board in order to reach the bananas. As they did, the high end tilted down and became the low end. Then the monkeys scampered to the other end with the same result. Then the smartest one of the three monkeys had an idea; he would stay at one end of the board and wait for the other two to run to the other end, thus raising him up. Consequently, the smart monkey reached the bananas by not conforming to what the others were doing.

As Christians we must reject the way of the world where people arrange their lives as if God does not exist and as if they are masters of their own destiny. Instead, we must always keep God in the picture as we make plans and dream about the future. James goes on to state that we don't know what will happen tomorrow, as we all know based on our experiences. However, as Christians, this uncertainty about the future is not a reason for fear or inaction, but a call to commit the future and all our plans into the hands of God.

Corrie Ten Boom said that we should never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God. You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them by looking backward. So, you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in the future. We are called to take one day at a time, to walk in faith and to trust in the Lord.

Let's now look at verse 17, where James issues a stern warning: "It is a sin when someone knows the right thing to do and doesn't do it." The *Message* puts it even more bluntly: "If you know the right thing to do and don't do it, that, for you, is evil." Now that's a powerful statement that should hit home to every one of us. Forget political correctness, James does not call our failure to do what is right a moral failure; he flatly states that it is a sin. As we have discussed before, there are two basic types of sins: the sin of commission and the sin of

omission; both are acts of disobedience, missing the mark. Both are sins in the eyes of God and unfortunately, we all have or will commit both many times during our lifetime.

When asked to define the two types of sins, a little boy said: "Sins of commission are the sins we commit, and sins of omission are those we meant to commit but forgot." Now that's not quite true. The sins of commission are sins that we commit by doing something that we know we should not do. Of course, this is the sin that we are most familiar with. We naturally think of sin as doing something wrong. There are many sins that fall into this category such as cheating, lying, stealing, gossiping, and hurting others.

Now in verse 17, James is defining the sin of omission. These are sins that we commit by not doing something that we should have done. Of the two types of sin, this is the easiest one to hide from others. It is difficult to commit a sin of commission and get away with it, but it is quite easy to commit a sin of omission without anyone knowing about it. Thus, this is the most dangerous one for us as Christians. The only ones who know about it are God and us. The sin of omission is the failure to do something that you can and ought to do; it is the result of not doing something that God's Word teaches us that we should do. These can vary from rejecting a call to ministry to failing to visit someone who is in the hospital to not stopping to help change a flat tire.

Jesus used two parables to illustrate this. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan in the tenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, a lawyer asks Jesus to define who is considered his neighbor. In reply, Jesus tells him a story in which a man is beaten and robbed and left for dead on the side of the road. A Priest and a Levite, both Jewish religious leaders, come down the road at different times and pass on the other side of the road without even acknowledging the needs of the injured man. These are excellent examples of the sins of omission. In contrast, a Samaritan, who was hated by the Jews, follows the advice of James and does what is right by providing assistance to man. At the end of the story, Jesus asks the lawyer which of these three men was the good neighbor. To which the lawyer replied: "The one who showed mercy." Jesus told him and us today to go and do likewise.

Likewise, in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats in twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus awards those who had fed the hungry, given water to the thirsty, and cared for the homeless and sick, but punishes those who had done nothing to care for the less fortunate; in other words, those who knew what was right to do, but did nothing. Do you remember what the reply was of those who failed to help others? They said: "If we had known it was You, Jesus, we would have gladly helped; but we thought it was just some common person who was not worth helping." Unfortunately, this is a common attitude in the sins of omission. This is the attitude of those who will help only when it benefits themselves with praise and public recognition; you know, when others are watching. Such help is not generosity, it is disguised

selfishness. The help which wins the approval of God is that which is given for nothing but the sake of helping others out of love.

We frequently ask God for forgiveness for the sins that we have committed, but how often do we ask for His forgiveness when we have failed to do what is right; missed an opportunity to serve Him by helping others? Are we even aware of what we should be doing for God? Do we see the opportunities for service that God is giving us each day? I have found that the closer you walk with God the more sensitive you are to His urging, to what He wants you to do and to where He wants you to serve. The question this morning is “what is God calling you to do today”? Don’t hesitate, do it, walk in faith. Talk is cheap; what the church needs is more people who talk less and work more! If God’s work is to be done, then we must do it; we are His hands and feet.

The chorus of our closing hymn states: “Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night. I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.” Be aware of what’s going on around you: look for the opportunities that God gives you each day to make a difference in the lives of others; and then do something about it; follow your heart and don’t let the opportunities pass. Action speaks louder than words.

In our passage this morning, James gives us some practical advice. First, make the most of each day and every opportunity to serve God. Second, realize that everything we have or do depends upon God, so involve God in your plans. And finally, don’t talk about what you are going to do; do it. Spend time in prayer this week and ask God to open your eyes to the opportunities to serve Him and make a difference each and every day. May we each be God’s hands and feet to a world desperately in need of someone who cares. And then one day may we all hopefully hear Jesus say: “Well done, my good and faithful servant.” Amen