

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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Being Wise in 2021

Jan 3, 2021

Sermon Text: James 4:13-17

Scripture Reading: Luke 12:13-40

James 4:13-17 ESV 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.

We receive regular reminders daily, if we will be careful to see them, at just how brief and fleeting this present life is. Another year has past. We are with

certainty one year closer to Christ’s return and one year closer to our departure from this world, whether it be when Christ comes or when He calls us out of this life.

How many people, this time last year, were making all kinds of plans for what they were going to do in 2020, and yet 2020 proved to be their last year in this world? Were they ready to meet, as people say, their Maker?

There is nothing at all wrong with making plans. With setting goals and striving to meet them. We call people who don’t have any goals, who just float along and coast – *sluggards*. I have known numbers of people who use religion as an excuse for their laziness. We really do need to give attention to the questions, “what do I plan to do with my life?” “How am I going to use the things the Lord has entrusted me with?”

James, however, is not talking here about this kind of planning. He is rebuking that arrogance which is so common which makes such future plans *with no acknowledgment of the*

Lord at all. That sinful pride which makes assumptions as if the man were the master and author of tomorrow:

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.

This really is the perfect scripture text for New Year resolutions. Let’s look at it more closely.

Today or Tomorrow

Not only do we not know what Monday morning is going to bring our way, we don’t even know what Sunday, today, is going to bring. We are blind to the next minute of our time here. That line which divides the present from the future is constantly advancing second by second. Today becomes yesterday, but as long as it remains today – we are living constantly in what I suppose we could call a “realized future.” The “then” becomes the “now” and then it passes into the records of history. Time is a strange thing.

If we are going to live in wisdom and give glory to the Lord, we must acknowledge that we do not know what tomorrow is going to bring. Our tomorrow is entirely in the Lord’s hands:

God the good Creator of all things, in his infinite power and wisdom does uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created, according unto his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will; to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy. [London Confession of Faith, chapter 5]

Notice that James reproves the *specificity* of this presumptuous sin. “You who say tomorrow we will go...to such and such a town...spend one year there...trade...make a profit.” And of course what James is talking about is the sin of saying such things or even in *doing* such things...*making no acknowledgement of our creatureliness or of our Creator*. This kind of thinking is really elevating ourselves as some kind of god.

We do not know what tomorrow will bring. We do not even know what the rest of today is going to bring.

We must all admit that there is within us this thinking that we know what tomorrow holds. Of course, as we said earlier, there is a proper place for planning for tomorrow based on certain assumptions that the sun will rise, 7AM will come, my car will start, I will drive to work, and at 5PM I will drive back home for an evening with my family. It would be impossible to function if we did not have these kinds of assumptions. But this is not what James is talking about.

You do not know what tomorrow will bring.

All of these assumptions and plans must be tempered with this admission. That is to say, our plans need to acknowledge the Lord. To admit that HE may have other plans for tomorrow. Many things happened last year that changed billions of plans that people had for the year.

The Ultimate Plan Changers – the Coming of the Lord or Death

Now, listen again for a real perspective check:

What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

If you are an early riser in the summertime, you have seen the mist James is talking about. It hangs over the fields but, once the sun rises – gone! As if it were never there. And that is the reality of the duration of our lives. Even if we live to be 100 years old.

When you reach the final portion of your life, the truth of this is going to sink in much more than it was at say, age 25. “Time flies” is going to be a real truism for you. Suddenly it is as if you wake up one morning and the years have just flown by.

The Bible reminds us of this brevity very often:

Job 9:25-26 ESV “My days are swifter than a runner; they flee away; they see no good. (26) They go by like skiffs of reed, like an eagle swooping on the prey.

Job 14:1-2 ESV “Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble. (2) He comes out like a flower and withers; he flees like a shadow and continues not.

Psalms 39:5 ESV Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! Selah

Psalms 103:15-16 ESV As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; (16) for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.

1 Peter 1:24-25 ESV for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, (25) but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

In contrast, in *marked* contrast – stands *eternity*. And yet the vast majority of mankind focuses on the mist, ignoring what is going to be forever.

Christ is going to come to us in one of two ways: for the majority of mankind, we end up standing before Him when this earthly life ends in death. How many people will pass out of this world even before this very day is over? And it won't be just the elderly people. Children and young people die as well.

All the time. Everyday. We say *he had his whole life before him*....but in fact he did not. His whole life was, for example, 20 years. And it ended. We do not know what tomorrow holds.

And it is not only death that is a real life changer. Injury. Illness. The death of another person – of a loved one. Financial loss.

Did you notice that James reproves the person who *assumes they are going to make a profit, giving no acknowledgement of the Lord in their plans at all*. The Great Depression is a real study in this kind of thing. The roaring 20's came to a roaring end. Virtually overnight. The profits ended and people who lived as if they were the masters of their own lives jumped off skyscrapers.

Who would have thought, among the thousands of people in New York, as they went to work on just another day, assuming, planning, knowing – and then those planes hit the buildings and it all literally came tumbling down. *We do not know what tomorrow holds. And we need to daily give acknowledgement to the One who does.*

Stephen Hawking grew up in privilege and academia. He was a brilliant scientist, focusing on theoretical matters like cosmology – how the universe came into being and so on. But in his early 20's he was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease and would spend the next 50 years increasingly disabled until he could only use a cheek muscle to operate a communication device.

And yet, in spite of all this humbling that the Lord allowed in his life, Hawking was an avowed atheist. He had many opportunities to hear the gospel, and yet he rejected Christ:

“We are each free to believe what we want and it is my view that the simplest explanation is there is no God. No one created the universe and no one directs our fate. This leads me to a profound realization. There is probably no heaven, and no afterlife either. We have this one life to appreciate the grand design of the universe, and for that, I am extremely grateful.” [Wikipedia article]

This is validation of Paul's words to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 3:18-19 ESV Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. (19) For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness,”

Hawking died in 2018 and he immediately knew he was wrong. In fact, you can tell just from his words in this quote that he knew, as all men do, that there is indeed a God, a heaven and hell, a Great Designer of the universe. He refused to acknowledge and give thanks to God. He acted as if he knew what the future held, but he did not. He is now giving account for using the gifts God gave him to mislead countless young people that the universe had design, but a Designer does not exist. A real example, you see, of the wisdom of man being, in the end, foolishness.

The other reality check is to remember that Christ could come again at any moment. How many people, we ask again, live every single day of their lives *giving no thought at all to this end of the age, game-changer of all game-changers!?*

Luke 17:26-30 ESV Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. (27) They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. (28) Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, (29) but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all— (30) so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

And we already read about the very same attitude in planning for tomorrow in Luke 12 –

Luke 12:18-19 ESV 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. (19) And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’”

This is a very, very wicked sin. And James reminds us that it is:

(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.

If the Lord wills...we will do such and such in 2021. If the Lord wills...we will live another day, month, or year. It is the Lord who gives life, and who takes it away.

Nice People Often are not Nice

I have known many, many “nice” people and so have you. “Nice” people who even profess to be Christians. They say kind things, and seem to do kind things. They are responsible, provide for their families, obey the law, and so on. *But in fact they are not “nice” at all in reality.* And by “reality,” I mean in God’s measure – and that measure is what really matters.

They are not nice – they are guilty of the most heinous sin of all. It is this:

Romans 1:21 ESV For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

This is why God's wrath is upon them. They know that God *is*, they know He is their Creator, they know it full well, and yet they go about their lives living today, planning for tomorrow and for next year, *doing so as if God does not exist. They refuse to honor or thank Him.* And whenever the reality of His being starts to shine through in their thoughts, they immediately suppress it.

These kind of people are in fact *practicing atheists and idolaters.* You see it here:

Romans 1:25 ESV because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

The Right Way to Live in 2021

(15) Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

Instead. Instead of living and acting as if we are God, as if we know the future, as if the number of our days in in our hands, James instructs us to say, *If the*

Lord wills. If He wills, we will live. If he wills, I will do this or that.

Psalms 90:10-12 ESV The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. (11) Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you? (12) So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

Teach us to number our days. That is really what James is telling us. That is the basis of real wisdom as the Psalmist says. *To get wisdom, we must be taught to number our days.* To confess that we do not know tomorrow. And then to be able to put our tomorrows into the hands of the One who already holds them.