

The Hidden Sinfulness in Our Hearts

Epistle of James
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Please turn with me in your Bibles to James 4, moving into a new section, well new verses anyway, not a new section. Two weeks ago we looked at James 4:11-12 and today we're going to begin looking at verses 13 to 17 and we'll need next week, Lord willing, especially appropriate to say that today in light of this passage, to be able to complete this. Today we're going to basically diagnose the problem and offer some hope, of course, from the truths of the Gospel in the word, but next week we're going to spend more time really looking at the treatment of the problem.

Today, the title of the message is "The Hidden Sinfulness in Our Hearts." The hidden sinfulness in our hearts. James does something in this passage that he exposes something of the sin that's in our hearts that we don't readily see, and something he's done a number of times actually. His letter, he's concerned to help those who profess to be Christians to really be faithful doers of the word. Not just hearers of the word but doers of the word, that is, have lives that match up to their profession and so he has a way of unearthing and unmasking problems that we don't see and he does this in this passage.

The hidden sinfulness in our hearts. So we'll read verses 13 to 17. James 4:13,

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." 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 right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

Let's pray together.

Father, we ask that you right now might cause the interest of your word to give light, that in your light we might see light, that you might through your word which is living and active, that you might lay open our hearts and in the same way that a two-edged sword cuts and divides between joints and marrow, that you might divide our soul and our

spirit, that your word might be a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart, that we might be laid bare before the one to whom we have to do, and that you might in exposing our need, help us run to Christ and to find in him a worthy and glorious Savior. We pray this in his name. Amen.

The hidden sinfulness of our hearts. When we read this passage, if you really deal with it honestly and you've got to remember we're going to try, I encourage you to look at it and imagine you were hearing it for the first time as we work through it, you know, that you don't know the end before you start, because when they first heard these words, imagine you were in one of those churches to whom James wrote. We know he wrote to Jewish believers scattered throughout the Mediterranean world in the first century. James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus Christ, writes and the leader of the church in Jerusalem after dispersion writes to Jewish believers to encourage them in their faith and as he writes, he's burdened about the issues that they're struggling with.

So this passage here, again he exposes something that they didn't know was a problem but as they hear it that first time, they hear verse 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.'" They were probably struck a little bit by the phrase "Come now" but that basically this is something that's a very reasonable thing. In fact, the first point, there are three points this morning as we consider the hidden sinfulness of our hearts, the first thing, the first point is: a reasonable plan? A reasonable plan? That's the first point because what I would suggest to you is that that looks like a reasonable plan, it looks like what you should do if you're a good businessman. I mean, you don't set off and go somewhere you don't know where you're going, "I'm just gonna go until the mood hits me right and then I'm going to do whatever the mood hits me to do and then I'm going to hope it just works out." That's not good business, right? You have to have a plan. You've got to have a product. You've got to have a plan of how you're going to deliver the product and so these guys that he's referring to, he's addressing the church here but he says, "Look, some of you are business guys." Interestingly, he's writing to, as I said, a Jewish audience, mostly Jewish believers, and many of whom were probably good businessmen and he's saying, "Look, you have this thing that you're doing and I'm gonna tell you, it looks reasonable on the surface but it is from the pit of hell and smells like smoke. You're gonna be surprised when you see it."

And the "Come now" is actually kind of an arresting phrase. It's actually in the first person singular imperative. Then he goes to second person singular imperative. It's a singular imperative. It's like you looking at an individual. "Come now, you." Then he broadens it out to the plural and he says, "who are saying," and this is all of these people who are saying these things. So it's like he's looking at a group, he's saying, "You're not the only one but I'm talking to you individually." There is a sense in which the Scripture is always doing that, isn't it? It's talking to us individually. The issue is God wants to deal with our hearts and so James even in the way he says that, that "Come now" is the kind of thing like, "Listen up. Now listen." It's an emphatic kind of attention-getting phrase. This is not used very often in the Scriptures at all. Actually he uses it twice, it's the two times in the New Testament, here and in chapter 5, verse 1, and it basically has that sense of,

"Come here," like you would say to your child, maybe you gave your son or daughter something to do, they messed it up or they didn't do it, they had forgotten it, and you're like, "Come here," because you're going to show them what they haven't done. This is the kind of tone of this opening phrase.

"Come now." So we're in trouble. What are we in trouble for? "You who say, 'Today or tomorrow we'll go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.'" Now I said a reasonable plan because that does seem like a reasonable plan. There are four verbs. "You who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go. We will go to such and such a city.'" The idea is that they're looking at a map, the guys are planning, "Let's go to Damascus. Let's go to Alexandria and let's stay there," the second verb, "spend a year there, go," the second verb, "spend a year there." Well, it's good to know how long you're going to spend if you're going to do business. "Let's spend a year there and what we're gonna do is we're gonna engage in business and our purpose of going is to make a profit. We intend to make a profit."

Now doesn't that seem like that's fairly reasonable? I mean, as I said, should you just go, you know, let go and let God and just let the wind blow you through life? Is that what he's saying? No, the Bible makes clear other places and this is one of the things that we talked about, the Scripture has a great way of balancing truths. You'll have one passage that will say one side of a truth and another passage will say another side of a truth and they correct each other. You know, God is absolutely sovereign, man is responsible. They are balancing truths and what we're going to see is the Bible does encourage planning, a fool doesn't plan. One of the sayings I remember hearing some time ago that's a helpful little nugget is, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." Right? There's truth in that and I think the Scripture affirms that. And we're going to see he's not really condemning planning but he's got something, he's got a big problem with something.

What is it? A surprising pronouncement. So we think he might be upset by the "Come now," but we see it clearly as we read on down, especially in verse 16. The surprising pronouncement is clear in verse 16, so the second point. The first point was a reasonable plan. The second point: a surprising pronouncement. Verse 16, "But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil." He's saying, "Listen, what you are doing is you are boasting in arrogance and boasting that you're doing is evil," and the word "evil" means it's from the evil one himself. "Your planning is, you're planning the way Satan plans." Wow. He makes this point emphatically.

Some of the key words in verse 16 in this surprising pronouncement that "you're boasting in arrogance and your arrogant boasting is evil." First the word "boast" occurs twice and the idea is exalting, glorying. Sometimes that word is translated "glorying" in the New Testament. And this word can be good or bad depending on the context and essentially the way you can determine if boasting is good, if you're boasting in God or you're boasting in Christ or you're boasting in the cross, it's good. If you're boasting in self, it's evil. So clearly he's saying they're boasting in themselves because he says, "your boasting is evil."

And he uses the word "arrogance, you're boasting in your arrogance." This is an interesting word that doesn't occur many times in the New Testament. It's a word which could be translated "ostentation." It's what the dictionary says, it's boasting about what one is not or about what one does not possess. You're boasting as if you are something that you're not. You're boasting as if you possess something that you do not possess. It is empty, pompous, vainglorious ostentation. It's pretentiousness. You are pretending to be something that you're not. "I'm just making a plan. James, lighten up. I have my Daytimer and I'm making a plan. I've got to plan out my schedule. What kind of person doesn't plan out his schedule?" I don't have a problem with your Daytimer. I'm dated. Your cellphone now. Your smartphone. You don't need a Daytimer. I used to like it. I like paper, though, myself. But anyway. Okay.

It's not the problem that you have a planner, the problem goes deeper than that. You are claiming to be something you're not. You are claiming to possess something that you do not possess and here the reader reading for the first time or hearing for the first time should be saying, "What is it we're claiming? I don't know what I'm claiming. I don't know how I'm boasting. What are you saying I'm claiming to be? I just want to be a good businessman and a good planner." Now this applies to all of us, not just people who are in business. This applies to everyone who says, "Today or tomorrow I'm going to do such and such." This applies to moms, it applies to children, it applies to every Christian, every human being, but he says it is evil.

A reasonable plan, a surprising pronouncement, and now the third point we're going to spend most of our time on: a profound problem. What is he really saying? Why is this apparently reasonable plan surprising pronounced as arrogant, boasting and evil? What is James getting at? A profound problem, our third point. Two subpoints and then there are going to be three subpoints under sub-subpoints under the second subpoint.

The first subpoint is: what the problem is not. What the problem is not. He's not saying the problem is planning. He's not saying it's sinful to plan. We know that because the Scripture makes clear planning is good. You can look at Proverbs 6:6-8 where Solomon says to the sluggard, "Go to the ant. Consider his ways. Learn from him." What does the ant do? He prepares for the winter in the summer and only a sluggard and a fool doesn't do that. So he's not condemning planning. Scripture is clear about that. I mean, example after example, we could just go on and on but there's no need to prove the point that well. I'll just mention a couple of things. I mean, Joseph in Genesis 43 when he is brought before Pharaoh to interpret those dreams, remember what does he say? "I've got a plan. We need to store up in the seven years of plenty for the seven years of famine." There's nothing evil in that. He's doing exactly what God wanted him to do and glorifying the God of heaven who is the revealer of all mysteries.

So it's not planning that he condemns. Even Jesus again and again affirms this. I mean, think for instance Luke 14:28 when he's defining what discipleship is. He says, "If you want to be my disciple, you need to count the cost. You need to be willing to die to self. Take up your cross daily and follow me. What man among you if he sets out to build a tower will not first sit down and calculate the cost?" He's not condemning that, he's

saying that's what you should do. You don't start out to build a house and not have the money or the building materials there. Only a fool does that. So what do you do? You plan and you gather all these things, of course. In the same way you should approach spiritual matters, Jesus says. So he's not condemning planning.

So the problem is not planning, the problem is not planning, planning is good; the problem is the tendency to forget God as we plan. It is the forgetting of God. It is the fact that God is not at the center of our thoughts as we contemplate our future and plan for it. That is what is evil. Proverbs 16:9, "A man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps." So he's saying, "Plan your way but acknowledge that there's only one who can direct it. I don't have the power to direct my steps, I only have the power to plan my way."

One of my favorite verses is Lamentations 3:37, actually 37 and 38 speaking of the sovereignty of God. Listen to this, Lamentations 3:37, "Who can speak and it come to pass unless the Lord has commanded it?" I can't say I'm going to walk to that spot over there and make it happen unless God commands it but if he commands it, it's going to happen. It's not a problem to propose doing it. Some people have said, "Man proposes, God disposes," and if that's our heart, then we're okay and we're on the right track, but James is saying there's something very subtle and deceptive in our sinful hearts even after we've been born-again. If you've repented and placed your faith in Christ, you still have the old nature and the old nature has this disease of sin and the disease of sin is to want to live life apart from being submitted to God, and one of the ways you see that evidence itself is in this way we think about our own futures. We start believing that we actually have the power and he really exposes what we tend to do.

So what the problem is, that's the second main subpoint. That's the third point, point 3B, what the problem is, and there are three points under that. He says three things about our problem of why we or how we tend to forget God. The problem is namely the tendency to forget God as we plan, but he basically says to these believers to whom he writes and to us in turn, our problem is, first of all, that you are acting when you say, "I'm going to go and I'm going to do this, next week I'm going to do that, then I'm going to do this," it's very easy if you're not consciously thinking about the fact that God is ruling your life and you're doing it for his glory, you are acting, this is the first point, as if you were omniscient. You are acting as if you have prescience, that is, foreknowledge.

So, 'I'm going to go to such and such a city and I'm going to stay there for a year and I know that I'm going to do it. I know what's going to happen. I'm going to take the freeway from Jerusalem," they're not in Jerusalem, they're at different places. "I'm going to take the freeway from Damascus to Alexandria and it's going to take me so many weeks on my camel and then I'm going to get there and I'm going to stay for a year and I'm going to trade, buy and sell and I'm going to make some serious money. Then maybe I'll give, I'll certainly give some to the Lord. I'm not opposed to tithing. Of course I'll do that." But I'm not thinking in a dependent way, "Lord," as I go, my life is supposed to be about loving God and worshiping God at all times so he should be at the center. There should be a sense in which even as I'm thinking about that, I'm making plans but I'm continually remembering, "Lord, if this is your will, let it happen, and if you want to turn

things around, I'm gonna follow you. You're the ones that calls the shots. You're my Shepherd. I'm not in charge as a sheep to determine where I go. I'm supposed to as I look at my life, make decisions in certain areas but ultimately I'm looking to you to lead me everywhere I go." But you're acting as if you're omniscient.

Proverbs 27:1, "Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth." The reality is that we don't know what's going to happen one minute from now, really one second from now. By the time it took me to say, "one second," I had already said it so it doesn't seem as effective to do that. But we don't know what's going to happen today, certainly not tomorrow. I mean, the future is behind a veil for us. We can see the moment but because we are not God, we cannot see past that veil and to act as if we can is to act as if we are God. That's what's so ugly about that.

He basically says, "You know, you think you're omniscient, what do you know?" We noticed how James when you read his letter, I mean, he's just right there in your face. He doesn't pull any punches. He's very direct. He says, verse 14, "Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow." Actually the different translations translate this slightly differently. There is a little bit of a textual issue here, one word, and it shows again how the textual problems we have in the New Testament are always about things unrelated to major issues and doctrine. Nothing that touches on salvation or any cardinal doctrine is ever even a textual issue. Over 99% of the text is clearly established with all the different manuscripts that we have, but in this particular area, the question is and most of the translations are not like the NASB. The NASB I think is wrong here actually too. It takes it, "Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow," I think what the text really says, the Greek says, "Yet you do not know about tomorrow," and the "what" belongs in a question, "What is your life?" Then he answers it, "a vapor." So he actually says, after he says, "You say, 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.' Yet you do not know a thing about tomorrow. What do you know? You know nothing." You and I know nothing. We really know zero. The foreknowledge that we have is zero.

I heard about a Christian, a pastor actually, who unbeknownst to his, he ran into a woman who wanted to tell his fortune and she was like saying, "If you'll give me so much, I'll tell your fortune," and he said, "So I have to give you so much and you'll tell me what's going to happen tomorrow?" and she said, "Yes." He said, "I'll tell you what, I'll give you twice that if you can tell me what I did yesterday." No business transaction happened that day.

We don't know what's going to happen. We have zero knowledge so we are not omniscient and if we speak like this, we're acting as if we're omniscient, we're acting as if we're God. The second thing, the second subpoint on the tendency to forget God, you're acting as if you're omniscient, secondly, you're acting as if you're eternal. You're acting as if you're eternal. What is your life? Here you are and here I am, when we get in this mindset presuming that we know more than we know, presuming that we have a being that is different than we are, that our life is so frail, it's so incredibly weak that it just, blow on it and it's over. I mean, think about how frail our human lives are, how quickly

they can be gone. A virus. A cancer cell. An accident. You fall wrong and you hit something, you hit your head and you're gone.

That's the reality of it, isn't it? This is something I think is really tough for us in our modern day because of the advances of medical science. I mean, there are so many wonderful things that God has blessed us with and these are good gifts from the Lord, every good gift comes from the Father, James said that in chapter 1. So the advances in medical science are good gifts. I mean, we have the ability to do open-heart surgery and extend our lives numbers of years. To do radiation or chemotherapy or have surgical operations to remove cancers and extend people's lives and so many of you have experienced the blessing of that. We've experienced the blessings of modern science but it makes us begin to subtly, because of our sin nature, we can tend to even more think we're indestructible and we don't really consciously fully weigh out that we're eternal but in our heart there's this sense in which we expect that we are, we're going to keep living. It's something about the nature of sin.

You know, it's a lot harder today than it was even 150 years ago. A while back, my family, we visited a graveyard where some of Patti's family were buried. It was out in the country somewhere like the Winder area, and a little small church and a graveyard that's like 200+ years old, and we walked around looking at the gravestones and it was really, it was kind of arresting. I commented to the kids as we were looking at them how many children that you had died. This child died in childbirth. This child died at 10 months old. This child died at three years old. This child died at eight years old. This woman died at 24. This man... You're like, "Wow!" For them death was a constant reality and there's something good about that. I mean, not that we should seek death because death ultimately is our enemy. God did not create death, sin brought death into the world. God is the Creator of life. But the good thing about death and the reason that he subjected the world to that consequence is so that we would know that something's wrong with us spiritually. If we lived forever, we would go on living forever in our sin but our finiteness, our limitedness causes us to look and say, "What's wrong?" When we lose someone we love and we know this isn't the way it's supposed to be, we weren't made to be separated from our loved ones, why is it like this? What's wrong with this world? God is helping us. What's wrong with me?

So he says, "What is your life?" The reality is even in today's world, even though we may live to be 75 or 80 or even older, your life is a vapor. The picture here is of steam or breath. You know how on a cold morning you breathe and you can see it? Think about the mist coming out and then you see it and it's gone. That's the word picture. Your life, it begins, you see it, and it is gone. As I get older, I can understand more of that than I did when I was a young man. There is something about when you're a young man, I mean, you just don't think that way, or a young woman, it's just we don't...but as you get older, things start breaking down and you start realizing, "Yeah, death is coming." This world is not all it's made out to be and it's God's graciousness, even though it's a function of sin, it's his grace to let the consequences come and remind us of our need of a Savior and to remind us to turn back to him if we already know him and to keep clinging to him.

So we are not eternal. We don't know if we're going to be here next year. We may, as these businessmen were doing, you may get all the way down to such and such a city and you may start to engage in business and then you may die before you even collect your profits. Or remember, I think he may be even having in mind, James often does this, it seems that he really goes back and mines the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels. Luke 12:15-20, Jesus tells the story about a man who was a very wealthy man and he was a good businessman, a good farmer, and he has such a bumper crop one year that he decides he's going to have to tear down his barns and make bigger barns to bring in all the crop. So he does it, he makes a plan. He tears down his barns and he makes bigger barns and he brings all the crop in and he says to his own soul, "Soul, basically you've got it made now. Eat, drink and be merry." And Jesus says, "You fool. You don't know that your life will be required of you this very day so that all that you stored up goes to someone else." It was a good business decision. I mean, if your barns are too small and you've got to collect stuff, there's nothing wrong with making a bigger barn, the problem was he had forgotten God. He forget that his soul, even when he talks to his soul, "Soul," it doesn't matter what you're enjoying in this life, the soul is made for eternity. He should have been rich in the things of God.

So what is your life? It's a vapor. He's saying if you're presuming upon the future, you're approaching life as if you know what's going to happen, when it's going to happen, you're presuming that you're omniscient, you're presuming that you're eternal, and thirdly, you're acting as if you are sovereign and in control. You act as if you're in complete control. You're going to do this and you're going to engage in business and you're going to make a profit. What I determine to do, I'm going to do.

There's something indigenous to the heart of sinful man that we have this desire and sometimes it's expressed in certain lives in much more graphic ways. I remember hearing the story of Napoleon and when he was, it's actually told about a couple of different incidences in his different military campaigns. Once it was reported that before he invaded Russia, you know, he had been just mopping up Europe and he decided he was going to invade Russia and someone told him as he was making his plans, they said, "Man proposes, God disposes." He's making this bold plan. And Napoleon in anger said, "Napoleon proposes and Napoleon disposes." Well, the Russia campaign was a disaster and it led to him being taken captive and exiled. Then later he got out of exile and raised an army again and then at Waterloo it was said that the same thing happened. I don't know if it happened twice or not but that that day he said, "Napoleon proposes, Napoleon disposes," and everything fell apart again because God will not abide someone who exalts themselves against him, who says, "I'm in charge of my life and I'm gonna do what I'm gonna do."

The Lord will not allow a rival and if your heart is that way and you don't repent, it shows that you're not really his and as believers, we can tend to have this same sin but we need to hate it and this is what James is calling us to do, hate this. This is as if we are trying to knock God off the throne of glory, his sovereign rule, and we want to be in charge. How wicked. You act as if you run your life when you do this. You act as if

you're in control. Nicolas Ellen says the only thing that you run is your mouth. It's the only thing I run, my mouth.

What are we actually in control of? What do we actually really have control of? You get right down to it, we have control of nothing. One of the great pictures of this in the Scripture and this is so gracious of God to give us this. A few years back, it's been like eight or nine years ago, I preached through the book of Daniel and Daniel has one of the most astonishing chapters in all of Scripture in the fourth chapter of Daniel. Daniel 4 is actually not written by Daniel. I mean, Daniel took it and put it into his prophecy. I'm not saying that. He may have actually scribed the words again to put it into his scroll when he originally wrote it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he did that, but he took a letter that was composed by the king of Babylon himself and he put it in the Bible. God put it in the Bible.

This is a letter from King Nebuchadnezzar to all of his subjects and he tells them about something that happened in his life. Nebuchadnezzar was a man who was like Napoleon. Nebuchadnezzar proposed and Nebuchadnezzar disposed. He really believed that and he had some reason to have some confidence, just like Napoleon did. I mean, Napoleon wasn't like, he wasn't some kind of a weak guy who just pretended to be great, he was a pretty impressive general. I mean, arguably one of the greatest generals of all time. Nebuchadnezzar was like that. He was a great military genius. He won great victories over the former Assyrian Empire, over the Egyptians. He was not only a great military genius, he was a great political, very astute politician. Not only that, he was a great builder, designer, architect. It's believed that he created the hanging gardens of Babylon, one of the seven wonders of the world for his wife. His wife was from the mountains and so he built, the belief is he built a ziggurat, a mountain, a man-made mountain, and then put all kinds of trees and shrubs all over it so that you go into the desert as you approach Babylon and there is this mountain, the hanging gardens of Babylon. And to do that, he had to create a system because there wasn't enough water. There's a reason the desert is the desert. There's a reason nothing grows in California, southern California anyway. You have to water like crazy, right? So what they did, they created a system of pulleys that brought water up from the Nile, a chain system that brought water up from the Nile and kept watering this mountain of stuff. I mean, it was an amazing architectural engineering feat. He was impressive.

So what you read is he has a dream. His dream is about a tree getting cut down, a great tree that spreads out and the birds nest in it and it gets cut down. He knows this is bad. He has a sense of foreboding, deep foreboding about this dream that he had, that the gods are speaking to him. So he asks all of his advisers and nobody can give him an interpretation. Then he calls for Daniel. He remembers, "Hey, there was a guy that interpreted some dreams a while back. I'm gonna call him." And he calls Daniel in and Daniel immediately has the interpretation and in his kindness to Nebuchadnezzar, he says, "O King, I wish this wasn't true of you. I wish it was true of your enemies." He's a model of godliness in dealing with an ungodly king even. And he tells him, "What this is though, you're going to be judged if you don't repent. You're going to be chopped down and you're going to

become like an animal and for seven years you're going to be in misery unless you repent. King, please repent! Repent! God is a God of grace and he'll relent."

So the king hears it and apparently he's stirred a little bit emotionally for a while but he forgets about it and then a year later, about a year later he's up on the top of his palace probably looking over at the hanging gardens and looking at the way he's laid out the city and this incredible defense around Babylon, and he says, "Is this not Babylon the Great that I built by the strength of my might for my glory?" As the last word goes off of his lips, a voice from heaven says, "Nebuchadnezzar, the kingdom is removed from you and you shall become as an animal and until you acknowledge that it's the Most High that is the ruler over all mankind and he gives it to whom he wishes and he bestows on the lowliest of men the greatest positions." Even an insult in that. "You're the lowliest of men, Nebuchadnezzar, and I put you on top. The reason you're on top is you were qualified. You had to be the lowliest."

God is sovereign. God reigns. So Nebuchadnezzar immediately became insane. He acted like an animal. Now, for the Babylonians, they believed that he was a god and so they didn't put him in a funny farm. You know, they didn't call the folks with the white jackets to come and get him. No, they just were like, "We don't know what's happening but leave him alone." And here he's out running around, not coming in the house, not living normally, and he stays outside and it becomes over these seven years of time, his hair becomes matted so that his hair growing out, his beard growing out, his hair looks like eagle's feathers. Imagine how matted and nasty it looks. This is the great Nebuchadnezzar. What is God saying? God is saying, "If I pull back my finger from you, if I pulled back everything from you, you would just disintegrate. I pull back my finger just like a finger off of you and you become from the greatest ruler and this engineer and this great king and this great warrior, you become less than a human being, less than an animal. You become an idiot and a fool."

Seven years and he ends this, so he tells the story. Nebuchadnezzar writes this letter to all of his people and he says, "I want to tell you, peoples, nations, men of every language that live in all the earth, may your peace abound. It seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me." This is after it all happens and he's restored. "How great are his signs and how mighty are his wonders. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and his dominion is from generation to generation." Then he tells the story, and then after the moment of truth comes in verse 34, chapter 4, verse 34, Daniel 4:34, "But at the end of that period," at the end of that seven years, "I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven," he looked up, "and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?' At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar,

praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride." Isn't that just amazing? That's the God of heaven. That is the God who has made himself known supremely in the Lord Jesus Christ. He shows us our pride and humbles us before his face and that's the best thing that can happen to you and me.

So James is seeking to do the same thing. He's saying, "Look, we don't realize how we tend to exalt ourselves against God because we think and we plan and we don't have any fear of God before our eyes. We're not thinking about the Lord. We're not thinking about his kingdom. We're not thinking as we evaluate our plans, "Is this what is pleasing to you, Lord? Lord, if this isn't pleasing to you, let this not happen. Show me that it's not pleasing, but I'm trying to plan my life and do things appropriately as I see but, Lord, you show me. What do I need to do?" And staying in his word, letting his word instruct us.

There is something in our hearts. We tend to take the blessings of God when God is kind to us like make somebody a good businessman, gives them ability, gives them resources, we take the blessings of God and we forget God and the last thing we should do is forget God. But the good news is that God has made available salvation through Jesus Christ. He sent his Son in the world and his Son lived the way a human being is supposed to live. The Lord Jesus Christ lived his entire 30+ years, the reason, in fact, he lived an entire life and this is something to think about, you know, if he just had to die on the cross, he could've come into the world as a 33-year-old man and he would have been spotless and he could've offered himself as a sacrifice. Why was he born a baby? Why was he conceived in the womb of Mary and live an entire 33 years? Because he lived a perfect life of righteousness. The God-man became man and he lived every day as man is supposed to live. He lived every day, though he was God, he lived in complete submission to God. He didn't plan like James is talking about you and I do. There was always, "Lord, what's your will? I know I've got to do this." I mean, even in his carpentry shop helping dad out, working with his brothers, James, another carpenter.

You've got to plan to build something, don't you? But there was a sense of submission to the Father and delight in that and it makes everything more wonderful when you are submitted to God, when he is in the center of your thoughts. That's the way he intends all of us to live, the problem is we tend not to be that way, but the good news is, if you know Jesus Christ, you have the access to a perfect record of righteousness. When God shows me that I have failed and here I am again getting ahead of him and forgetting him and off doing my thing and I'm guilty of acting like I'm omniscient, acting like I'm eternal, acting like I'm sovereign, acting like I'm God, what are you to do? Run to Christ and find in him the forgiveness. He died for people like you and me because the essence of sin is to want to be God. What did Satan say to Eve? "In the day you eat of it, you will become like God."

We want to be God but Jesus never lived that way. He never lived taking...he was God but he lived as man before the Father. Complete submission and dependence upon God every day. Complete surrender. Perfect record of righteousness so that when you trust in him and you go to the Lord saying, "Lord, here I am again. Forgive me. Thank you that

Jesus' blood covers me, washes my sins away." He doesn't just wash you clean, he gives you his righteousness in place. You now see me as if I lived like Jesus lived. Jesus said, "My meat and my drink is to do the will of him who sent me."

That's one of the most challenging verses to me. I like to eat. Are you like me sometimes, you're finishing one meal and you're already thinking about the next? "This was good but, man, tonight what are we going to have? Or tomorrow I've got to get some ribs. I need some chicken wings again." You start thinking ahead and God is the one who made us to eat and we're going to have the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven. Eating is not bad, it's good. Psalm 34:8, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." But Jesus said, "What's better than eating for me is to do the will of God." The most delicious thing in the world, the most delightful thing in the world to the Son of God was to do the will of his Father and that's what you and I are supposed to be like. We can never do it on our own and we can't make ourselves like that, but he has given us a perfect record of righteousness. When you stand before God, you will stand clothed if you're trusting in Jesus, if you've repented and placed your faith in him, your record will be his record. God will see you as if you wanted to do his will more than you wanted to eat.

That's good news and if you love him, he's going to help you start wanting that more and more and more throughout your life so that it really does become more delightful and more delightful over time. We still struggle. We still fail but we get closer to that because Jesus is making us like him. That's what God wants for us. He is good and we'll continue to look at how he wants us to live this out more, Lord willing, next Sunday.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for the glory of our Savior, that you found a way to take sinners that were just mired in sin in a hopeless way, we could never cleanse ourselves, we could never wash ourselves, we could never make ourselves fit for you, we were hopeless, helpless, you found a way to make us clean in your sight forever and to still maintain your justice, to still do exactly what is right, to vindicate your holy wrath by punishing our sins in the glorious person of your Son, that when he hung on the cross, he who knew no sin became sin and you punished him as if he had lived our wretched lives and he took all the punishment and he said, "It is finished. Paid in full." Then he died and he rose again to show us that you had accepted his offering, that he was truly righteous his whole life, perfect, and he's now able to give us the righteousness that he has. Father, we pray that you would help us to see how our hearts still stray and how we still seek to become God and we dishonor you. Help us to turn from presumption and to live our lives in dependent faith, submission. Help us be more like Jesus and give us the joy of being diligent in our planning but always humble, always prayerful and always joyful knowing that you're the one who's in control. What a wonderful place to be where we're not in control, we don't think we are, we know you are. We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.