

James - The Right Life Goals

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Preacher: Christopher Baker

[0:00] All right, you know what book of the Bible we're in this morning, right? Yes, we have started our walk through the book of James, and we are continuing our walk through the book of James this morning. And if you remember the book of James, how is it described? How would you describe the book of James? We've talked about it a couple of weeks now, so how would you describe it? The Proverbs of the New Testament? What's that?

The essence of true religion? It really is that where our faith should be, where the rubber meets the road, how to apply our faith in life, and how it should have an impact on us. That is really what the book of James is all about. And we're going to kind of continue in that same thing this morning, because what we're going to talk about are life goals. Do you have any goals in life? Seven of you have goals in life, the rest of you are just drifting through seeing what happens. Do you have goals in life? Yes. We all have goals in life. We have, actually, we have kind of different levels of goals in life, don't we? I mean, we have some kind of bottom tier goals in life that, you know, everyday things that if you accomplish them, fine. If not, fine. I'm a list guy. I like to make a list, because I love checking them off as you do them. Sometimes if I've already got it done, I'll write it down anyway, just so I can check it off.

Makes me feel good. And every one of those, Tammy's nodding, yes, he does that. It's probably a mental disorder, I don't know. But the reason you make that list, each one of those things you write down is kind of a mini goal, isn't it? My goal is to get this done, and to get this done, and to be able to check these off. Those are all each individual goals. But to be honest, most of the things that I write down on my own to-do list, you know what? Mow the lawn. That might be on the list.

How important is that in the grand scheme of things? I mean, it's one of those everyday things you probably should take care of at some point. But if it doesn't get done, guess what?

Yeah, it's not the end of the world. The grass is still going to be there. It's going to die off in the fall anyway, so you know. It's important, but not that important. What I'm talking about this morning, though, are not those little everyday goals. I'm talking about those major, what our life is all about kind of a goal. What are we really after in life? What is our priority?

[2:52] What is that thing that is most important to us, or the things that are most important to us that really direct the way that we think and the way that we live out our lives? And James does, the book of James, and God through this, has some things to tell us about that.

So James chapter 1, we're going to be sharing to start. There's a few verses we're going to look at this morning, but verses 9 through 11 of chapter 1 is what we're going to start with. And if you're able, I'm going to ask if you'd stand as we read God's Word to begin our time together this morning. James chapter 1, beginning in verse 9, and this is what God shares with us. Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted, but the rich in that he is made low, because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth. And the grace of the fashion of it, it perishes. So also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. Let's pray. Lord God, thank you again for this time we have to share together. And Lord, I know that you have words, you have a message that you want to get across to us on this day. And Lord, I simply pray that you would just use me to do that, that the words that I would share would be the words that you want us to hear.

For each one of us that are here. And I pray, Lord, that we would be people that have soft hearts, that we'd be ready to hear it, that we'd be ready to consider our lives, that we would be ready to understand if there are things we need to change, if there are ways of thinking that we need to change.

So Lord, just help us to be soft-hearted this morning as we hear your voice. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen. You can be seated this morning. So as we begin these verses, it starts off in verse

9, Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted. Exalted means lifted up.

[5:00] But who is it talking about first? The brother of low degree. Who is that or what is that? What does it mean to be of low degree? What's that, Travis?

Humble circumstances. Those that are of humble circumstances is what it's saying. And what does it tell those people to do? Rejoice. That he is exalted. And what does exalted mean?

Lifted up. Okay? So that's the first category that it's talking about or first group it's talking to. Verse 10 then switches gears and looks at another side. But the rich, that's kind of the opposite of humble circumstances, right?

So now it's looking at the other side of things. But the rich in that he is made low because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. I don't think we need to, well maybe we do really talk about what does it mean when it says rich.

What does it mean to be rich? Wealthy? Any other descriptors for that? All of us study here are rich right now.

[6:07] Okay, well there's a question then. Who's the rich? Are you rich? We're talking, is it talking spiritually here or is it talking monetarily?

What do you think? It's kind of talking physical here. Talking humble circumstances and it's talking the rich. Those that have money. So are you rich?

Yeah. Yeah, it's kind of like, well I don't know, how am I supposed to answer that? Well, it's all depending on how you look at it, isn't it? We can look at ourselves and it depends on who we compare ourselves with.

If we compare ourselves to Bill Gates, are you rich? No. If you compare yourself to a Tesla guy. Elon Musk. Elon Musk. Thank you. The name just left my mind. If we compare ourselves to Elon Musk, are you rich? Okay. Now, if you compare yourself to most people that live in third world countries, which is a huge, huge number of people, are you rich?

[7:19] Yes. So it's all comparative, isn't it? But as it talks about humble circumstances and it talks about the rich here, does this mean that all the poor are good and all the rich are bad?

Is that what it's saying? No, it's not saying that. Obviously, it's not saying that. That's not what God's Word is really meaning to say. What it's talking about more than that are your goals in life, which is what we started talking about.

The things that are most important to you. Are there rich people that their money is the most important thing to them? Absolutely. And that's really what it's beginning to try to get us to thinking about.

What are our goals in life? How important are riches in our lives? Living in the United States, I want to tell you as believers and as Christians, we live in a society where this can be a challenge for us. Because our society, do you know what our society values? Money. Do you know who our society kind of holds up? Those who have money.

[8:28] Fame and fortune. And that's what our society tends to hold up and to say, this is what you need to aspire to. How many people do you want to know? And in the world of social media and the internet that we have today, everybody wants to become rich and famous.

They want to get themselves on TikTok and it's how many viewers and how many followers you have and you can be an influencer and all these kind of things that go on in our world today. That's just fact. That's just reality.

But the thing is, so often as they do that, what is their goal? What is their number one thing in life? To be popular. To be rich.

To be famous. To have all that that our society holds up. We shouldn't be surprised that people want that in their lives because that is what our society values. But here's the thing.

This is talking to believers, isn't it? And it's talking about those of humble circumstances. It's talking about those that are rich. What is your goal in life? And it gives us some reminders here of something that as we make our goals in life, we should keep this in mind.

[9:41] As we decide what is most important to us, here is what we should keep in mind. Because as the flower of grass, he shall pass away.

We should make our goals with the understanding of how brief our life is and how quickly money can come and go.

Because it can all pass away and it will, won't it? Look at what it says. Because as the flower of grass, he shall pass away. And then in verse 11, for the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat,

but it withereth the grass and the flower thereof falleth and the grace of the fashion of it perishes. So also shall a rich man fade in his ways. We should make our life goals based on how brief life is and how brief riches are. That's really what it's telling us.

Because it compares it to what? Grass and flowers. We understand that this time of year, don't we? Now it's a little different right now in August with the grass.

[10:50] Typically this time of year, what does your yard look like? Brown. You walk across it, it crinkles under your feet. That's not the case right now, is it? We've got a lot of rain, it's green, it's growing.

But what's going to happen within the next month? It's going to start to wither, isn't it? As we get into September and the end of September and then as we get into October, what's going to begin to happen?

The leaves are going to change and begin to fall. What about all these beautiful flowers that we spend all this time watering every week and try to keep, well more than every week, but you try to keep them growing and flourishing and they look so beautiful.

What's going to happen to all those flowers? They're either going to die if they're, I was getting mixed around, if they're the ones that just live for a year. Annuals, thank you.

I'm not a plant guy, I know how to put water on them. The annuals are going to have, what? Die. The perennials, those are the ones that keep going every year, right? But still, they're going to go into hibernation.

[11:52] They're going to wither and they're not going to look good, are they? You expect that, don't you? You know it's going to happen. So it begins in the fall and you don't think, oh my gosh, what's happening to my plants?

They're withering. You don't think that, do you? Why? You know it's coming. You expect it. You obviously know that's the way things are and that's what's going to happen. What is the Bible telling us here about our lives?

Same thing. But how often do we have that same attitude? Yeah, I know it's going to happen. We don't like thinking about that, do we?

But how often, again, these are reminders God gives us that as we make our goals in life, God wants us to keep that in mind, doesn't He? He gives us that reminder not just once but numerous times in His Word to remember how brief our lives are.

And I know, again, that's not something we often enjoy talking about, but as believers maybe we should. Oh, wow, it got quiet. Why should we enjoy talking about how brief our lives are?

[13:03] Because we have a promised home in heaven. We should expect it. This is not what it's all about, folks. It is not. Our life here on this earth is not what it's all about. But sometimes we get conditioned to think that way, don't we?

But it's not. But this is only a just very short period of time before we have what God made for us. A home in heaven.

An eternity in heaven. I have used the example before. You've gone to doctor's appointments, right? Right? Where do you go before you go in to see the doctor?

The waiting room. Why is it called the waiting room? Because you've got to wait. For what? To be called in. To be called in to what you're actually there for, right?

The waiting room is just that brief... Well, not always brief. It's supposed to be that brief time before it's really what you're there for. Folks, that's our life here on this earth. It's the brief time before it's what God has truly prepared us for.

[14:07] Do we look at life that way? But isn't that really the truth of it? We need to understand. We're not going to be here forever. We're not intended to be.

And this is just a short time. And yet, we put down roots and that's good. And we have things that are important to us and that's good. But God reminds us, as we make our goals in life, remember, this is not what it's all about.

Same thing. You go stay in a hotel, right? How many of you have stayed in a hotel? When you stay in a hotel, what do you keep in mind the entire time that you're there?

Whether you realize it or not, what do you keep in mind while you're there? That you're going to check out, right? Don't you have that in the back of your mind?

Whether you realize it or not? How many of you take the time to get all your clothes out of the suitcase and put them in those nice drawers that they have? You straighten them all out.

[15:06] How many of you do that? Loretta does it. There's probably some of you that do. But often, we don't do that. Why not? Well, they might be dirty.

You don't know if they're clean. But also because you know you're not staying there. It's just temporary. I'm not going to get my clothes out of my suitcase. I live out of the suitcase because I'm going to go in a couple days. Do you start rearranging the furniture in the room?

Do you say, I don't care for that painting they put on the wall. I'm going to take it down and I got a hammer and nails. I'm going to put it over here. Do you do that? Why?

I hope nobody says yes because that's... Don't do that. But why don't we do that? It's not yours, which really is this life that we have. Is it really ours?

It's God's. But why else don't you do that? Because you're there on a temporary basis. It's okay to make it a little bit your home as long as you can understand it's not really your home.

[16:06] And that is what God wants us, I believe, to understand about our lives here. You know, this is our home, but is it really our home? No, we're just... There's a song we're just passing through.

I want you to look at a couple other verses. I'm certain that you've heard these before. Look in the book of Psalms, chapter 90. Old Testament. You know where to find Psalms.

Psalms, chapter 90, verse 10. Armando was talking about this a little bit this morning. He didn't know what we were going to talk about in the sermon, though.

Psalms, chapter 90, verse 10. The days of our years are threescore years and ten. All right, math people. Three score and ten.

Seven. Seventy. And if by reason of strength they be fourscore... Eighty. If they be fourscore years, yet is there strength and labor and sorrow.

[17:11] For it is... What's that next word? Soon cut off and we fly away. You know, when we go to the nursing home often, they always enjoy the song.

I like playing it on the guitar. I'll fly away. That's what this verse is talking about. It says, no matter whether we live to be 70, maybe you're blessed and live to be 80, maybe you're blessed and live to be 120.

I don't know. But no matter which one of those you make it to, what does it say? It is soon cut off.

What does that word mean? It won't be long.

It's going to come quickly. And then we'll fly away. Again, it's not about our time here. This is a preparation for what God has for us later when we fly away.

Because it will soon be cut off. Our years here are brief. As we make goals in life, remember our time here is brief. Look in Psalms 144.

[18:18] Stay in Psalms. Look in 144. 144, verse 4. A lot of 4s there, I know. 144, verse 4.

Man is like to vanity. His days are as a shadow that passes away.

What is He comparing our life here to? A shadow. What can you tell me about a shadow? We all have one. We all have one.

You're right, Jerry. What else do we know about shadows? They can be here one minute and what?

Go on to the next. What does it say is like a shadow?

Life. Our lives. It's like a shadow. Our lives here are not permanent, they're temporary. Do you think God is reminding us over and over of this for a reason?

[19:23] One more spot. Look in 1 Peter 1. Back in the New Testament, towards the back of your Bible. 1 Peter 1. 1 Peter 1, verse 23.

Well, actually 23, 24, and 25. This is one of those chapters we memorized as a church group a while back, if you remember that.

We should start doing that again one of these days. All right. 1 Peter 1, beginning in verse 23. 3.

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.

So it's talking there about some things that are forever. Word of God, right? That's forever. For all flesh. And now it's talking about something else. Flesh, which is us. All right.

For all flesh is as. Now we're back to the grass thing. And all the glory of man as the flower of grass. Here's reality, folks. Like it or not.

[20:21] Now the grass withers. The flower thereof falls away. But the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word by which the gospel is preached to you.

Flesh is as grass. As the flower. Those things wither. Those things pass away. And I know it's easy to say, oh, wow. The sermon was really depressing this morning.

Just talked about how we're here, we live a little bit, and then we die. But folks, God is reminding us of this for a reason. That as we spend our time here, knowing that it is short, we need to make sure our goals are on things that are truly important.

And to remember that our lives are short. When we were on vacation this summer, we were up by Lake Huron, and we had a bunch of the evening, especially of these little things that were flying around.

You know what they're called? Mayflies. There were a lot of them. You'd wake up in the morning and stuff was kind of covered with them. What do you know about mayflies? Anything? They don't last long.

[21 : 28] They don't last long. Their entire life cycle is 24 hours, I believe that's right. At least the adult stage. 24 hours.

What do you think of that? Their whole adult life stage is 24 hours. Come and go. Tori? Thank God we live longer than that.

Okay? But to them, do you think it seems so short? They're just used to that. But to us, we look at that and think, oh, how brief.

How very brief. They should really focus on the important things in life. What do you think God thinks when He looks at our 70, 80, 100 years?

You think God looks at it, oh, how brief. They should really focus on the things that are important because they don't have long. Folks, that's what God's Word is reminding us of.

[22 : 28] As we make goals in our lives, we need to remember that our life is brief. So make goals that really matter. Make goals that are important, that are substantial. Turn back to James again, where we started.

Because if you remember, James often mentions something in the first chapter and then expounds on it and explains it a little more later on. So look in James chapter 4 because he talks more about these life goals.

James 4, starting in verse 10. And this should sound familiar after our singing this morning. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up.

Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother and judges his brother, speaketh evil of the law and judges the law. But if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.

There is one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy. Who art thou that judges another? Go to now you that say, today or tomorrow we will go into such a city and continue there a year and buy and sell and get gain, whereas you know not what shall be on the morrow.

[23 : 41] For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vanishes away. For you ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that.

But now you rejoice in your boastings. All such rejoicing is evil. Therefore, to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

You know, as we look at these verses, as we think about how brief life is, and again, it reminds us because it calls our lives a vapor. What are some vapors that you see in life? Any of you make anything on the stove this morning?

Tea or hot water? What comes off that hot water? Steam. You see it come out as it heats up and then what? It just steams up your whole house? It's gone.

It comes out, it disperses, and it's gone. That's what it's talking about. We had some fog this week. Cottonmouth had a delay. It was... Tammy was happy. It was hanging in the air and it was a little foggy, but a couple hours later, what happened to it?

[24 : 41] Where'd it go? It's kind of vanished, didn't it? It's saying that's our life. So what does it tell us here in verse 10 as it starts this section? Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up.

So what maybe should be one of our goals in life? To be rich or to be humble? To be humble before God. What does that really mean?

To be humble before God, what does that really mean? Live your life for Him. Live your life for Him. Okay. What else? I really want you to think, what does it mean for us to be humble before God?

I didn't really think I'd stump you all by asking that question. To know that God holds our lives in His hand. Okay. To know that God holds our lives in His hand and it's in His timing.

What else? To give Him thanks and realize He is the one that is deserving of the thanks. What else does it mean to be humble before God?

[25 : 51] Look at Him for everything. Grateful for all His blessings. Put others before ourselves. To realize you can't save yourself and you can't do it on your own.

To realize He is in control. I think all those are correct. Having an understanding in life that as we make goals in life, as we think about our life and what's really important, to realize first and foremost, it's not about us.

If we think it's about us, are we being humble? No. Being humble is understanding that it's all about God. That our lives are not for us, they're for Him.

That is humility before God, understanding it's about Him and not us. Is that easy? We started off talking about the rich and those are of humble circumstances. Do you know the challenge of having a lot of wealth?

It's not a sin to have money. But what is the challenge of having money? How you use it and beginning to think that it's by my own hand, by my own power, by my own smarts that I've accumulated this, that it's mine so I can spend it however I want.

[27 : 10] That's not humble. That's not saying God allowed me to have this. This belongs to God and I want to use it for Him. That's humility. And as we make goals in life and as we think about what is truly important, that is the attitude we need to have.

This is all about God, not me. Being humble is so important. Do you know how often it talks about being humble in the Bible? I don't either. I'm going to look it up this week.

There's so many verses that talk about humility. That's what God expects in our lives, being humble before Him. And you know, the other danger of having riches, if we make wealth our priority, do you know how we begin to judge others?

By wealth. If we make that our priority, we begin to judge the worth of others by how much wealth they have. And isn't that what happens so often in our world?

Our society values wealth, so how do we judge people? By their wealth. If they have more wealth, they're more important. If they don't have much, eh. We need to make sure we don't fall into that kind of thinking.

[28 : 18] But we stay humble before God. Understanding that if we have wealth, wonderful. God allowed us to have it. It's His. We need to use it for Him. That is what God really wants. The other life goal that it gives us here at the end of what we just read is in verse 17.

Therefore, to him that knoweth to do good and does it not, to him it is a sin. Life goal number one, being humble before God. Life goal number two, what does it talk about in that verse?

Doing good. Doing good. To others around us. To this world that we live in. Striving to make a difference for Christ in this world that we live in.

You want goals in life? Here's what it says. Stay humble before God and do good in His name.

That's not really hard to understand, is it? God doesn't make it hard to understand.

Now, living it out, that can be the challenge. Having that soft heart to do it, that can be the challenge. Because we can have a hard heart and say, it's my money, I'm going to do with it what I want.

[29 : 26] That's not a soft heart, is it? The soft heart is God allowed me to have this. I'm thankful for it and I want to use it for Him. Folks, life goals. What do you hold as valuable, as most valuable in your life?

What are you really after? I hope that we're after staying humble before the God that created us and loves us. And I hope we're after doing good in this life in the name of Jesus Christ.

We are God's representatives for this world. Do you understand that? Do you understand that? Like it or not, if you are a Christian, if you say you are a Christian, and I can't, only God knows your heart.

I'm not judging anyone. But if we say that we are believers and we have Christ in our hearts, it is our responsibility to carry His name into the world around us. That is our job.

Staying humble before God and then representing God to this world around us. Does that mean we're going to be perfect? No. But does that mean we should sure try and strive to serve God in this world around us?

[30 : 30] Yes. So this morning, again, this sermon wasn't meant to be depressing. Oh, my life is short. Remember, this is just a taste of what He has for us in eternity.

But as we spend our time here, there are goals God wants us to have. Make those goals understanding how short this life is. Make those goals knowing riches come and riches go. Make your number one goal to stay humble before God and represent Him to the world around you. You do that, and I believe God will be pleased with our lives. Let's pray together.

Lord God, I thank You for this day that You've given us. I thank You for Your Word, for just the wisdom that it contains that You share with us. And I pray on this morning, Lord, that each one of us would really examine our hearts and lives to see if we have that spirit of humility that You desire that we have.

A spirit that acknowledges that everything we have is from You. Every accomplishment we have, You've allowed us to have. The abilities we have come from You.

[31 : 33] It's all about You, not us. Help us to recognize that and to live like that. And then, Lord, help us to understand You've given us a responsibility, and that is to do good, to share You with others around us, to be Your representatives in this world.

And, Lord, if we don't have humility, that's going to be a tough thing to do. Lord, help us to have that humility, and then with that humble heart, to take You into the world around us, and to share the love of Jesus with people around us.

Lord, those are the goals we really need to focus on, because those are the goals that last for all eternity. Lord, give us wisdom. Help us to have the right goals. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.