

Future Planning

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[0 : 00] My message today is about future planning. And with our AGM as a church shortly, we're going to be looking ahead. There's some future planning to do. What lies ahead?

How is your future planning? I know some people have a personal planner, don't they? They have a personal coach. How's your future planning looking?

Are you ready for what lies ahead? What does the future hold? And we're going to go to James, James chapter 4. Now, in our Bible study Wednesday nights, we've been touching on these verses. And it struck me to speak about them today. What does the future hold? James 4, verse 13. And James addresses some people here.

And he writes of some who made big plans for what they wanted to do. And James 4, verse 13, it reads, Go to now, ye that say today or tomorrow, we will go into such a city and continue there a year and buy and sell and get gain.

[1 : 08] So James says here, hey, come now. He rebukes these ones here who would try to live their lives, make their grand plans for the future, really without scarcely a thought for God.

There's no mention of God in their future planning here. What about you and me? Are we aware of the hand of God upon our own lives? Are we aware of our own limitations?

We don't know what's going to happen in 23, 24, let alone beyond. We're not aware. We don't really know what's going to happen even tomorrow, let alone in a year from now.

And these traders that James addresses, they travel from city to city, across wide regional areas. They might have said, oh, we're going to go to Rome, and then we're going to go to Corinth, or we're going to go somewhere here, there, and we're going to do this at such a time schedule. They said, we will go. So they had these plans. This is what we will do. These people were presuming some things about their future, about their use of their time, about what they would do.

[2 : 19] And they took for granted things, things to come, which were not really in their own power. And they were focused, as you can see here, they were focused really on worldly pursuits, on worldly aims and objects.

They gave no thought in their plans, it seems, for God, for eternal things. In all their planning, they gave no thought about the glory of God, about the kingdom of God.

Notice what mistakes these business people made. We see numbers of mistakes. Some things they made mistakes about. Time.

They took for granted. They said, today or tomorrow we're going to blah, blah. They took for granted the time that God would give them, and they just aim to use it up for their own selfish ends.

That's a mistake. How much better would it be to say, how can I plan my days ahead for the glory of God? How can I use my time for His glory, to honour Him?

[3 : 26] And when I plan what I'm going to do, do I set a commitment to make time for what matters? Or do I make commitments that conflict with fellowship or worship?

Will I prioritise some social event or sport above attending the worship service? Will I opt out of fellowship because of some trivial pursuit? Or do I rather fit my other commitments around times of fellowship?

Do I prioritise making as many of the opportunities for fellowship and worship and service as I can make? Or do I just settle for a minimal commitment?

How serious am I with the stewardship of my time? And we don't put people on a guilt trip in this church, and the pastor doesn't badger people and say, you weren't there Sunday night, or this or that, or midweek, or whatever it be.

I'd like to think that you want to be fellowshiping. You want to be there. The people James addressed made mistakes about their use of their time. They made mistakes about location too.

[4 : 34] These traders just decided, oh, we're going to go here, we're going to go there, just wherever they could. To make money. That was their motivation. It looked like they didn't give a

thought about where it was that God wanted them to be, or to go.

There was no mention, no thought of praying, of seeking God's will. We can be like that, can't we? James is rebuking these people, living lives without God, planning their future, but God wasn't in their thinking.

Their thinking was all about their business enterprise. As to location, what about you and me? When we're thinking of going somewhere, being somewhere, can we consider, where does God want me to be?

Where does God want me to live? I know in times past, as a younger man, I made a lot of choices that were really of my own making, about where I would live.

I applied for jobs here, there and everywhere, and if I got the job, I moved. I didn't really, probably be as prayerful as I should have been, about where I was going to live, where I was going to be, whether there was a place of worship, or service that I could find in the new place.

[5 : 45] How much better would it be, if each of us had the heart, to make all the kinds of decisions of our lives, with an eye to, what will better my soul? What will help my family spiritually?

Is it a good decision? What will grow my faith? The location. Where am I going to put my time? Where am I going to be? Or go? What's the best decision for me to make?

Based on spiritual reasons. And these folk of James rebukes made mistakes about their use of time, about where they were going to be, their location. Also, they made mistakes even about making plans.

Now, there's nothing wrong with making plans about the future. We should. We should think about the future of our family, of wise investments, of being careful and prudent, and planning for days ahead, even years ahead.

But when these traders made all their plans, they did so presumptuously. God was missing from their plans. God did not feature in their plans. They didn't seem to care about seeking God's will or about trusting in Him.

[6 : 48] There was no prayer, no seeking to know God's mind about the matter. They seemed to get all caught up in making money. We can be like that too. Planning this or that, and yet potentially losing out spiritually.

Making all these plans. We will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain.

It's easy not to make the best decisions, isn't it? On what will build our faith, our walk with God. Do we make decisions of life lightly, just based on selfish plans, on short-term gains, and just chasing after our own interests, our own self-interest?

All the while, when we like that, we can lose out. In terms of our fellowship, of our growth, our walk with God, we can miss out on what really matters the most. And so, I urge you, each one here today, do we care for our spiritual life and growth?

What is it that we live for? Truly, do spiritual considerations come into play when we make our life decisions, or are they just an afterthought, the spiritual side?

[8 : 05] Do we have an eternal perspective when we go about making our life decisions? We do well to consider, and not make the mistakes that these people did.

In James 4, 14, it reads on, Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow, for what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a time, and then vanisheth away.

It's like this vapour that comes and goes. Some virtually play God, don't they? They think that they can predict the future. Today, tomorrow, we will.

The Bible says, boast not, you may not even see tomorrow. Your life is even a vapour. Some think they have all the time in the world, today, tomorrow, next week, next month, next year.

But they won't see that time. They think they have time on their hands, they presume their grand plans without looking to the will of God, and the providence of God. Our life is like a vapour.

[9 : 13] Our life is like this mist. This passing vapour that appears for a time, and then it's no more. It disappears, and we are gone. I had a call at 7pm last night.

Brother Ralph Anderson called to tell me that less than an hour before, his dear wife, Jenny, had passed into eternity. Ralph won't get to hold her again, kiss her, He won't get to talk to his lifelong sweetheart again, this side of heaven.

We can make all kinds of plans, can't we? And yet, for some of us, we won't live to see those days. Let's not be presumptuous about what time we have.

We only have the now. Let's make it count. Amen. We all need this reality check. Our life is temporary. Your time is a finite resource.

It's slowly running out. You've heard me say it before, like sand through the hourglass, isn't it? So are the days of our lives.

[10 : 23] I don't know what book of the Bible that comes from, but it's true, isn't it? It's biblical. We only have this finite time on this earth, don't we, brothers and sisters? Our lives flee from us.

They're transitory. They flee from us quickly, so quickly. Our life is passing. We don't know what we will face in the days ahead.

We have little control over much of what will happen to us in the days that lie ahead of us. Let's be honest. We're in His hands, aren't we? Our times are in His hands.

There's no guarantee of the future. We have no assurance that we'll grow old. Young people, there's no guarantee how long you're going to live.

Make every day count now. Don't wait till you're older to do something for God. Let's approach the future prayerfully too. Will we pray this prayer as the psalmist prayed?

[11 : 20] So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. Are we applying our hearts to wisdom?

As we think about the future, future planning, will we decide to give glad-hearted service unto our Lord? Will we take on some disciplines of committing to be present, to be active whenever we can be together as a church family?

And again, not as a yoke or out of an irksome, half-hearted sense of duty. Why? Because we love God.

We love God. We love the people of God. We want to please our Lord. We want to honour our Lord and give Him the first, the best, the most of our lives.

It's our glad privilege to wisely use our time, our lives, in such a way that gives Him due honour.

[12 : 25] Can we bear in mind that God gives us but a brief moment in the scheme of things here on earth? Can we learn to live our lives as unto the Lord?

Truly, our lives are short. As a preacher, it comes home to me often when I see, I look on the congregation and I know the numbers that are not here because they've passed on into eternity.

Our lives are short, people. Why do we so easily waste the precious time that we have? Isn't it easy to fritter it away with screens and this and that and so many things that would occupy minutes that become hours, that become days of our lives, frittered away, gone.

Poof! Like a vapour. We can easily fritter time away, can't we? Before we know it, it's gone! We ought to focus and put a priority on that, that counts, that truly is of greatest value.

But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things. You know, the material things that, the other things will be added unto you.

[13 : 40] It's saying here, put our mind on God, set our mind upon Him. It's been wisely said that the true purpose of our lives is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

That sums it up, doesn't it? Some wise man wrote those words, glorify God and enjoy Him forever. That's life, that's the purpose, that's why we're here.

God is not against us making plans, yes, make plans. God willing is the proviso. Future plans, that's wise and prudent that we do so as a church too.

But let's not be presumptuous in our plans. We're in His hands. We're at the mercy of God, aren't we? Let's rather commit our future into His hands. Let us prepare for what lies ahead for us, prayerfully so, while seeking to know and to do His will.

Let's trust in His providence for us, for our life. We live and move only at the permission of God.

Really, may our planning and our doing be framed by our reliance upon our Lord.

[14 : 46] Like Job said, our days, well, it's in Job, I'm not sure if it was him, by the way, whether it was him quoted here, but in the book of Job it reads, our days upon earth are a shadow.

It's true, isn't it? A shadow. The rich man made his great plans in Luke 12. He made plans for the future. Oh, I'm going to have my barns filled with plenty. And then, this night, thy soul is required of thee.

He foolishly lost it all. All of his grand plans didn't come about because his soul was required of him. Knowing that life is short, let's apply our energy, our diligence to spiritual things that we can grow spiritually.

It reads on in James 4, verse 15. They said, we're going to go here, we're going to go there, we're going to do this or that, we're going to get gain, whereas you know not what shall be on the morrow. What is your life? It's even like a vapour that appeareth for a little time and vanisheth away. For that you ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that.

[16:10] Are we even going to be alive, let alone do what we plan to do? Let us keep that humility of soul. Amen? Let's keep that humility. If God gives us life, we'll do this or that.

God helping us, God willing. Let's have that humility that entrusts our time, our life, our existence, our lives to God's care. Let's live humbly, dependently, prayerfully, resting, relying upon our Lord God.

We cannot live and move independent of God. So what does the future hold? Today, tomorrow, next week, next month, the years ahead, what lies ahead for us?

How do we prepare for it? How can we know for sure what is going to happen? What should we be planning for? I put to you some things that we should plan for.

We should be planning for some things. We should be planning to do some things. I'd urge you to do these several things based on what the Word of God says, what it shows us.

[17:20] One thing's for sure in looking ahead, in thinking of our future, what we should do, let us live in readiness for our Lord's coming.

Let's be ready. Let us be ready for our Lord's coming, knowing that our Lord's return is certain. We don't know the timing, but we know it is sure.

Live in readiness for our Lord's coming. Will He find us watching? Will He find us ready? May our lives be a testimony for Him, for His transforming power and a witness to our world.

Live in readiness for our Lord's coming because it is sure, there's no doubt about that, that Christ is coming. What does the future hold? What? What can we expect?

I put to you we can expect moral decay, moral decay in the last days, perilous times, perilous times, dangerous, terrible times.

[18:27] The Bible tells of moral decay. So what should we do? Stand up for our families. Stand up. Stand up against this moral decline.

The world is surely in a moral decay. It's the last days. people are going to be unthankful, unholy, all the rest of it.

The word of God tells us of a coming moral decay and we can see it, can't we? An erosion of values, a disregard for the sanctity of life. They're talking about babies born alive after an abortion. Just let them die. That's the sick kind of world we live in. People, a breakdown of traditional family structures. Family has been redefined as something perverse now.

We need to stand up in such a world where everything is going down the tubes. But as Christians we're called to be the godly. To stand godly, to stand firm in our faith, to model godly role models, to model godly principles.

[19:33] Let's aim to strengthen our families. We can't expect a moral decline, a moral decay. Let's strengthen our families in the word of god. Fathers, mothers, let's strengthen our families in bible application, in bible study at home, in fellowship.

Make fellowship a habit. Make fellowship a discipline. That you model it to your children. They see that it counts as important to you. They count it important because you show that it's important by modelling it, by making it your personal priority.

They know, yeah, when fellowship's on, we're there. What does the future hold? The people James rebuked made some careless plans. They seemed sure of what was actually uncertain.

As we look to the future, I want to assure you that there are some things we certainly can expect and we ought to prepare ourselves for. Some things we certainly ought to expect and some things we ought to do.

What can we expect? We can expect deception. We can expect deception, people. I see it on social media, some of the crazy postings of false cults.

[20:53] Some preachers going on about this immersion, gathering, get baptised. He saw the fire on the water. God showed him these visions and he's got these visions of healings and signs and wonders.

There's a lot of deception out there and they're very public, they're published, they're marketing it and it's no wonder people don't know what to believe anymore.

We've got to build our faith on the word of God. You need to build your faith. Study the word of God. Get into study. Our Lord warns of false prophets, of deceivers who are going to lead people astray, many astray.

He said, beware lest any man deceive you. We're living in an age of information overload and discernment is crucial. We must anchor ourselves in the word of God and be vigilant against any teachings that deviate from it.

There's multiple internet preachers that have got all kinds of wacko ideas. Let's hold fast to the unchanging truth of scripture, of having that spiritual armour in the face of deception.

[22 : 05] That is why Bible studies are important. We can feed ourselves as we study the word of God together. Study the word of God together at home, as a family. If you live too remote to make the Bible study night, and I know some of you do, you live too remote, Bible study night is hard for you to make.

Then hold a Bible study locally. I'm not against that. I support that. You that live remote, you that live regional, you that live an hour or so away, hold a Bible study locally.

Invite people to your home. Have a Bible study, even if it's just you and your family. Don't miss out. Make it a habit. It's a good habit to have a weekly Bible study. Commit to that.

You can run it yourself. I can give you some support through notes if you'd like, some support too. Because Bible study is important. It'll help you to grow. Because we're living in days of deception, it's guaranteed.

So we've got to be grounded. We've got to be grounded, people. Seek wisdom and understanding through prayer and study. Test all teachings against the yardstick of God's word.

[23 : 13] We've got to have the word. We've got to build our faith on the word of God. What does the future hold? I put to you that the future holds persecution. Let me be honest with you here.

There's persecution coming. Well, there's persecution now. We're just in a lucky country, aren't we? We can expect opposition. We can expect persecution against believers. God's word tells us that for sure we shall, we shall suffer persecution.

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. It's been said that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. It's probably a good thing. Let's pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters in other lands and stand strong ourselves.

We can expect trials. We can expect trouble. We can expect it. Prepare for the future. Get ready for persecution.

In other words, strengthen your faith now. Memorise the word of God. Hide it in your heart. Learn sound doctrine. Our Lord tells us that we've got to face some trials and tribulations.

[24 : 22] However, these trials are not without purpose. They're going to refine our faith. They're going to help us draw closer to God. Job was stronger for his testings, wasn't he? We see the church was stronger for its tribulation in the early church.

We see that God's people were stronger because their faith was like gold tried in the furnace. Let's endure. Let's learn endurance. Let's not get fretting and fussing over some little fuss that comes to us.

We've got to endure some stuff. There's some harder times ahead. I believe that. We will see harder times. So let's endure with patience. Go through every trial. Let's strengthen our faith now. Let's resolve to face whatever comes our way. God's people. Let's go through the early church didn't say it's your best life now and you're going to have a bed of roses and everything's going to be easy breezy and cushy and you're going to be having such a comfortable time as a Christian. They said you're going to have to face much tribulation. They said you're going to have to go through some things. Even our Lord, he says, he promises it. He says, these things I've spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace.

[25 : 32] In the world you shall have tribulation but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world. Our Lord says, yeah, get ready. You're going to have some tribulation but be of good cheer.

Have some courage here. You're going to have some courage to face it because I have overcome the world. I have got the victory and I've given you the victory. So we think, brothers and sisters, as we think of the prospect, the real prospect of persecution, let's develop our spiritual muscles now. Amen. We see the soldiers preparing through the recruit course and through the various obstacle courses and the feats of endurance and building up stamina.

They've got to get ready because they're going to go into battle. In this time of peacetime right now, shouldn't we be like those soldiers? Shouldn't we? We should be building up our spiritual muscles now so we're ready for the fight ahead.

given that we can expect persecution in times of trial, what are we to do? We should be prayerful. We should rely on God. I know I was talking to someone lately, there's a, you know, you've got the WJD, what would Jesus do?

[26 : 47] There's one called FROG, fully rely on God. That's what we need to do, people. FROG. We need to fully rely on God. We need to persevere in prayer. In uncertain times, our prayer life is essential.

Let us persevere in prayer. And given these testing times ahead, be a faithful steward. While we wait in Christ's return, we're called to be faithful stewards of all that God has entrusted to us to fulfil God's purpose in our lives, our time, our talents, our resources, our families.

There's precious resources. Let's be faithful to use these gifts for God's glory and for blessing others. And given these times of trouble ahead, live for Christ.

The Bible calls us to holiness, to be a separated people, set apart unto God's glory and holiness, to take our faith seriously. People, there's testing times surely ahead.

Let's not get soft. Let's not be softies. softies. Let's not be like that.

[28 : 00] We've got to harden up for what lies ahead. May our lives reflect the transformative power of Christ. Let us strive for purity in thought, word and deed.

What are we meant to be? A living sacrifice. It's your reasonable service. And as part and parcel of your future planning, I'd urge you to decide to be a worshipper.

Be a worshipper. Psalm 29.2 Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name. Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

So love God. Join in worship. Don't miss it for the world. Also be an ambassador. We're called to be an ambassador for the kingdom of God.

We are an ambassador. We are an ambassador whether we realise it or not. The question is, are we a good ambassador or not? Are we a poor ambassador?

[29 : 03] You hear sometimes of some ambassador doing something wrong and running to the embassy and it's a disgrace. It's a disgrace on his country that he's acted in such a poor way for the kingdom that he represents.

You are an ambassador. Each one of us are ambassadors. And it tells us now then we are ambassadors for Christ. So think of it people today, I pray you'd be encouraged to see not like the presumptuous people in James that said, oh we're going to do this or that.

I'm not going to think about asking God or trusting God. We're just going to go and get gain. We're just going to do our own thing. We're going to go here, go there. Or are we going to be saying, actually, if I live, God helping me, I'm going to do something right.

I'm going to do something spiritual. I'm going to stand for Christ. I'm going to be a living sacrifice. I'm going to stand up to this world and its ways and the persecution potentially ahead.

And I'm going to stand strong. I'm not going to be a softie. I'm going to trust God to make me persevere, to make me stand strong. We're God's agents representing Christ.

[30 : 17] and his kingdom. So be a witness for Christ. Our lives should reflect that hope that we have, that knowledge that we have, that God is our king and he reigns supreme and mighty, that Christ is truly our king.

And we're good representatives of his glorious kingdom. We are ambassadors. We are ambassadors for Christ.

So let's live out the values of God's kingdom in our present world. This is a foreign country to you, isn't it? We are representing another culture.

We're refugees, as it were. We don't belong here, but we represent him. We represent his kingdom on earth.

And so above all things too, may we have this motto. Whether therefore you eat or drink or whatsoever you do.

[31 : 23] Everything, that's all encompassing, isn't it? Even when you have a little bit to eat for lunch today. Or you have a drink or something. Even just the routine and every day.

Whatever, whatsoever you do. It's all encompassing, isn't it? Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Do all to the glory of God. I pray as we think about the future.

Think about the future of our own lives, the future of this church, the future of what faces us if we live, if we see tomorrow.

What are we going to do? What are we going to do today for the kingdom of God? Let us pray.

Lord, we thank you that you are our great king. That you so graciously have reached us with your wonderful gospel message that we can know your saving grace.

That we can know life, eternal life, imparted to us in our mortal frame. We can know eternity in the present tense. We can know that we live forever already.

[32 : 30] Because you've saved us, you've given us eternal, everlasting life. Lord, we pray each one might have that trust, that knowledge to know you. And Lord, for us that are such a people, we are your ambassadors, even when we don't act as a good one.

Lord, help us to be such an ambassador that you're pleased with. A faithful steward. Help us to be a worshipper. help us to be a people that will take time to persevere in prayer, in your word, in study, in fellowship.

Lord, that will be a people that please you. Lord, we pray each one might have an encouragement today. Not a put down, but a lifting up. That, yes, Lord, I want to be such a one.

Help us to be such a people, we pray. All to your glory and praise. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.