Plan With Humility

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Preacher: Cedric Moss

[0:00] Good morning, church. Our scripture lesson today is taken from! Psalms 39 and James chapter 4 verses 13 through 17.

! I said, I will guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue. I will guard my mouth with a muzzle. So long as the wicked are in the presence, I was mute and silent.
I held my peace to no avail, and my distress grew worse. My heart became hot within me.
As I mused, the fire burned. Then I spoke with my tongue. O Lord, make me know my end. And what is the measure of my days?
Let me know how fleeting I am. Behold, you have made my days a new hand breath, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely, all mankind stands as a mere breath. Surely, a man goes about as a shadow. Surely, for nothing, they are in turmoil. Man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather.
[1:27] And now, O Lord, for what I do, I wait. My hope is in you. Deliver me from all my transgressions. Do not make me the scorn of the fool. I am mute. I do not open my mouth, for it is you who have done it.

Remove your stroke from me. I am spent by the hostility of your hand. When you discipline a man with rebuke for sin, you consume like a moth what is dear to him. Surely, all mankind is a mere breath.
Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry. Hold not your peace at my tears. For I am a sojourner with you, a guest like all my fathers. Look away from me, that I may smile again before I depart and am no more.
James chapter 4 verses 13 through 17. Come now you who say, today or tomorrow, or we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there, and trade and make a profit.
Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead, you are to say, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that, as it is you boast in your arrogance.
[3:08] All such boasting is evil, so whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. Once again, it is good to be gathered on this first Sunday of a new year as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Historically, I have always viewed the first month of a new year and the sermons in that month as being foundational for the rest of the year.
And this year is no different. And so this year we are beginning with a five-part sermon series from the book of James.
And the title of it is Wisdom for Life. And this morning we begin with the first sermon, Plan with Humility. Next Sunday, we will consider Obey God's Word Diligently.
And then on the 21st, which is going to be the start of our week of corporate consecration. Well, the end of it, but we will be looking at Seek the Lord Sincerely.
[4:31] And then on the 28th, view trials biblically. And then finally, in February, the first Sunday of February, we will consider Resist Favoritism Firmly.

And so I pray that this first sermon for the year, and indeed the series that we'll be doing, would truly be foundational for the rest of the year.
And so we begin this morning with this first sermon, Plan with Humility. And I think it's an appropriate sermon for us at the beginning of a year, because I think all of us, whether we have written out our plans, I think we all have plans for this year.
Things that we want to pursue, things we want to accomplish. And whether we've written them down or not, they are plans all the same. And the counsel of James in this passage that was read,

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the last passage, James 4, 13 through 17, is planned with humility.
That's the counsel that James gives us. And this morning, I want us to consider his counsel in these five verses. But first, let's take a moment to pray.
[5:52] Father, how we need to hear from you this morning. Lord, New Year's are always filled with wonderful prospects to dream and to desire to accomplish new things and greater things.

And we make plans to accomplish these things. And so, Lord, we need to hear from you this morning that you would guide us and direct us in how we should plan.
And I pray that you'd speak to all of our hearts. And I pray that our planning will be in accordance with the counsel that we find in James 4, 13 through 17.
Amen. Lord, would you grant us all ears to hear? Would you grant me the grace and the ability to faithfully bring your word to your people this morning?
Lord, this is an expression of your care for them. And so would you help me to care for your people through the preaching of your word? And we ask that you would do this in Jesus' name.
[7:14] Amen. James 4, 13 to 17 is a sobering rebuke to those of us who make plans forgetting or not truly accepting two humbling realities.

And these realities are, number one, we don't know and we don't control the future. We don't know and we don't control the events of the future.
We don't know them. We can't control them. And second, we don't know and we don't control the length of our days.
And so really we have no ability to ensure, to see to it, that the plans we make will indeed come to fruition.
We have no ability to do that. And so the overarching point that James makes in these five verses before us is that God controls the events of the future and the length of our days and only what he wills comes to pass.
[8:33] There's no randomness in any of that. All of that is within the sovereign control of the Lord.

He controls the events of the future. He controls the length of our days and only what he wills comes to pass.
It's a very sobering thought to allow to rest on us. And so in our remaining time this morning, I want to consider these two humbling realities that James brings us face to face with in this passage.
And may the Lord work on our hearts and cause us to plan with them in mind. The first reality that we come face to face with when we make plans is the uncertainty of the future.
Look at how James calls our attention to it in verse 13. He writes, He says, He's singling out a particular group of people, those who would speak with this kind of certainty, speak with this kind of confidence.
[10:02] Today or tomorrow, I'm going to go to such and such a town, I'm going to spend a year, I'm going to trade, and I will make a profit.

Now here James is primarily addressing Christian business people. He's addressing those who in his day would move from place to place for periods of time and do business.
But if we're going to rightly hear James this morning, we need to we need to hear two helpful things about how we need to understand what he's saying in verse 13.
Now, although James is speaking primarily to business people, he's not speaking to business people exclusively. James is speaking to all people who make plans without reference to the Lord and his will.
And so, you may think, well, I'm not a business person, I don't go here and trade and say I'm going to make a profit, but we may do whatever we do and we may be approaching it in a very similar way where we're planning and we make no reference to God and no reference to his will.
[11:27] That is not on our radar. All that's on our radar is what we plan to do. James was not exclusively addressing business people.

He was primarily addressing them. And then the second thing we should bear in mind as we consider this passage is that James is not anti-planning. James doesn't have a thing against planning.
Indeed, God has given us the ability to plan. And he calls us to plan. He calls us to consider the future and to plan.
So James is not anti-planning. James is against presumptuous planning. James is against planning that is done without humbly acknowledging that our plans will only come to pass if God wills.

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And so in verse 13, we should be hearing James address all of us who make plans without reference to God and to his will.
[12:39] And so the first reality that James confronts us with is that you don't know what tomorrow brings. That's what he says in verse 14.

You don't know what tomorrow will bring. And here he is really addressing two particular aspects of uncertainty.
And the first is we don't know the future only God knows the future. We don't know how future events may impact the plans that we make.
And when we think about the future it's not just about tomorrow or next week. The future is even today. The future is to make a plan even a minute from now, a second from now, five minutes from now, an hour from now, even today.
And that's what James says in verse 13. He says, today or tomorrow, James has this presumption in planning today without reference to God. Not just tomorrow, not just out in the distant future, but even today.
[13:55] If our attitude is that we're going to do this or that and we have no mindfulness of the Lord and his will, James is addressing us and he is drawing our attention to the uncertainty about the future.

Brothers and sisters, if we don't even know what an hour will bring, we certainly don't know what 2024 is going to bring for us.
There are some things that are in the future that affect all of us. All of us are affected. We think back to 2020 when the COVID pandemic hit us.
we were all affected by that. Our lives are upended by that. Currently, we have major wars that are taking place around the world and they're affecting the world's economy.
They're affecting supply chains and shipping and all kinds of other issues. We're all being affected by that. And then there are personal uncertainties.
[15:03] Uncertainties that are unique to some of us that may not affect the rest of us. They're health uncertainties. They're financial uncertainties.

They're family uncertainties, just to name a few of them. And then the second aspect of the future is that we don't control it.
The second aspect of the uncertainty of the future is we don't control it. We cannot control it. God controls it. He controls every detail of it, every aspect of it. All of it is in his hands.
And since we are not able to control the future, we cannot with any kind of certainty guarantee the plans we make will indeed come to pass.
So in light of this uncertainty, James says to us in verse 15, look at verse 15, he says whenever we make our plans, we ought to say if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.
[16:15] He says if we're making plans and we are not acknowledging that these plans are subject to God's will, he says you're arrogant, he goes on to say that.

He says it's arrogant to actually do that. And James is not saying to us that when we plan we need to tack four words onto it at the front or the back and say if the Lord wills or God willing or something of the sort.
That's not what James is really saying to us because I think we all know that sometimes it's a matter of speech, it's a matter of talking. We just say God willing, the Lord willing, we say those kinds of things just we kind of pick it up from the older people who probably really believed it.
But we can say those words and not have any conviction at all about what we're saying. On the other hand, we may plan and we may never say if God wills or the Lord willing, we never write those things if the Lord spares life.
But that is so deep within our soul that our plans are subject to the Lord, that that is what matters. What matters is not so much that we audibly say that or we write that down if the Lord wills.
[17:41] What matters is that that is a conviction of our hearts that these plans will only come to pass if the Lord wills.

wills. And that is what James is saying. He is saying that rather than make these plans in such a way that we give the impression that they're all in our hands and we have the power to bring it to pass, he says no.
He says what you should say is if the Lord wills, we will do this or we will do that. So how then should we make our plans?

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We should plan prayerfully. We should submit our plans to the Lord acknowledging that without him we can do nothing. We should submit them to the Lord and we should fervently pray that he would bring them to pass if they are his will.
You know, I remembered this would be back in the 80s when there was this false teaching around that if you said if God wills, like if you're praying for someone and you say Lord if it's your will heal this person, they said no, no, no, no, no, don't say that because that shows an expression that you don't have faith.
[19:11] And the idea was it was God's will to heal everybody, it was God's will to do whatever you wanted them to do. And that's just not true. Scripture refutes that and life experience refutes that.

And to sincerely pray, Lord, if this is your will, is the way that we are to pray about these things.
We should never be afraid to pray in that way. We should never be afraid to even say, Lord, if this is not your will, Lord, close this door. Lord, if this is not your will, don't let this come to pass.
You should never be afraid to pray that because we want God's will. It shows that we are wise. It shows that we understand who God is, we understand who we are.
Because sometimes we can be all about ourselves and we can get ahead of ourselves and so we need to be sincerely committing our will to the Lord.
[20:12] to don't know if it was true or not or whether it was a joke. But there was this pastor in London.

He was pastoring this very small church and actually he was outside of London and he got this opportunity to consider taking on the pastorate of this larger church more in central London.
And he told his wife about it and he said to her, he said, I'm going to go upstairs and pray, you go downstairs and pack. See, that's not the way we pray about our plans.
We don't pray for God to rubber stamp what we want. Brothers and sisters, how evil is that? We want God's will in our lives.
We're not wise enough to choose our own way. And many of us have lived long enough to see that. The future is uncertain and we don't know it.
[21:23] The future is uncertain and we don't control it. And so we should humbly submit our plans to God and we should say, your will be done. But you know, sometimes even after we have prayed, prayed about doing something, taking on some initiative, even after we've prayed, we don't have any clear direction about what God's will is and what we should do.

We don't know. Sometimes the situation may dictate what to do by maybe there's a deadline and it's facing right in front of you and so you have to make some decision.
But brothers and sisters, when we have done our best to seek the Lord and we have postured ourselves sincerely before the Lord as best we know how to desire his will, we simply need to take godly counsel, we simply need to proceed in faith and in trust in the Lord, trusting that in the end he will bring his will to pass.
Because we're not holding on to it with a tight fist, we're holding on to it with an open hand and we're saying Lord, I don't know the future, I can't control the future, I don't see all these things. But Lord, I believe this is the way you're leading and this makes sense to proceed in this way.
I submit it to you, your will be done. And whatever the outcome is, we learn to say amen because we trust the Lord. Brothers and sisters, this is the posture of humility.
[23:13] The posture of humility is to desire the will of God in whatever we do. Proverbs 16 and verse 3 says, commit your work to the Lord and your plans will be established.

Proverbs 19, 21 says, many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.
We can hold on to these as we go about planning and go about executing our plans.
So that's the first reality that we need to be in mind as we make plans, the uncertainty of the future. We don't know it, we can't control it, the sovereign Lord knows it, the sovereign Lord controls it, and he will work out all things in accordance with the counsel of his will.
The second reality that we must bear in mind is that of our planning, in our planning, sorry, is the brevity of our days.
[24:29] The brevity of our days. And James points us to the brevity of our days by this question that he asks and answers in verse 14. Look at verse 14 again. He says, what is your life?

For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. James' point is, in the grand scheme of things, our life is so brief, it is a mist.

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And making plans without any reference to God, making plans about the future with no reference to God, is arrogant.
That's the point he makes in verse 16. He says, as it is, you boast in your arrogance, all such boasting is evil. James is saying, when people who don't know the future, don't control the future, whose lives are as brief as a vapor of mist, go around saying, I'm going to do this and I'm going to do that, without any reference to God, he said, it is arrogant and it is evil.
He said, it is boasting. And you know, we may not have a tone of boasting in our voice, but brothers and sisters, if we are planning with some kind of certainty and God is not in view of those plans, that is boasting, that we are able to bring those things to pass, even though we cannot.
[26:00] And James says, that is evil. Those are strong words. And those are strong words that cause us to pause and reflect about how we approach our lives and how we make our plans.

We can make plans. We can write them down. They can be firm. But they must have God in view. We must be mindful that only if he wills, will he bring them to pass.
Look at what James says in verse 15 again. He says, instead you are to say, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.
will he go to to God? Brothers and sisters, this is the most sobering point that James makes. Yes, we know that the future is uncertain and we don't know events that may await us and we can't control the future.
but the most sobering point that James makes is that our lives are brief. And whether we live is in God's hands.
[27:29] Whether we draw our next breath is in the Lord's hands. This is very, very sobering. Our lives are as brief as mist.

Here one moment and gone the next without notice, without warning. And so we will only carry out our plans if the Lord wills and if we live.
And again, when we say if the Lord spares my life, that needs to be a conviction of heart. That needs to be with the awareness. I may not live to see the rest of the day.
I may go to bed and not wake up. And for the believer, that's not a morbid thought. That is a realistic thought. And what the Bible assures us is that whether we live or we die, we are the Lord's.
And to acknowledge that reality doesn't bring it to us any closer. There are people who really think that if you think about death in those terms, that somehow death will come to you sooner.
[28:42] Kind of like how some people think if you make a will, you're going to die soon. No, we will die when the Lord ordains that we should die. And so to think in this way, to think in a very sober way, if the Lord spares my life, I will do this or I will do that.

And brothers and sisters, how fresh is this reminder on our hearts? our sister Jennifer Cox on a vacation and without warning, the Lord took her from time into eternity.
It's a vivid reminder that our lives are like mist. Here, and it vanishes just like that. And even when it isn't sudden, as it was in the case of my sister or early, it still has this feeling of a mist that the life was brief and the life was short.
We whose lives are described as a mist. And it's interesting how James puts it. James doesn't say your life is like a mist. He says your life is a mist.
We whose lives are mist should live with the awareness that it is only if the Lord wills, we will live.
[30:18] And we will do this or we will do that. And there's nothing we can do that can change or determine the length of our days to any degree.

people die. The old die, the young die, the rich die, the poor die, parents die, children die, and in no particular order. Sick people die and healthy people die.
People die naturally, people die accidentally. And the list goes on of all the categories of people.
The Lord keeps us honest. There is no carve out that we can have to say if I can be in this group, I can have some certainty about my life.
We can look at the obituaries and all of us will find some match for us in the obituary. The psalmist in Psalm 39 verses 4 to 6 shows us how we who are amiss ought to pray.
We ought to pray, O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days. Let me know how fleeting I am.
[31:34] Behold, you have made my days a few hand breaths. My lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere wrath.

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Surely a man goes about as a shadow. Surely for nothing they are in turmoil. man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather it.
Brothers and sisters, this prayer should be on our hearts as we think about the future, as we plan for the future. We are missed. We're going about as a mere shadow.
And when we do that, when we pray in this way, it's an expression of humility humility under the hands of a sovereign God. And so I pray this morning that the Lord would grant all of us the ability to plan in this way.
Plan humbly. Plan with these realities in mind. Let there be nothing about us that gives us any confidence about what we think the future holds for us.
[32:45] Let it not be youth. Let it not be health. Let it not be possessions. We can all find people who had those attributes and they left from time into eternity because the sovereign Lord determined that that was the time that they should go.

So may the Lord grant us wisdom to plan with this awareness that our lives are brief and that we would sincerely and humbly acknowledge that our plans will only come to pass if the Lord wills and if we live should he spare our lives.
And may the Lord grant to those of us who have trusted in him not to fear about our plans not coming to pass. Not to fear that we plan something that doesn't come to pass.
Okay, if it doesn't come to pass, amen. The Lord knows and the Lord sees and he's going to take care of us. And certainly if we die, again, Christ is our hope in life and death.
I thank Brother Troy for choosing that song for us this morning. It's a wonderful song. It is a statement of whatever the future is.
[34:15] Christ is our hope in life and in death. Let me just close by reading the first verse and you're hearing once again.

And let's take this in, brothers and sisters. What is our hope in life and death? Christ alone. Christ alone.
What is our only confidence? That our souls to him belong. who holds our days within his hands.
What comes apart from his command? And what will keep us to the end? The love of Christ in which we stand.
It's a precious promise, brothers and sisters. Those are precious promises. promises. And they should be the confidence of every believer.
[35:15] Whether you're here this morning, whether you are watching or listening online, this is our confidence. Christ is our hope in life and in death.

This only applies for those who belong to Christ. Maybe you're here, maybe you're watching online, and maybe you sang these words to be a part of the singing.
But you couldn't sing it with conviction because Christ is not your hope in life and in death. Christ is only our hope in life and death if we belong to him.
If we put our trust in him, if we've turned from our sin, we have trusted in Jesus, then we can sing with conviction, Christ is my hope. in life and in death.
If you're here this morning or if you're watching or listening online and you have not trusted Jesus Christ, I call you this morning, repent, turn away from your sin, turn away from the emptiness and the folly of sin and trust in Jesus Christ so that you likewise in a year that is uncertain and you don't know what it holds to you, that you could sing whatever it is in life or death, Christ is my hope and Christ is my confidence.
[36:47] I pray that you do that today. I pray that if you're here that you will not leave without quieting your heart and trusting Jesus Christ as your Lord, as your personal Savior.

Certainly if you want to talk about these things, I'll be available after the gathering to be able to talk with you and even to pray with you.
Brothers and sisters, let's plan with humility and let's remember that the best place for us is in God's will and a sign of maturity is when we don't know whether God's will is left or right, that our posture is, Lord, whether your will is left or right, I want your will.
That's a sign of maturity. A maturity is when we want our way because of what we see and because of what we desire. God's way and God's will is best for us.
Jesus expressed it best for us in the Garden of Gethsemane when the bitter cup of the wrath of God was placed before him for the sins of sinners that he would have to drink going to the cross.

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[38:09] He bitterly cried out, nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done. Brothers and sisters, whatever the endeavor, may we seek, the will of God, not just for this year, but for the rest of our lives.

Let's pray. Father, we want to plan with humility and to plan with humility means that we acknowledge that our plans will only come to pass if you will and let you spare our lives.
Would you help us all to embrace this humble posture, Lord? Lord, where there are those of us this morning who might be holding on to some plan or some ambition, some desire, Lord, would you help us all to lay it at your feet, to seek your guidance and to desire more than anything else that your will would be done.
And Father, we pray for those who do not know Christ. Would you work in their lives, even in this moment, would you convict them, would you save them, would you enable them to sing with conviction that Christ alone is their hope in life and in death.
We ask that you would do this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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