

Our Plans and God's Providence

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Date: 25 April 2021

[0 : 00] We continue our series in James this morning, the book of James, and you will be aware that we have been in this book for some time now. There's one thing that we have learned about James during our study of the book of James, and it is that James is a straight talker.

He does not beat around the bush. He does not mince words. The passage that forms the basis for our message today is no less direct.

Here James brings us face to face with our insignificance, if you will, while reminding us that it is the Lord who ultimately controls the future and not us.

Let us pray. Father, we thank you for this privilege that we have to share your word, to feast at your table.

And Lord, we pray in the name of Jesus that you would cause your word to accomplish what you would desire for us. Speak to us. Speak to our hearts, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[1 : 25] Amen. Please turn in your Bibles to James chapter 4. James chapter 4. James chapter 4, beginning at verse 13.

James 4, beginning at verse 13. James writes, Come now, you who say, today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit.

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 ought to say, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that. As it is, you boast in your arrogance.

All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

[2 : 44] I believe in these few verses that we have read, James is telling us a simple truth. There is a wrong way and a right way for a believer to plan.

James is telling us simply, there is a wrong way and a right way for a believer to plan. So to help focus our thoughts, we will examine these verses under two headings.

And I know you know what they are already. The first is the wrong way to plan. And the second is the right way to plan.

Before considering these two points, I think it's helpful to settle on a few fundamental issues. First, to whom is James writing this section in particular?

Is James only writing to business people? Let's take a look at it. He says, come now, you who say tomorrow, today or tomorrow, we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit.

[4 : 04] Perhaps you heard that. Perhaps you read that and thought that James is talking only to the tradesmen, to business people.

Perhaps you think that James is talking to wealthy people. But I believe James is talking to everyone who plans, no matter who you are.

Whatever the plan is about. Whether you are a child. Whether you are an adult. Whether you are in business or not. It doesn't matter. James is talking to everyone.

And whatever the plan. Whether the plan is about your education. Whether the plan is about your business. Whether the plan is about your marriage. Whether it's about starting a family.

Whether it is about the next baseball game. Or whatever it might be. James is talking to all of us.

[5 : 05] Or even planning what the next meal is going to be. James helps us to see that there are at least four different components to a plan.

He mentions them. He tells us that the plan that he deals with in these verses. Speak to when.

When such and such will occur. And what. What is going to happen. What is it that I wish to do. And where.

Where will I do it. And finally he tells us about the desired result. Now to be clear. And I think this needs to be understood up front.

That the Bible does not prohibit planning. Indeed the Bible expressly encourages planning. Consider these words in Proverbs.

[6 : 09] Chapter 6. Proverbs 6. Beginning at verse 6. Go to the aunt. O sluggard. Consider her ways.

And be wise. Without having any chief. Officer or ruler. She prepares her bread in summer. And gathers her food.

In harvest. So we are being. Told that we should consider the ways of the aunt. Who plans. Who plans.

Who plans during the summer. For the lame months. But planning. While we are not discouraged from planning.

It is important for us to also bear in mind. That planning. Is not to rise. In us from a lack of trust.

[7 : 06] In God's care for us. We don't plan. Because we don't trust God. Is what we are saying. We don't plan. Because we are afraid.

Of what the future holds for us. Because you will recall. What Jesus said to his disciples. In Matthew chapter 6. Beginning at verse 25.

Jesus taught them that the Lord cares for us. And that we should not be overly concerned. About the future.

What the Bible does prohibit. Is planning. Without having God's providence. In view. Let's now consider.

The wrong way. To plan. As James. Sets it out. I think that the overarching point.

[8 : 06] That. James makes. Is. That the. That. The unbiblical planner. Is presumptuous. And the.

Unbiblical planner. Is arrogant. Presumptuous. In the fact that he. Fails to. Observe. Limits. He. Simply assumes that.

Things. Will happen as planned. Because. He. Planned it. Presumptuous. I planned it. So it's going to happen that way.

Arrogant. Arrogant. The Bible says a great deal about. Pride and arrogance. God resists.

The proud. As believers. We don't want to be caught. In either of these places. Being presumptuous. Or being arrogant. James uses very effective language.

[9 : 08] To characterize. The person who does not plan. With God in view. Look at how James begins. This. Section.

Verse 13. James writes. Come now. Come now. Come now. You know. When you're talking to your buddy. You say. Come now. Come on man.

Come on. You know better than that. So James. Is saying to us. Come now. Engage your minds. Come now. As if he.

Is saying to us. Stop talking foolishness. Think. When someone says to you. Come now. He's really asking you. To have your mouth.

Communicate with your brain. Before it communicates. With someone else. Come now. James writes. James sees a planner.

[10 : 05] Who does not have God in view. As an unwise person. Come now. Someone who is not thinking. From a biblical perspective. James invites us to come now.

To consider. What we have learned. To consider. To apply what we know. What the scripture. Qualley teaches us. Come now.

It would be. Accurate to say. That James calls believers. To be thoughtful. When planning. Do not. Do not. Ignore. Biblical.

Principles. Here is what this planner. That James writes about. Here is what he says. He says. Today. Today. Or tomorrow. We will go. Into such and such. A town. And spend a year. There.

[11 : 01] And trade. And make a profit. Listen to that. Today or tomorrow. We will go. In such and such. A town. And spend a year.

There. Trade. For profit. What presumption. What. Presumption. These men. Proceeded. As if they. Controlled. Things. They controlled. The prices. In the market. They determined. Whether. A competitor. Would. Outbid them.

They even. Controlled. Whether. They would. Be robbed. On their way. To the market. This worldly. Mindset. That James.

Describes. Here. In this. Verse. Reflects. The fact. That we feed. Ourselves. With. Pleasures.

[11:57] Before we obtain them. And I know this is true for all of us. When we sit down and we think. About boy.

This is something I'd love to have. I want to have this. BMW. With you. Or I want to have this. Extra whatever.

This extra client. This additional client. Or I want to make this additional sum of money. Or I want to get my bachelor's degree. By this particular time.

We feed ourselves. We see ourselves. With these various things. Before we get them. And we allow those pleasures. Those things.

To overtake us. The mind. The mind seizes them. And then. We're off to the races. Just like that. Just like that.

[12:53] Now I can tell you. Because. I've been there. I've done that. And I'll be lying to you. If I said. I only did it once. Or twice. Or three times. Countless times.

I have sat down. And I have imagined. Various things. And I've seized it. And immediately start. To jump at it.

James says. This is. Presumption. He's James. Deals with presumption. At a very basic level. He deals with this. At a very basic level.

Look at how he. Deals with it. In verse 14. He says. Listen. You're talking about. A year.

You're going to trade. He said. Yet. Yet. In verse 14. Look at what he says. Yet. You do not know. What tomorrow. Will bring. That's very fundamental.

[13:51] All of us can understand that. James says. You are. Predicting. The future. You're predicting. Projecting. One year out. And you can't even. Accurately.

Predict. What tomorrow will bring. Now this is a lesson. For all of us. Because. If you are alive. If you have. Any degree.

Of ambition. You are thinking. About. The future. This message. Is intended. To help us. To see how we ought to plan. James says.

Here. Don't presume. Upon. The future. In this way. Says very. Fundamentally. That you can't even. Predict. What tomorrow will bring. And you're thinking. About the future. How many of us. Just over a year ago. Would have predicted.

[14:48] The pandemic. The global pandemic. That is. Upon us. How many people's plans. Were thwarted. As a result. How many of you.

Wanted to go to Miami. And had made trips. Perhaps like the one. That I described. And then. Suddenly. The pandemic.

Listen. You see. That was only a joke. I wasn't inviting anybody. Now you see. Now. Now. Now. Now I have made enemies.

With all the women. In the church. Lord have mercy. But. But you get the point. You know. Thank you for permitting me. To make the point.

Ladies. Thank you for permitting me. To do that. But the point is. That things happen. Over which we have. No control. And that's the point.

[15:43] That James. Is making. See. We. Plan the wrong way. When we don't consider this. When we think. Just because it's in our head. It's going to happen.

Then James. Goes on. James says. To them. You need to look at this. In verse 14. He continues. James. Asks. What is your life? I.

You know. I think James is. Perhaps saying. Who you think you is? What is your life? What is your life? Yes. Yes.

And then James responds to the question that he asked. He said, for you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

James says, you think you are a big deal. You're planning the future. You're planning very out there. You're looking into the future. In a year, I'm going to make X amount of money. I'm going to start this business.

[16:44] And I'm going to make X amount of money. You have your accountant put a signature to your plan. And James said, who do you think you are? You're just a mist.

In the Bahamas, perhaps we're not extremely familiar with mist and vapor. The best example I can come up with with respect to vapor would be the clouds. When I was a younger boy, when I was a young boy, not a younger boy.

When I was a young boy, you got words get you in trouble, Brother Tim. You know, perhaps the Lord is saying something to me. When I was a younger boy, Clarence.

When I was a young boy, I would gaze into the sky and look at the clouds, stare at the clouds. And it's amazing what the clouds would look like from time to time.

Sometimes they'd look like men with birds. And sometimes like airplanes, all kinds of mountains, angels, you name it. I would stare for a while and always the cloud would either dissipate, change shape, or just float away.

[17 : 56] It never lasted long. And if the truth be told, these clouds never intended to form themselves into the shape that I saw.

It just happened. I believe that James is telling us two things about vapors, about ourselves when we plan this way.

I think the first thing James is telling us, he's saying, you know, listen, think about who you are.

You're not Mr. Big Stuff. He is saying, you need to consider the brevity of the mist.

It doesn't last long. A mist is here one minute and gone the next. So James says, get yourself right. Think correctly about yourself. Don't think about yourself more highly than you are. You are better mist. Mist. The second thing I think he's saying to us with respect to this language is that the impact of mist on the overall scheme of things is really very small.

[19 : 09] James is speaking very directly here. He is saying that our lives in and of themselves are insignificant. significant. I know we don't like to hear that. But James's point is that we place too much importance on ourselves. James wants us to understand that the ups and downs of life are such that we cannot control them. We can't control them. And our lives can be so easily changed. So when we plan, this is James's point. When we plan, remember who we are. We are missed.

That's the point James makes. He's saying to us that when you and I are planning, when we are sitting down and strategizing about our businesses, about our family affairs, about our budgets, about our next vacation, about the next team we are going to put together or be a part of, he says, get a grip on who you truly are. This reality, that is the reality that our lives are like mist should cause us to approach life with a deep and abiding humility. That's the point.

James explains that some boast and brag arrogantly about their plans. You've seen this. I've been there, done that. So I'm speaking to myself too. James says that you boast and brag arrogantly about your plans. Have you ever put together a plan? Don't raise your hand now. Have you ever put together a plan? And you thought, man, this thing is the best thing since sliced bread and you have it made in the shade? James says, you think you got it all figured out. And then next day, it goes up in flames or doesn't even get off the floor, off the ground. I didn't hear any amens there, but I know it happens.

Amen. Amen. That's right. Yes. Maybe you've done it before. The reason why such boasting is evil is because it leaves no room for God and it puts too much emphasis on self. The planner is to be humble. The planner is to know his place and he is to know God's place. The planner is not to think too highly of himself. He is to be low in spirit and reliant on God.

But what's the right way to plan? How should you and I plan? First thing, all these things that we've already talked about we shouldn't do. So James tells us what we shouldn't do. He tells us about the disposition we shouldn't have. But in these verses, when it all boils down, James is telling us that the right way to plan is to have God's providence in view. That's the essence of what James says to us. James says, you want to plan right?

[22 : 42] Then you have to have the providence of God in view. What's providence? What's providence? The word providence is nowhere to be found in scripture.

But it is a word that is used to explain God's relationship with his creation. It means that God is ultimately in control of creation. Not only to preserve it, but he also directs it to fulfill his purpose. And James says that you and I, we ought to get connected to this. We ought to understand our place and understand God's providence.

understand that God is sovereign over his creation. We see this in Proverbs 19, 21, which says, many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.

I think that's an important verse for us to remember. Many are the plans in the mind of a man. And I think each one of us, certainly the adults here, we can all say that this is true. Many, we've all had many plans, many plans.

But we're told here, it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand. And as we plan, we need to have this in view.

[24 : 28] We see also in Daniel chapter 4, verse 35, it says, King Nebuchadnezzar said, of punishment. He finally got it. Essentially, when we speak of the providence of God, we're speaking about the fact that God is involved in the affairs of man.

We believe that nothing happens unless God permits it. And he is not surprised by anything. James shrewdly summarizes the appropriate disposition, the appropriate attitude for the believer with these words, if the Lord wills. Let's take a look at what James says very specifically. James says, Instead of having that bad attitude when you're planning. You ought to say, If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.

How loaded is that? If the Lord wills. If the Lord wills. These are not just mere words. These are words that should come from the innermost part of our hearts.

The saying, If the Lord wills, always indicate that one has a right perspective when it comes to planning. You think they're just merely saying it. If the Lord wills.

Child, I'm going up the road. If the Lord wills. Some people say it as a matter of vote. Some people just say it to appear to be religious. If the Lord wills.

[26 : 37] Oh yeah, I go into Miami next week. If the Lord wills. The right words, perhaps. But not the right spirit.

And when someone does not say these words, is it an indication that he is not a godly planner? Not necessarily. One can have these words, these thoughts in one's heart.

Or one might say similar words. I often say, If the Lord permits. Is James really saying to us that we ought to say these words whenever we talk about our plans.

Is that what James is saying? That you ought to say, If the Lord wills. No. There are many examples in scripture where persons have talked about plans and not used these words.

Indeed, we can become so immersed in these words that we say them without any real meaning. And that's certainly not what James is saying to us.

[27 : 53] We say them only for our consciences and nothing else. James is saying to us that the reality of the providence of God should so govern our lives that it forms the basis for our plans.

It informs how we plan and what we plan. It informs when we plan and why we plan. It is not the words that matter so much.

It is the posture of our hearts. It is our attitude. James is saying fundamentally that when we say if the Lord wills, what we are taking our plans and what we are doing is we are putting it where they belong.

We are putting it in the hands of the Lord. Lord, we are saying, Lord, I am truly missed. Lord, I don't know the future. I don't even know tomorrow, what tomorrow will bring.

But Lord, if you will, you are the sovereign one. You are the one who controls all things. Yes, yes, many are the plants in my mind, but you are the one whose purposes prevail.

[29 : 21] But the key is ensuring that our hearts are aligned with the words that we speak. But James, just let's be clear now.

if we are to, if we are to use these words, if we are to be sincere about these words, I mean, if you know you can't have evil intent behind them and say, you know, Lord, you know, you're going to, you know, we don't do this, but I'm just using this as an example.

You're going to rob a food store and then you say, Lord, I'm going to rob this food store. I'm going to be successful in my attempt if you will. that's not what we're talking about.

We're talking about sensible things. And more importantly, really, our plans should really rest within the crucible of God's providence.

Our plans must be shaped by his providence. And how do we do that? We do that in prayer. We do that in prayer first. So we ask the Lord, Lord, what am I to do in this circumstance?

[30 : 36] What am I to do? And out of that we develop our prayer. We start right so that we would end right. It's not good enough for us to devise plans without regard to the Lord's purpose and then ask him to bless them.

But it is apparent, it is apparent that the planners, James writes about, they thought that they had it made in the shade.

They thought that they were immortal. They thought that whatever they planned because they thought that they dotted all their I's and crossed all their T's.

How many of you know that we're not smart enough to do that? But the truth about which we speak should shape the way we approach planning.

It doesn't. I want to give you an example here. In Acts chapter 18, we find an account of Paul. [31 : 47] Paul, who is on a trip to Ephesus. And we see a conversation that he has with the Jews in the synagogue.

When Paul was leaving, the Jews asked him to stay. And in verse 21 of chapter 18, Paul responds to them and this is what Paul says.

Paul writes, Paul doesn't presume upon the future.

Paul says, if the Lord wills, what an attitude for you and I to have. Even when, even about tomorrow, even about later today, if the Lord wills, if the Lord permits, if the Lord allows.

If the Lord allows. despite the fact that Paul's return might have been a good thing, Paul says, listen, I'm only a man and don't know the Lord's purposes.

[33 : 03] While no one could argue that Paul's return to Ephesus appeared to be worthy on its face, it might not have been a part of God's agenda.

And so, we are to realize that the achievement of our plan rests in the hand of the Lord.

James helps us to see that. And Proverbs also helps us to see that.

Proverbs 16 and 9. not only are our lives in the hand of the Lord, but our ultimate success rests with him as well.

Listen to what James says, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that. If the Lord wills, we will do this or that. This must also mean that if the Lord wills, we will not do this or that.

[34 : 25] But this goes right back to the godly planner. Accepting the reality that the achievement of his plan rests ultimately with God. It's about God and not ourselves.

It's amazing. We see this every day in simple things. We see often very simple things. We see two men set out with the same goal, the same ambition, the same ability.

similar circumstances. One succeeds and the other does not. Why? Ultimately, it's the Lord's will. It's the Lord's will.

So what's this all about? How do we put some teeth into this? What does this mean for us practically? What does it mean for you and me, these verses that James writes here?

Chapter 4 of James verses 13 through 17. I believe the first thing is the truth we have heard should give us an unshakable confidence in the future.

[35 : 45] Should give us an unshakable confidence in the future. future. Why? Because it is God who controls the future and not any man.

Not you or any other man. Not any circumstance. That's why we are able to say and God is able to make all grace abound to you so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times you may abound in every good work.

It is he who does it. And so you and I can rest knowing that whatever plans we might have ultimately God's going to cause his purpose to prevail.

If we believe God is good if we believe God is wise then we know that he knows what is best for us and how we might be transformed into the image of Christ so we can leave it with him in other words.

Next we should live humbly before one another realizing that it is God who is the real power broker and not any of us.

[37 : 14] That's what this is all about. That's what James is telling us. James is saying you need to walk humbly. You need to know your place. Then he is telling us that we should plan after praying to God.

James doesn't say this very specifically. But if you can imagine if you plumb the depths of these words what if the Lord wills if the Lord wills shapes our hearts those words shape our hearts and tells us the disposition that we should have.

It's one thing to plan and ask for God's blessings but it's another to ask for God's blessings and then proceed to plan. As we conclude today in verse 17 of this section chapter 4 James says so whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it for him it is sin.

Whoever knows the right thing to do and doesn't do it for him it is sin. So James is saying to us we've read the scripture we've heard the word and now we know the truth and now we as believers we know how we ought to plan and James is saying to us quite plainly that we ought to plan according to what he says here and if we don't do it for us it is sin so as we plan so then as we plan let us do so knowing that God is providentially in control that is not cause for fear or alarm shouldn't be but cause for joy because he loves us cause for joy because we know that his purposes will

prevail cause for joy extreme joy we can relax as it were we can have confidence none of us though none of us will follow this perfectly even having heard these words but the good news is that Christ died for our sins of arrogance and presumption he bore God's wrath for our arrogance and for our presumption what we are called to do we are called to do the best we can we are called to invite the help of the Holy Spirit in our lives we are called not to take these things for granted we are called to know our place and to know God's place and not to sit in his seat let us pray father we thank you for your word today lord we are encouraged by the reminder that you are sovereign in our lives is under your umbrella lord that you know not only today but tomorrow and every day that follows so lord we pray in the name of jesus that you would quiet our hearts as we think about tomorrow lord that we would not operate in fear lord that we would operate in hope and expectation lord we pray in the name of jesus that you would grant to each one grace grace to plan with you in mind grace oh lord to recognize our places grace lord to know that we are mere missed grace oh lord to accept that you are the one who sits on the throne you oh lord are the sovereign one in the name of jesus we pray and all god's people say all god's people say amen amen to you you to you to to you