

James 4:11-5:6

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 August 2011

Preachers: Adriaan Neele, Greg Hendrickson

[0:00] Well, we come to our time of teaching for the evening, and tonight we have the pleasure of having Dr. Adrian Neal come and give the sermon for us tonight. For those of you who haven't had a chance to meet Dr. Neal, he is a part of the Jonathan Edwards Center here at Yale, and he and his family have been a part of our family here at Trinity for a number of years.

So with that short introduction, let me welcome Adrian to the pulpit, and may the Lord prepare our hearts to receive his word tonight. Thank you, Nick.

Let us pray. Lord, give us to see tonight, for the first time or by renewal, the great privilege of having your word, directing our hearts and life to you, the living God through the word.

Our Lord Jesus Christ. Give this night, when we open your word, that the words of our mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. The scripture reading for tonight you can find in the epistle according to James.

[1:29] Chapter 4, the verses 11 to the end. James chapter 4, the verses 11 to the end of the chapter.

Brothers do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it.

When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one lawgiver and judge, the one who is able to save and destroy.

But you, who are you to judge your neighbor? Now listen, you who say today or tomorrow we will go to this and that city, spend a year there, carrying on business and make money.

Why you do not even know what will happen tomorrow? What is your life? You are a mist that appears for the little while and then vanishes.

[2:45] Instead, you ought to say, if it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that. As it is, you boast and brag.

All such boasting is evil. Anyone then who knows the good he ought to do and does not do it since.

What is your life?

The book of James, as we have seen so far in our sermon series, is a very practical book.

Practical for the Christian life. As it speaks about the trials and temptations, the testings in our lives.

[3:55] For example, chapter one, blessed is the one who remains steadfast under trial. For when one has stood the test, such one receives the crown of life.

The epistle speaks of faith and works. It speaks of wisdom that we need from above because we do not have such of ourselves.

The apostle has instructed, if anyone of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God who gives generously. The wisdom that is from above, he says in chapter three, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

And this epistle, as we have seen last week, speaks of meekness, humility.

As we heard last week, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourself before the Lord and he will exalt you.

[5 : 13] In summary, the instruction of this epistle is about the Christian life. It exhorts and encourages us to be Christ-like.

Imitate him. And the question therefore is for you and me, are we Christ-like in our life?

Daily life. Daily life. Daily life. Or, as the apostle James formulated, a question for his readers in the first century.

The central question that the Lord poses to all of us this night. What is your life?

Daily life. Daily life. Daily life. And yes, this goes a little deeper than how are you doing. Actually, it might be considered as a very deep philosophical question.

[6 : 18] But tonight, with the help of the Lord, we will reflect on this biblical question. What is your life? In its immediate context of the text, which is James 4, the verses 11 to 17.

And therefore, the theme for tonight is, what is your life? Three main thoughts. Our life in relation to fellow Christians.

You can find it in the verses 11 and 12. Our life in relation to ourselves. Our life in relation to ourselves. The verses 13, 14.

And I will also involve 16. And our life in relation to God. Verse 15. And we will conclude with an application as we find such in verse 17 of our text.

Thus, the theme is, what is our life? Three main thoughts. Our life in relation to fellow Christians, to ourselves, and to God.

[7 : 33] Verse 11. Brothers, do not slander against one another. Or speak not evil against one another.

Brothers, here the Apostles changes the tone of his writing. After addressing the designation of his epistle in the opening of the epistle to the twelve tribes in the dispersion.

After addressing them in the first section of the chapter. Chapter 4, verse 1 to 10. As you, which you find in the verses 1 to 3. Or adulterous people, verse 4.

Or your sinners, verse 8. Or double-minded people, verse 8. But now, brothers. Fellow Christians.

And yet, the Apostle gives immediately a comment. Do not slander one another. Do not speak disdainful. Do not speak evil.

[8 : 38] Do not speak ill of one another. In other words, a misuse of the tongue. Which the Apostle had addressed also in chapter 3.

A misuse of the tongue in the Christian community. Had not the Apostle instructed. Chapter 1, my beloved brothers.

Let every person be quick to hear. Slow to speak. Slow to anger. Chapter 2. If you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. You are doing well. And now, brothers. Do not speak ill of one another. Do not slander one another.

Such is this possible among Christians. In the church. In the congregation. And not only in the first century.

- [9 : 41] Did you hear? What he or see did? The Apostle realizes that Christians can speak at times.
- Talking poorly about other Christians. And it is immaterial whether such ill-speaking accusations or charges are true or false. When we slander or gossip.
- We are hurting three people, if not more. We are hurting ourself and our character. We hurt the ones we are slandering and gossiping about.
- And we hurt the ones we are gossiping to. Do. Slender, gossip, speaking ill. Is destructive to community harmony.
- When the Apostle comment here. Do not slander one another. That is first because we are brothers, sisters.
- [10 : 48] Since they are fellow Christians. We should not denigrate or defame others. We must not take pleasure in speaking of the faults of others.
- Exposing things whether in secret or not. Or making more known of their faults than they really deserve. Consider. You are brothers, sisters.
- There is not the Apostle reminders. Love. Cover a multitude of sins. Cover. Do not broadcast sins.
- And secondly, when we slander, such is against God's law. As James continues in verse 11. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother.
- Speaks evil against the law and judges the law. Now the Apostle does not justify his command by citing to other biblical instructions.
- [11 : 56] Though they resonate well with verse 11. As Moses, for example, instructs in Leviticus 19. You shall not go around as a slenderer among your people. Or as Christ himself instructs in Matthew 7.
- Do not judge or you too will be judged. But the Apostle explains, the Apostle James explains this by reason his comment. He says, and I paraphrase, do not slander or judge one another.
- Because when you do that, you speak implicitly ill of the law and judges the law. You lack respect of the law. You set yourself outside the law.
- Master of your own destiny. Responsible to no one but yourself. In summary, you transgress over steps God's law.
- And in particular, in respect to the second great commandment, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. And therefore, brothers, do not slander one another.
- [13 : 04] Because when you do such, the Apostle says you are not a doer of the law, but a judge.
- Not a doer of the law. Of which the Apostle have spoken in the first chapter. Be doers of the word, of the Torah, the law. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in the mirror.
- But when one who looks into the perfect law and is a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. And thirdly, this command of the Apostle, do not slander one another.
- When we slander, it is not only because it is against fellow Christians, against the law, but it is against God himself as lawgiver.
- Verse 12, there is only one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. Remember, the final verdict.
- [14 : 13] Judgment belongs only to God. He alone was given his law and instructions whereby we live by.
- And he alone will wisely and righteously judge us in his sovereignty. Did not the Apostle instruct and assert it. You believe that there is one God?

Well, he gave his law. And he alone enforces his commandments. There is not the Psalmist saying in 75, no one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man.

But it is God who judges. He brings one down and he exalts another. And therefore, the Apostle closes verse 12.

But who are you to judge your neighbor? There is also the Apostle Paul says in Romans 14, who are you to judge someone else? If God gives us his law and he is the sole judge, how dare we to set ourselves up as a judge over others?

[15 : 27] Slander, which is against God himself, is against God's law. And that to a brother or sister?

Maybe we can read also this command of the Apostle as a pastoral pleading. Brothers, sisters, do not slender, gossip, speak ill of one another.

What is your life? What is your and my life in relation to fellow Christians, to others around us?

Is there one of us tonight here without fault, failure and disrespect, of slender or gossip?

Without shortcoming and sin? Are we Christ-like? Christ who instructs in Matthew 7, for with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged, and with the measure you use it, will be measured to you?

[16 : 48] If he being gossiped of or spoken ill of, do we imitate him? As he was oppressed and afflicted, slandered and gossiped, yet Christ did not open his mouth?

And therefore, let us take to heart what the Lord instructs us by the Apostle Peter, saying, Rid yourself of slender of every kind, so that you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

In the second place, what is our life in relation to ourself? Verse 13, come now, you say, tomorrow, today or tomorrow, we will go into such and such town, and spend a year there, and trade and make a profit.

And the image that comes to mind here in those verses 13 and 14, particularly in the context of the first century, are possibly traders, business people, who plan and go to places and make profits, do business in such and such town, and travel maybe by boat on the Mediterranean Sea, and who see sometimes, and who see sometimes, and who see sometimes at the Long Island Sound, in the early morning, there is a mist on the water.

But suddenly, it can disappear, fade away, vanishes away, evaporates. Well, says the Apostle, you, who say, we are going to do this, and we are going to do that, and today this, and tomorrow that, and actually, we will spend a year there, reminds the Apostle.

[18 : 45] You, who do not know what tomorrow will bring, you, with your boasting arrogance, what is your life?

For you are a mist that appears for the little time, and then vanishes. Let us be honest tonight to ourselves.

What is your life? What is my life? Come now, writes the Apostle, using a Greek expression code to now, which is, pay attention, listen, what is your life?

Now, you may ask yourself, but may I not do business, and make a profit, and for that, plan and travel, and spend time in another place? Is there something wrong to plan ahead?

Related to the text, related to the text, business people plan ahead, travel plans, market projections, timeframes, profit forecast, is business stuff in all ages.

[19:57] Every business person would plan along the same way, being pagan, or Jew, or Christian. But this is exactly the problem the Apostle has with these plans of those of his leaders, of his Apostle.

You will say today or tomorrow, we will go into such and such a town, and spend a year there, and make trade, and make a profit. There seems absolutely nothing about their plans.

Travel and making money, that is any different from the rest of the world. One commentator says, their worship may be exemplary, their personal morality impeccable, but when it comes to business and planning, they think entirely on a worldly plane.

Those business people may say, to go to Antioch, Alexandria, Damascus, the great business centers in the time of the Apostle James. But how certain can they be to arrive there, let alone to spend a year there?

Many have started the trip, but never reached their final destination. And those who arrived at the place, and they become sick, have spent less than a year, or more than a year.

[21:21] Congregation, what is in the deepest sense the real problem the Apostle has with such boasting of, we are going to do this, and we are going to do that, and today this, and tomorrow that?

First, first the deep realization, what is my life?

And pause for a moment this evening. And maybe you have come to church with plans for the future, your study that you will begin, or continue in the upcoming semester, or your work, maybe you received a promotion, or new work, or you are excited and the planning for the next phase in life, or the plans for this week, tomorrow this, Tuesday that, and oh, Friday.

Then I have to go there. But pause. What is your and my life? The Lord reminds us tonight, you and I are a mist.

Like on the waters of the Long Island Sound. A mist that appears for a little time. And then vanishes. Job says, my life is but a breath.

[22:48] Psalmist in 39 writes, you have made my days a mere hand breath. The span of my years is as nothing before you.

Psalm 78. Our life is a passing breath that does not return. Psalm 110 to the Psalmist says, for my days vanish like smoke.

One more Psalm 103. As for man, his days are like grass. He flourishes like a flower of the field.

The wind blows over it. And it is gone. And its place remembers it no more. Congregation this time has brought forth through the ages many, many important and famous people in their times.

Whose names mostly we have forgotten today. What is your and what is my life?

[23:56] A mist. A hand breath. A breath. Is this not a too pessimistic view of life?

Do we not read in scripture positively? Enjoy life? There is a time to plant and to build and to laugh and to embrace and to love.

Even a command of the Lord with a promise. Honor your father and your mother so that you may live long and that it may go well with you.

So the Lord gives us in his grace. But here, the Apostle scripture gives us a realistic and ultimate view of life.

Our life. With all its busyness and boasting. With all its God given pleasures and positives. Our life is but a mist. Our life is but a mist.

[25 : 04] That appears for a little time. And then vanishes. And yet, by grace I hope you may say, a God given realization.

As wisdom says in scripture, then I realize that it is good and proper for us to eat and to drink and to find satisfaction in our toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given us.

And that you have a God given rest. To know, by experience, my times, my life are in your hands, O Lord.

Christ-like. Christ-like. So that when the time, our time comes, that you may say, Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit, my life.

What is your life? And that's the first problem. And that's the first problem. And that's the first problem. And that's the first problem. The apostle points out to those who boast in their arrogance.

[26 : 29] Today or tomorrow, we will go into such and such a town and spend the year there and take and make a profit. But there is also a second problem that the apostle points to and exhort us, which is our third main thought, our life in relation to God.

Verse 15, instead, you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.

Instead of resting in false security of worldly thinking, instead of ignoring the brevity of life, the apostle direct us to depend on the Lord.

And for example, the apostle Paul, we carried the description. When he traveled and departed from Ephesus, he says, I will return to you if God wills.

Or when he came to Rome. By God's will, I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

[27 : 40] The apostle, he recognizes his fineness and divine sovereignty. And so should we. And congregation, so, such does not rule out planning.

The, we will do this or that, is not a planning by adding God willing. Rather, it is to plan with God. Each plan, each of our plans is laid before the Lord in prayer, in preparation.

Time spent with God, listening and seeking his direction through his words and through his providence. Such must be the disposition of our life.

A life directed to God. Yes. Also for your study, this coming year. Or for your work, what is ahead. Or for the things of this new week.

Independence. If it is the Lord's will. That is the first condition. And the second, if we live. We do this or that. Because we realize the brevity of our life.

[28 : 53] That our life is in God's hands. The Greeks in the time of the apostle James were probably used to say, in any plan they made, with approval and blessing of God.

Does the apostle then ask too much of his readers, his fellow Christians, brothers, is the Lord asking us too much tonight?

Whatever you plan and planning to do, do such independence of the Lord, in accordance to his will.

That is in part not against his law, his revealed will. And in accordance to his ways, discern to prayer and providence. What is our life before God?

Is it still a realization? Not only of the brevity of our life, that venescens away, is a mist.

[30 : 03] But also is our life and all what we do and plan dependent on God. Do you and I need him for all things alive?

Not God is best, but we keep him for less. But integral, by grace, intertwined in our life. In the morning, during the day, in the evening, Lord, what will you have me to do?

Because there are sometimes cares and concerns in our life, which are caused by ourself, by not consulting with the Lord and not having taken the time in prayer and discernment.

Let's be honest tonight. And yet, the Lord promises in his word, also for those situations, cast all your cares upon him, for he cares for you.

And there is one who most perfectly lift this instruction, if the Lord wills, even in his deepest suffering and adversity of his life.

[31 : 20] As we see Christ in his deep humiliation in the garden of Gethsemane, prays for his Father's will, doing his Father's will. Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me, yet not my will, but yours be done.

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

Verse 17. The apostle round off his thought, and on the surface, it may simply rebuke the sins of omission. A person who knows that he or she should do something, but neglect to do it.

Such person has not only missed an opportunity for obedience by God-given grace, but has sinned, said the apostle. But in the context of these closing words, the apostle also may exhort his readers in the dispersion, and us tonight, if these brothers take God into account in speaking of one another, they may do the right thing.

Do not slander. Do not slander. If these business people take God into account in their planning and doing business, they may have done the right thing and practice what the apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians.

[33 : 01] You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion. If you and I take in account in all that we do, depend on him by his grace, whatever we do, work it with all your heart as working for the Lord, well-pleasing to him, not for men.

Not for men. What is our life? Can you say by grace, my life?

Yes, with all its shortcomings and sin, in speaking about others, in all my planning and plans, in my life before God, yet my life is hidden with Christ in God.

He is my life. John Wesley says of this, Christ is the fountain of life in my inmost soul, from which all my tempers, words and actions flow.

And in this way, your life, hidden with Christ in God, your life by grace will attest of speaking well of others.

[34 : 40] Your life will acknowledge the Lord in all your ways and he will make your path straight. Your life will be more Christ-like and God-glorifying.

Let us pray. Lord, apply your word to our hearts and life for this new week.

Realizing the brevity of our life, that we may practice our dependency on you and you alone.

And speaking well and doing well for those around us through the work of your Holy Spirit.
Amen.