

The Complete Christian is Not Presumptuous

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Date: 23 June 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Turn with me, please, to the book of James, James chapter 4. Thank you very much indeed, Paul, for leading our worship this morning to the musicians, to the singers, to the techie guys. We really appreciate them in these days. Certainly, next week, I understand there's no visuals. We'll be singing from books, so brace yourself for that next week. That'll be good. But we're looking at James chapter 4 this morning. And we're coming to the end of chapter 4. Next week, we'll look at chapter 5. A few weeks' time, we'll be finished this series. And this evening, we will finish the series on the life of Jacob. That'll come to a close this evening, and we'll do a new series probably in August when that comes.

But let's just come before God. Let's ask for His help as we come to His Word now. Our loving Father, we just still ourselves in Your presence this morning. Lord, we thank You for all that's gone before to this point, Lord. It's been our joy and our privilege, Lord, and an honor to know that we know You, and we know Your Son, and we know, Lord, Your great plan of salvation made real to us in Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit working in us. We thank You that we have a great God and a great Savior and a great gospel. But Father, we do rejoice as well, Lord, that we are saved, Lord. We are justified.

We are redeemed. We have been reconciled. And we praise and thank You for that. But Lord, we know even while we remain on this earth, Lord, that there is still a work to be done in us, Lord. There is a change that constantly takes place, Lord, where You mold us and You shape us. You sanctify us, Lord, to be like Your Son. And Lord, some of us, Lord, are further down that road than others. Some of us, Lord, perhaps every one of us, Lord, would wish we were further down that road. We were better, Lord, in many ways. But Father, as we come to Your Word now, we pray, Lord, that Your Word would come to us as a challenge. And at the same time, the Holy Spirit would take these things to us and apply them to our life. So, Father, speak to us now, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So, let's read from James chapter 4. We are up at verse 13, about boasting about tomorrow. It's a very real aspect of the Christian life. And James is dealing with real things throughout his letter. Now, James, the head of the church in Jerusalem, the half-brother of Jesus, writes, and he says this to the church that's scattered.

Now, listen, you who say, today or tomorrow, we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business, and make money. Why? You do not even know what will happen tomorrow.

What is your life? You're a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 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 in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. If anyone then knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them. We'll end our reading there.

[3 : 2 3] I remember as a young Christian, I think within the first year of becoming a Christian, I went to Filey. Do you remember Filey? I don't think you get Filey now. A Christian camp where you, I think it was Butlins, if I remember rightly, and my mother took us there. She'd been a Christian for a number of years, and we were dragged on the bus singing, give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning.

And my mother led that. I remember dying a thousand deaths. My mother walked up and down the middle of the bus, got everybody singing. But I remember when I was there, I discovered something I'd never seen before, and these images show it. Holy haberdashery, as I call it. Verses on mugs and pens and so forth, and a man of God pen. That's just a thing you need. So, I'd never seen anything like this before.

And then you get tea shops as well. Various things like this. Catch up with Jesus. Jesus. And I never bought them. And I'm not slagging them off, because I know folk in the church wear these things. I think I was left mentally scarred, because at the time, I bought myself a pair of rainbow braces. That was, I was, I fell into that trap. And my mother said, what on earth do you want with them? I wouldn't wear them nowadays. If I'd worn them through the center of Edinburgh yesterday, I'd have been communicating something very, very different from what it meant at that time.

And it's great. T-shirts, things like that are good. They communicate something. They make people think, which is quite good. There was one T-shirt that I did like, and I remember, and it was this one here, under new management as a Christian. Because I was acutely aware of that when I became a Christian, that not only was I saved, that Jesus was not just my Savior, that He was now my Lord.

And up to that point, I'd made all the decisions by myself, and I just worked it out. I'm going to do this. I'm going to do that. But when you become a Christian, Jesus becomes Lord of your life. And He is in control. He is sovereign. And really, that's what we're looking at this morning in this passage before us. And we're coming to the end over the next few weeks of studies in the book of James, and He's dealing with Christian maturity, what it means to be a mature Christian, that we might be complete, mature, lacking nothing. The reason for this, I make no apology if I keep saying this every single time, because He chose to give us new life. He chose to give us birth through the Word of Truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created. We are different. God has not just done a work for us, He's done a work in us. And this molds us and shapes us to be the people that God wants us to be. And James, as the head of the church in Jerusalem, he mentions many basic things in the

[6 : 26] Christian life all the way through this. And we've looked at many big things. The mature Christian understands trials right at the very beginning. God is at work in us to perfect us, to mold us. We don't kick against these things. We know God's doing this. We know we need wisdom. We seek wisdom.

We understand riches and poverty, that this world's riches are not what it's all about, that we build treasure in heaven. We understand temptation, that we are led away by our own sinful desires. We listen to God's Word, and we seek to obey God's Word. We love God's Word.

We are truly religious if we're mature. We care for the poor and for the vulnerable, as the Lord does. We have a faith that works, that shows itself in action. And we control our tongue, or we should do.

And we are peace-loving, and we submit to God. Last time we looked at the danger, or the such unpleasant thing as slander, speaking ill of someone to promote ourself. And it seems we've been in the tongue for quite some time. I was on the bypass a couple of weeks ago, and I usually listen to Jazz FM.

That's my radio of choice. And there was a song I'd never heard by a guy called Moe's Allison. Have anybody heard of that guy? He's an old guy. He's probably dead long ago now. And he sang a song.

[7 : 57] I laughed all the way around the bypass. And it basically sums up the past six weeks teaching, I think. The song is called Your Mind is on Vacation. Your Mind is on Vacation, and the refrain says, Your Mind is on Vacation, and Your Mouth is Working Overtime. And it just made me laugh.

Your mind is on vacation. It's on holiday, but your mouth is working overtime. And basically, if James was writing a song, that's the words he would put over the past few weeks. Engage your mind.

Think about what you're saying. Put your mouth on vacation. Give it a rest, and use your mind. And I thought, wow, that's a great song for summing up the book of James.

But now James, in this part that we read this morning, is moving away from social relationships, and a relationship with one another. And he's doing something very important. He's looking at a religious relationship with God. So, it's no longer now how we relate to each other. It's how we walk with God, and especially how we plan our life, how we plan, how we make decisions. And that's what he's dealing with here. And in this wee passage, he speaks to the business community within the church.

Now, why is he speaking to them about, you business folk, you're going to do this, that, and the other? Because business people are usually high achievers. They've planned their life out. They know where they're going to go, what they're going to do. And the temptation for them is, I can do this, so that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to—I'm used to planning, so I will plan. And I'll have it all sorted out. And it's to them, but to anybody, really. And we all plan our own life.

[9 : 48] And he's speaking about presumption, where we presume certain things that we are going to do. He touches on various things here. He touches on the length of life that today, tomorrow, next year, he mentions. So, he's speaking to folk who think that we have control of the length of our days. We think of today, we think of tomorrow, we're even planning for next year. He's also touching on this whole area of choice, whether in this city or that city. We just need to choose where we will go. We have the length of days that we think we have, and we have choice. Thirdly, ability, that we will carry on business, and we will make money. We have the ability to do this. So, these are three main areas that really James is looking at—the length of life, the choice of life, and the ability to carry things out. And we forget that the Lord is sovereign over all things.

And really, when we do this, James calls this arrogance. We call it planning. But James says, when you plan without God, it is arrogance. Verse 6, as it is, you boast, and in your arrogant schemes, all such boasting is evil. He's not saying planning is wrong. He's not saying making money is wrong.

It's this whole area of presumption. It could be that you plan the size of your family, where you will live, the type of job you will have, your health, your bodily things, or whatever, and you think that you can do all this. And it is that presumption. There's nothing wrong to look at these areas to want to improve yourself. The problem lies in our presumption that the solution lies in our hands. And that's why he's speaking to us where we—if we think we can achieve, we can do, we can do all this ourself, where we live, the career that we will choose, and so forth, what school we will go to. I remember when I first came to Edinburgh, I didn't realize schools were such an important thing in Edinburgh, that whatever school you go to is quite significant. You have a CV, and if your boss sees, oh, you went to that school, there's the job. You can just have this, because you went to—Glasgow's not like that. But Edinburgh, I think, is quite like that. We plan, we organize, and that can very much be wrong. So let's look at certain things in this passage. I want to go through them fairly quickly. James is dealing with our everyday aspect of life. He's dealing with the basics of life in this whole letter, and this is a big area of your life and my life. You will be planning this week. You will be planning next month, maybe next year. Are these things wrong? How are we to regulate our thinking? So first of all, James tells us, or reminds us, that we are servants.

We are servants. If you're a Christian, you are under new management, and that is a big thing. It's a great thing to affirm every day when you wake up, I'm saved. Jesus is my Savior, but He is also my Lord.

He is Lord of my life. We are under new management. We have been made alive. And the mature Christian knows that daily, we have to place our life under the Lordship of Jesus. And before we were Christians, you made your own decisions. You remember this. I remember it as clear as day. What I was going to do, I was going to marry a girl that looked like this. I was maybe going to live here. I was going to get a job. I would stay there for a few years doing electronics, and then I would do this. And the world has to do that. They have no one over them. They have no management over them. They are their own boss.

[13 : 47] And this is how we used to live. Whereas the Lord Jesus Himself, you remember, He even said, my food, my basic daily thing, Jesus says, is to do the will of Him who sent me. He recognized the Father had a will for Him, and His daily food was to do that will. It wasn't to do His own thing.

I have come down from heaven, Jesus says in John 6, 38, not to do my will, but to do the will of Him who sent me. Paul says the same thing. We are to seek the will of God in every area of our life.

1 Corinthians 6, 19. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own. You were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies. He owns us. He owns our bodies. He owns our life.

And you know the well-known passage in Romans 12, 1 and 2, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is your true and proper worship. Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may be able to test and approve what God's will is, His good, pleasing, and perfect will. So, Paul is saying in these two passages, we need to know the will of God. We are not our own boss. God owns us. Therefore, we submit to the sovereignty of God, the Lordship of Christ, the leading of the Holy Spirit. He owns us, and we have to have a new mind. And the new Christian knows this. He knows that the Lord has to lead and to guide.

And you know this with a mature Christian, don't you? You know that, well, I'm thinking of this, but really it's what the Lord wants. They're not just adding DV to the end of everything. Deo valente, God willing. It's a heart thing. I'm planning this, but ultimately I surrender to God. And if God cuts across me and decides to do something else, His will be done. And the mature Christian knows this.

[16 : 10] We don't always get that right, and we can get frustrated, but we remember that we are servants, and that's a good thing to remind ourselves of. When we forget this, that is when we get into all sorts of trouble. Lord, you should be serving me. You should be doing what I want. But we come and we bow our knee before Him. We are servants. The other reason that James wants us to be mature in is because we are ignorant. Not only are we servants, we are ignorant. Look at verse 14. Why, you don't even know what will happen tomorrow. The emphasis in this wee phrase is the word you. It is speaking of you people, you as a creature. So, it's why you don't even know what tomorrow will bring. In other words, you are clueless. You don't really know what will happen tomorrow. So, the emphasis in verse 14 is on our human limitations. We really don't know. There is much we do not know. There is much we cannot do. And this is the problem, isn't it? We don't know what tomorrow will bring. And this is what we need to—James wants to remind us of. Not only are we servants, but there's the unpredictability of life. We don't know what tomorrow will bring, what will happen. And that fact alone should be enough for us to say, Lord, I surrender my times into your hands, because I really do not know what's going to happen tomorrow. The words of Proverbs, Proverbs 27 verse 1 says this, Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring. It couldn't be clearer. The Lord, on the other hand, knows the end from the beginning. He is the omniscient God. He knows all things. Psalm 147,

Great is our Lord and mighty in power. His understanding has no limit. The book of Job, you remember, when he says, I go to the left and to the right, the north and the south, I can't find you. But you know the way that I take, and when you have finished with me, I will come forth as gold. And God, when he challenges him in the latter part of Job, says, Where were you when I formed the earth? Do you know? Can you do? And God reminds him of his smallness, and he's limited, whereas God knows all things. And therefore, if we serve a father who isn't ignorant, who knows, it makes sense, doesn't it, to submit to him. Lord, you know, and we submit to him.

Not only that, the doctrine of not only the omniscience of God, but the eternity of God. I love that. We exist in time and space. You are here this morning on June the 23rd, is it?

Good. Thank you. The 23rd, we exist here at half past 11 in this place. This is where we are. God is in the past, in the present, and in the future. He's not limited to time and space.

He's already in your tomorrow. He's already in your next year. He is the God who can lead you. It's great whenever you meet somebody who's been around a course before you. They can lead you.

[19 : 41] They are the best person to lead you. Not only because they know you and they know your situation. He already knows tomorrow. He already knows your strength, your weaknesses. And we simply place our hand in his hand, and we ask him to lead us into our tomorrows, into our next years. He is the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. He is all these things.

And he knows what will happen tomorrow. Why? Because he's in our tomorrow. He's already there. He already knows. And yet in all this, he has a plan for us. Look at verse 15. Instead, we ought to say, if it's the Lord's will that God has a will for you. Jeremiah 29 was one of the verses that kept me seeking for God. I know the plans for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you, not to harm you, to give you a hope and a future. That kept me seeking even long before I became a Christian. I wanted a God who knew me and who could look after me and lead and guide and care and have a purpose and a hope for me. And then when you become a Christian, you realize the hope you have, the purpose you have, and it is to glorify him. It really is very, very special. There's that old hymn as I was preparing this this week that wrote, my times are in your hand. You know that one?

My times are in your hand. My God, I wish them there. My life, my friends, my soul I leave entirely to your care. Verse 2, my times are in your hand, whatever they may be, pleasing or painful, dark or bright, dark or bright, as you know best for me. My times are in your hand. Why should I doubt or fear? My Father's hand will never cause his child a careless tear or a needless tear.

It's a big thing to be able to say that. Only the mature Christian can turn around and really say, Lord, my times are in your hand, whatever they may be. So, we are ignorant and we place ourself in his hands. Thirdly, James reminds us that we are frail. We are frail. What is your life? You're a mist that appears for a little while, then vanishes. If the Bible was, and the Bible goes to great lengths to convince us how frail we are. There's nothing frailer than a mist. A mist coming out the kettle, poof, gone. You can't grab it. You can't touch. You can't do anything with it. And the Bible goes out its way to, and James here is really, you're a mist. We think we're substantial. We think we really are something, and we are not. It appears for a little while, then vanishes. James has already mentioned this in chapter 1. Remember when he called us like a wild flower, like a wild flower that comes up and passes away. The sun comes up, and we fade away. The Bible mentions this often.

We're a mist. We're a shadow. Ecclesiastes 6. For who knows what is good for a person in life? During the few and meaningless days, they pass through like a shadow. Psalm 90. Our days may come to 70 or 80. If our strength endures, yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow. They pass quickly, and we fly away. Jacob said this, doesn't he, about his life? My life has been trouble, difficult, few, and so forth. Jesus also told a parable to teachers about ignorance and about frailty.

[23 : 33] Remember the man, a certain rich man, yielded an abundant harvest. What will I do? I know what I'll do. I'll tear down my barrens and build bigger ones. Then I will have store. I'll have surplus grain.

I'll say to myself, you have plenty of grain laid up for many years. In his mind, he's thinking, I have many years. Look at what I've done. I have done this. Take it easy. Eat, drink, and be merry.

But God said to him, you fool. This very night, your life will be demanded of you. It really is very sobering, isn't it? The confident farmer speaking of many years. You don't even get tomorrow. You get today. God said, God is in control. He says your life is demanded of you. James goes out of his way to remind us that it's a mist. It's transient. It's here for a little while, and then it vanishes.

And our times are in his hand. Our very life is in his hands. And God decides how best to use this for his glory. And as we submit to him, he is able to glorify and to bless us and to use us for his glory and for our good. Fourthly, James reminds us that we are dependent. We are dependent upon him. This is probably his main point in this whole teaching. He says in verse 15, this is what you should say, if it's the Lord's will, we will do, we will live, and we will do this or that. In other words, we need to acknowledge the Lord's sovereignty over us. It's not enough to acknowledge that we are weak and frail. That's not a religious truth. That's just a fact. You can ask anybody in this estate this morning, would you acknowledge you are weak and frail? They go, yes, that's not necessarily religious, but this truth is. Instead, we should say, if it's the Lord's will, we will do this and that.

We are bound to fail. And without the Lord, we are dependent upon him for life and for breath and for everything. As I said, the non-Christian leaves out God in their planning. They will do this. Next year, they will plan that. They will get a pension, and it will all work out. The Bible calls that the pride of life. I will do this. I'm in control of my life. It's down to me. And that's why James calls it evil. It's a serious word, isn't it? You boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil.

[26 : 19] When we stop short of our dependence upon God, watch me, Lord, I can do this. This is evil. When we flaunt our independence, our self-sufficiency, instead, we who boast are to boast only in the Lord. And we need to recognize, isn't it, our limitations. We need to recognize that we need the Lord to work. And we need to see here as well that we need to trust in the Lord.

We're already rich. That's the most amazing thing. We don't need to strive after riches. James tells us, he's already mentioned this in verse 1, chapter 1, verse 9, believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. So, why running around trying to make a name for yourself? You're already a son of God. Ephesians 1, 7, in him, in Jesus, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace. We're already rich. 1 Peter 2, you're a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession. We've already been raised up with Christ, seated with him in the heavenly places. Your mansion, your glory is already there. And therefore, we should not run ahead of him. So, we are dependent upon God. We should be saying,

Lord, if it's your will, I should do this. It's a heart thing. It's not, as it says, DV, sticking that on. I used to use that all the time. And I knew after a while it was becoming a bit meaningless. I'm doing this, DV, as if, well, I'm doing this. Basically, I was saying, I'm doing this, stop me, Lord, whatever that is in Latin. I'm just going. I better put that in and so forth.

Nothing wrong in it. And I use that every now and again, *dio valente*, if it's the Lord's will. But it's not a magic charm. It's not a lucky thing. We're not just using the words. It's very much a heart condition. Lord, I'm planning this. But make recognize, Lord, if you choose to do something different, my times are in your hands. Lord, I'll leave them there. Lead and guide. That's a daily thing. You don't just get it in the big things. It's a daily thing. And when it becomes part of our daily life, then when the big things come, when something devastating comes our way, and our life takes a different course, it's a bit easier to submit to the Lord and whatever His will for us. It's not easy in this life. This is a big thing that James is dealing with here.

We will all encounter this at some point. Maybe you're there, the big things. But make the small decisions, His decisions. Walk humbly with Him. Lastly, or before we end this, oh, fifthly, and this is so close, we're under obligation. Verse 17 is quite a challenging verse. If anyone then knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it for them, it is sin. In other words, James is saying, because you know this, and because you know this is the way to go, and the Lord's doing a particular thing, if you fight against Him, or you do something different from the will of God, that's personal sin for you. That is your personal sin. The Lord has shown you, and you have gone somewhere else. And it is very serious, because the sins of omission and commission are the same, things that we should do, things that we shouldn't do. And when the Lord says, yeah, you might not be doing these things, but you should be doing that, sin of commission, and you need to be taking these things on. Luke 12, the servant, Jesus says, who knows the master's will and does not get ready and does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. In other words, we are accountable for what we know. And this is what James says. It's quite a serious thing that he mentions here right at the very—I don't know about James. James just grabs you by the lapels, and you think you're going to get an easy time of it. It just gives you a shake, doesn't it? You just think, wow, this is a basic thing in life, whether it's trust or wisdom or money or relationships, the basic things of life.

[30 : 51] He's a good pastor, and he's very blunt in the way in which he speaks. And in this whole area, we really need the Lord's help, because we're servants. We do not know. We are frail. We are dependent upon him to lead us and to guide us, and we're under obligation to follow wherever he leads and guides. So, just before we finish, three questions very quickly. How can we know God's will?

We've talked about how do we know this on Monday morning? We pray. We communicate with God. God communicates with us. We pray. We have God's Word. We have the Holy Spirit to lead us and to guide us.

We also have good Christian counsel from others to lead us and to guide us as well. And we have divinely appointed circumstances where God is working in our life at a specific time in a specific way.

And in these things, we can see the hand of God. We can see the will of God. How can we have the right mindset? We walk daily with him through word and prayer. We seek first the kingdom of God.

That's how we know we're thinking right. We humbly submit to his will and his dealings with us. It's a daily walk. We trust in him. We wait upon him. We look to him to lead and guide. We allow him to lead us and to guide us. What happens if we take a wrong turn? God often does this. The Bible isn't a GPS.

[32 : 23] It's a compass. It points us roughly in the right direction. And in that, there might be meandering here and there. But the Lord is able to lead and to guide. So, James here isn't banishing planning from our life. He's banning the attitude of presumption, of self-importance, of an arrogance that says, Lord, I'm doing this. But where we willingly put our lives in his control, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, not just on a Sunday, the other six days of the week. Lord, you lead.

You guide. My times are in your hand. You choose how you will work. So, let's remember that we're always under new management as servants. Ignorant. We do not know. He knows. We are frail. He is strong.

We are dependent upon him. And he wants to lead us and guide us. And we should follow him. Let's close by singing together our closing song. O great God of highest heaven. How many of you know this?

O great God. Right. Okay. It might be a solo quartet. Four of us. We'll give this a go. Let's stand and we'll sing this great song to the glory of God. Father, we've just been singing that we might live a life that's dependent upon your grace. We thank you, Father, for that grace which saved us. But we thank you for your sustaining grace. Lord, we will face many ups and downs in our life, many challenges and many difficulties. Lord, we will worry and we will become anxious and we will fret. When, Father, we pray that you would give us the grace that we need to submit to you and to trust in you and to know your help and your strength and your enabling.

Father, I pray that for each one of us. Lord, there are people in our church, Lord, going through a difficult and an uncertain time just now. Pray, Father, that they will very much know your grace and your leading and your provision and your care and your love towards them. So, Father, help us to walk humbly with you day by day, that we might not be our own worst enemy, but we might submit to your Lordship over every area of our lives. We know that is best. So, Father, we commend ourselves to you in Jesus' name. Amen.

[34 : 44] Amen. Thank you, folks.