

James: Faith Works Sin to Him it is!



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James 4:13-17

We are going to study James 4:13–17, but our reading this morning will continue through chapter 5, verse 6 because I believe these two thoughts go together. Next week we will come back and address verses 1-6, and this message is going to lay the foundation for what is going to be said next week for James 5:1–6.

Scripture

(4:13–17) ***"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."***

(5:1-6) ***"Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments***

are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you."

You may not remember this like I do, but on Sunday, May 31, 2020, because of the guidelines of our governor, we were not yet meeting together in person, but Kory and I and few on the worship team and tech team met here that morning. Most of you were watching online. We were preaching through a sermon series called 20/20 Vision in 2020, and in particular, on that Sunday we were in the middle of the part where we were talking about salvation. Kory brought the message and as I sat listening, he had opened up to 1 John and presented five personal tests that would reveal to us whether or not we were really saved because John was writing to believers and he wanted those who believed in the name of the Son, Jesus Christ, to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that they had eternal life. On that particular Sunday, I was getting use to the fact that it would just be a few of us on campus in person and the majority of us would be online. But here is what I knew: that was the first day of a brand-new week, and just like today, God was getting us ready for what he was getting us ready for!

You see, on that Sunday as worship ended and I was thinking about what God had in store for me for the rest of the week, I just knew with all of my heart that it was going to be God's will for us to finish planting the bean crop. We already had the tractors down at Elbow Creek. So when Monday came, Grant and I loaded up to go to LBL, but we needed something so we sent Dad to Murray and Dad went to Murray and got what he was supposed to get. I was planting the first field on Elbow Creek when Dad pulled into the field. He got out of his vehicle, got into the ton truck, and

pulled the seed tender in front of me, so I stopped the tractor and drill. He was already out of the truck, and as Dad always did, he wanted to help so he took the tops off the planter units. We had no idea it would be the last time he filled up a planter. As we filled the planter and I walked toward the ton to turn it around so Dad could take it to the next field, I saw Dad putting the tops on the planters. I had no idea it would be the last time he would do that. I remember getting into the truck, and though there was no reason for me to look into the side rearview mirror, I did. When I looked in the side rearview mirror, my dad was laying under my seed tender. I could see his white t-shirt. I had no idea. When I called 911 and I called my sister, and I called my wife, and I called my son, and I called Grant, I had no idea that within fifteen minutes my dad would be gone. See, you have to just forgive me this morning. I don't know how this passage fell to me again, but when it fell to me and I read that phrase, "yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring," I had no idea that on June 1st it would be the last time I would ever work with my dad. I had no idea that my dad would get his wish and he would literally die with his boots on, in the fields he loved at Land Between the Lakes.

James is writing to a group of believers and there are some behaviors that he is trying to correct because he knows these behaviors are founded on a false belief system. Even though most of them in the church, we assume, are in Christ, there was probably the possibility that some were not. James knew when he wrote to these people that this letter would be read to them. They would not have a personal copy like we do of the Bible, but there would be a public reader who would read the letter from James to the church who was gathered. When he asked them the question — who in the world do you think you are to judge your neighbor — he wanted to make sure they didn't miss what he was going to say next. James even says, "Come now..." In James's language of Greek he is saying, LISTEN... PAY ATTENTION... Get your head up, look at me! He pauses, just for a moment, to make sure everybody is listening, and then he identifies who he is talking to, "you who say." The tense that James uses here means there is a group of people within the church who continually are saying

this. James uses the present tense to denote this is their lifestyle. This is who they are, "Come now, you who are saying, *continually...*"

At the core of James's letter to these people, he believes that the words of your mouth reveal your heart. I hope you are listening to what people say; it reveals their heart. It reveals whether the religion that they say they have is useful or useless. It reveals whether they have saving faith or not. James knows that the words that come out of our mouth are revealing our heart, they are revealing our belief system, and they are revealing who we really are and what we believe. James identifies this group of people with a certain speech pattern because this speech pattern is revealing something about them and it reveals something about us. See if this sounds like you... *Today or tomorrow we are going to go to such and such place and we are going to stay there for a certain amount of time and we are going to do business there and we are going to make some money.* In the third chapter, James identified the teachers, and now he is identifying those people who are striving to make a living. Are you striving to make a living? But in particular, are you that person who gets to choose how you make a living and you get to choose how you conduct the business? In other words, James is signaling out those people in the church who are the merchants or businessmen. I think we know this, but I think we highly respect people who physically descend from Abraham, because there is just something in them that is really savvy when it comes to business. Do you agree? In the biblical world, because of the persecution that came on the early church, many Jewish merchants had to flee Jerusalem and Palestine and they got dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. When they went into the Roman Empire, because of this vast highway system that the Romans had, they quickly picked up on business. They could go to a town, stay there for about a year, open a business, and make money in that town. Then they could move to another town and make money there. So if I am trying to make a living, and particularly if I were running a business — I would pay attention. I would pay close attention. If I worked for somebody else and I am one of the people who make decisions that help my company make money, I would pay attention. Listen to what James is saying...How can you be a Christian and say what you are going

to do today, what you are going to do tomorrow, where you are going to go, how long you are going to stay, and what you are going to make when you do not even know what tomorrow will bring?

Then, James says this. Are you businessmen listening? Are you businesswomen listening? Everyone here who is striving to make a living, are you listening? James says your life is a mist; it appears for a little while and then it is gone. Some Greek scholars believe that what James has in mind is when you breathe out on a cool morning and you see your breath in front of you. Have any of you ever seen your breath on a cold morning? How long can you see it? It isn't very long before it's gone. Some Greek scholars believe that maybe James was talking about in the bottoms when the mist or fog set in and then you go about your business, and when you look back, it's gone. Others believe that this is the imagery of a fire and smoke that ascends from the fire. One minute you see the smoke, and the next thing you know the smoke is gone. But, here is what James says about your life — it appeared, it disappears. Whether we die at 1, 5, 10, 20, 40, 60, 80, or 100 years old, in light of eternity it is a vapor. And the life that you have? It's uncertain. So with all of these uncertainties of life, how can you say what you are going to do?

Now, before you start trying to decide where I am going with this, I want you to listen. I think, probably, for the first time in my life I have seen this in the context. James says those of us who are trying to make a living shouldn't be saying what we will do, only; what we ought to say is as the Lord wills. How many of you businessmen say that to your employees? How many of you businessmen say that to your partners? How many of you businessmen say that to your wife or children? How many of us who are trying to make a living actually say that..."I am making these plans and here is how I am going to earn a living, yet I recognize I am not sovereign over my life, but God is." Why does James tell us here is what we ought to say? It's because what each one of us as a Christian should be doing is not taking credit for what is happening in our life as if *we* are the sovereign in our life and what happens to us is based on our ability to make things happen. We should recognize our blessing comes from the sovereignty of

God. So before we dare speak about what we are doing or are going to do, we make sure we reflect credit to the one we believe is really doing it through us, and that is God. Not just the sovereign God of the universe who is HOLY, HOLY, HOLY — James doesn't say as God wills, but as the Lord wills, the personal God of the universe who is my personal Lord. While I am not in control of my life and I am not in control of what may happen to me, even this afternoon, I know who is.

James doesn't just say we ought to say as the Lord wills but he says we ought to say as the Lord wills, "we will live." Whoa...I wonder how radically different our lives would be if when we got up in the morning and we looked at our spouse and said, "If God gives us a full day today [here is] what I would like for us to do, rather than us just heading out." Can I be totally honest with you? I think most of us want our will to be done, and we want God to bless our will. That is a pretty neat deal for us...*Hey God, I will hang with you if you will bless what I want to do*, rather than wanting to hang with God for what He wants to do with you. Church, can I ask you a simple question? Do you really acknowledge that every day, every moment of life is a gift from God and it could be over tomorrow? Do you really believe what David believed when he penned that psalm? — *God, you knew me. You looked into my mother's womb and you saw my unformed substance; you saw me in that embryotic form. You saw me as a fetus! Yet, when you saw me in my mother's womb, you already saw, you already knew all the days that were written in your book for me.* Do you understand what that means? That means that God has a book and there is a chapter in it that has your life in it. One day, when the last page in that book turns, it is over. We are dead. We are gone, no more life here. Yet so many of us don't live in light of that; we live as if we are lord of our life.

James even says if we are going to be a Christian we don't just say as the Lord wills we will live, we even say as the Lord wills, we will "do this or that." We even believe He is into the details of our lives, so that as we make our plans, we make our plans in light of recognizing that this may not be God's plan for us, and if it is not, He will direct us in another way. I may be uncertain about how many days I have to live, and I may be

uncertain about what is going to happen tomorrow, but I can always be certain of this: God has a plan for my life. And then, here is what James says, "As it is, you boast..." Now, this is talking about you who say what you are going to do every day because you believe you are ultimately in control of your destiny. You have bought into the fact that you are different because you have a different work ethic, a different DNA, and you are different from other people because of *you*. He says, "...you boast in your arrogance." What he is saying here is every time you open your mouth and talk this way, you are revealing your arrogance; that you are into yourself. We are promoting self. Our confidence is in us. Our trust is in us.

Do you hear what James says next? He doesn't say that is wrong; he says that "is evil." This broke my heart to know that as a saint of God there have been times in my life that the words that have come out of my mouth are evil, a promotion of Ricky. Why is it evil? Because my life is not a reflection of Ricky, my life is a reflection of God. So for me to boast about me when what I do is because of the will of God, not my will, how dare I take credit for what somebody else has done...and that someone else is God! That is evil. The word used here for, "evil," is the same word that many times in the New Testament is used to describe the devil, Satan, the evil one. So when we do this, we aren't like him, the personification of evil — but we are doing an act that is on par with him, the devil. Jesus taught us not to want our will to be done, but God's will to be done on Earth as in Heaven, amen? He taught us to pray that we not enter into temptation, but to what? To be delivered from the evil one. And yet he influences us on a daily basis to be into ourselves and the living we can make for ourselves and our families instead of recognizing, and not just recognizing, but letting others know by saying if God wills. That is not a cliché you are supposed to say.

Can I be honest with you? There are times when I ask someone how they are doing and I really want to know how they are doing. I stop, I pause, I look at you, and I have time for you to answer. Then, there are other times when I walk into Walmart and I meet someone's eyes. And I don't know if

I really know them or not, but their eyes meet my eyes and I feel like I need to say how are you, but then I just keep on going into the store...A couple of weeks ago, early in the morning while I was running on the beach, I met some people also running that I had never met before. Because they were running and I was running, I said, "How are you," but I was looking at my watch because I was trying to beat my time from the previous morning. If they had stopped to tell me how they were doing, I would have been frustrated because it would have broken my rhythm of running on the beach. James is not telling you to develop a cliché and when you say something about yourself, you tack on "if God wills." He is talking about us living our lives with a perspective where we really believe, as a child of God He is the sovereign ruler of our life. He has a plan and a purpose for us and we recognize that when we make our plans, our plans may not be in accordance to what He is ultimately going to want to happen in our lives, because we can't see tomorrow and we don't know when our last day is. Ultimately, what we want people to see is what we really believe is happening in our life — and that is the revelation of God Himself.

James says in verse 17, "So (meaning based on what he has been saying) whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." Keep this in context. What is the context here? How are you living your life...are you living your life to bring glory to yourself, or are you living your life to bring glory to God? You now know what your mouth ought to be saying. You now know you should be wanting others to know who should get the credit for what you are doing — and that is not you that is God, if you are a believer. So whoever knows what is right and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Can I remind you of one of my favorite fictional characters? I do not know how many years ago it was, but I was a young teen and I went to the movies and a movie about space. I met a character and the way he talked just grabbed my attention, but he was a funny looking little fellow; his name was Yoda. I love Yoda. Can I tell you why I love Yoda? I love Yoda because he does not talk like us. Have you ever noticed that? In this English-speaking world in which we live, we have a word order of how we

talk. We always introduce the subject, then the verb, and then the object. It can be a direct object or an indirect object. Not Yoda. Yoda's word order was not subject, verb, and then object. His word order was always object, subject, and then verb. I will never forget this moment when Yoda says, "Powerful you have become." Do you ever wonder why Yoda talks that way? Yoda talks that way to emphasize the object of what you have done or what has been done to you. He does not just say you are powerful, but powerful you have become.

Because Greek does not have to flow like ours does, in an order, James puts the object first. Here is what James says, "To know to do right and fail to do it, sin for you it is." Whether we are in-person or online, whether we are a small business operator or we are just trying to make a living working for someone else, here is what we now know to be true... We are to let the words out of our mouth that communicate our heart, express what we are going to do in such a way that others know that we are not taking credit for our lives because we are not lord of our lives — we are going to speak in such a way that others know who really deserves glory in our life, and that is God, the sovereign Lord of our life.