

"If the Lord Wills . . ."

by Wayne Goff

The book of James is a wonderful book that has been dubbed "The Practical Gospel." It contains easily understood lessons and warnings about things people do everyday that are presumptuous or sinful.

In this article we want to focus on James 4:13-16 which says "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit;' whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.' But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil."

You and I might wonder what's the big deal about planning for the future. We all assume we will be around for quite some time. In fact, even Christians have been found to be hesitant to talk about death, funerals, and eternity. Some have told me that all such discussions are "morbid." But what the average human presumes is okay to do, God may not permit! Look again at verses 13-16, read them carefully, let the words sink in, and then ask yourself, "Am I following God's instructions in these words?"

The whole fourth chapter of James is written to people who live to make money, and some live to make money by ill-gotten means. They are selfish, self-centered, sinful, presumptuous, and covetous! James is warning them of the wrath of God to come if they do not cease and desist!

The problem with these materialistic people is that they have left God completely out of the picture! Christians should never be guilty of doing this while we rather expect it of the world. But everybody remembers God in their time of need or disaster! But if that is the only time they call on the Lord, then they will be sadly disappointed at the Lord's silence (see Prov. 1:21-33).

The truth of the matter is that nobody knows what tomorrow will bring (v. 14). But everybody thinks they know! Everybody thinks the bad stuff will always happen to somebody else. I have observed that mankind is very uncomfortable when presented with the uncertainty of life. We would much rather assume that all will be well. Anxiety and worry can be eliminated simply by turning to God and trusting in Him for today and tomorrow (v. 15; Matt. 5:25-26). If we will put the Kingdom of God and His righteousness first, then everything else will take care of itself (Matt. 6:33). But man is loathe to do that. I think it is the old attitude of "I don't need anybody's help. I can do it myself!" that keeps man from leaning on the Lord. We prefer to think of ourselves as sufficient, independent, and strong!

Secondly, James reminds us that life is a "vapor," v. 14 -- another thought we would rather not have! But life is very fragile, uncertain and temporary. We are here to prepare for eternity with God. This life is simply the testing grounds for tomorrow. The older we get, the more we realize the amazing truth that life is very brief. Prepare for eternity while you can.

Thirdly, James forbids us to boast arrogantly, v. 16. God hates the proud look, Prov. 6:17. The man who thinks himself to be something when he is nothing only fools himself, Gal. 6:3. God the Creator demands respect from man the created.

How hard is it to humbly place yourself in the hands of Almighty God? It will be well with your soul when you do.

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