

For What Is Your Life?

James 4:13-17

Intro:

One day a doctor called one of his patients into his office to deliver some very important news.

He said to his patient, "I have received the results of your tests and I have some bad news and some good news for you."

The patient was quiet for a moment, sensing the gravity of the situation he said, "Doc, give me the good news first."

The Doctor said, "You only have 24 hours to live!"

The patient shouted, "Oh my goodness, if that's the good news what could the bad news possibly be?"

The doctor replied, "I was supposed to tell you that news yesterday."

When historian H.G. Wells died in 1946, many newspapers quoted the last words he ever spoke.

Friends and nurses were scurrying around his bedside trying to be helpful, adjusting his pillows, pulling up his covers, administering sedatives and so on.

H.G. Wells turned to them and said, "Don't bother me! Can't you see I'm busy dying?"

It was the last flicker of humor that the comedian.

Let me tell you one more story before I begin my sermon:

The Pastor began his sermon in a shocking way.

He was preaching to students on "Student Recognition Day"

He began like this: "Young people, you may not think you are going to die, but you are.

One of these days, they'll take you to the cemetery, drop you in a hole, throw some dirt on your face, and go back to the church and eat potato salad."

What a way to open a sermon! Amen?

What was the pastor trying to do?

He was trying to make an unforgettable and inevitable fact across to the young people of the fact that someday every person will face death.

In this passage of Scripture that I have just read to you we find a very serious problem: I'm going to call it the Sin of Self-Sufficiency.

Self-sufficiency is a terrible sin in the eyes of God.

- Look at the uncertainty of our life
 - Mankind is frail
 - We are subject to all kinds of disease
 - We have accidents beyond our control
 - We have heart attacks
 - We develop cancer
 - Death could happen at the snap of a finger

- And yet in spite of our frailty and the uncertainty of our life, men and women still ignore God and lives without any thought of turning their lives to God.

- Most of us would be aware that Humanism has taken over the thinking of the majority of our land.

- Humanism boasts that man is ultimately in control of his own life and fate.

- And how far is this from the real truth.

This morning I want to preach to you a sermon that will address the Sin of Self-Sufficiency.

James said and I quote him from the KJV, "***For what is Your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away.***"

"...you are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away..."

"I close my eyes, only for a moment, and the moment's gone
All my dreams, pass before my eyes, a curiosity
Dust in the wind, all they are is dust in the wind.
Same old song, just a drop of water in an endless sea
All we do, crumbles to the ground, though we refuse to see – we're

Dust in the wind, all we are is dust in the wind

[Now] Don't hang on, nothing lasts forever but the earth and sky
It slips away, and all your money won't another minute buy.

Dust in the wind, all we are is dust in the wind
Dust in the wind, everything is dust in the wind."

The group that recorded those lyrics is named "Kansas".

Appropriate, don't you think?

If anyone knows about dust and wind it'd have to be someone from Kansas.

Would you agree with me that it's sort of a gloomy song; but they've hit the nail on the head with their main theme.

We close our eyes only for a moment, and the moment's gone.

And life is made up of moments, isn't it? One just passed. There goes another!

'Vapor' says James. A mist. Not time! But us!

"You and I are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

James is not the only scripture writer who declares this truth. Psalm 144:4 says,

"Man is like a mere breath; his days are like a passing shadow."

And in Psalm 39:5...

“Behold, You have made my days as hand-breadths. And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight, surely every man at his best is a mere breath.”

Very few of us live as if there is no tomorrow.

As a matter of fact, most of us in this room lives as if there will be many tomorrows.

But the real truth is – None of us are guaranteed of a tomorrow!

James emphasizes the truth that a life of faith as believers is one of daily dependence upon the Lord.

Our day-to-day planning must always be done with the awareness that our minutes, our hours, and our days are in the hands of the Lord.

I. Often we Plan our lives without God. Verse 13

“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.’”

A. There is nothing wrong with making plans.

The Bible tells us that it is a good thing to plan for the future.

It’s a wise man who looks ahead and plans.

We plan for such things like vacations
We plan for such things like trips
We plan for such things as retirement.
We plan for our homes
We plan for the right school for our children

We keep calendars of appointments.

One of the best things that has happened to me is my Blackberry that I carry with me all the time.

I was always loosing my calendar.

But my blackberry has a calendar that reminds me of my appointments, if I remember to put them in the Blackberry. Do you know what I mean?

You see - being a good steward of our lives necessitates the making of good plans.

Jesus told us to plan for the future *by laying up treasures in heaven that would not rust or decay.*

Matthew 6:19

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:”

So the Word of God is teaching us that we must be Good Stewards in the Spiritual sense.

God’s Word is teaching us the all importance of confronting the need

- The only investments that have eternal consequences will be what we give to God.
- What does that mean?
- We’re not necessarily talking about monetary gifts, but what we give of our own lives to God.

But too many people plan their lives without any thought or eye towards God.

The Scriptures give warning after warning of excluding God from our plans in life.

The Word of God warns about the neglect of spiritually giving ones life to God.

They just live aimlessly go on in life without a thought of planning spiritually.

Illustration:

A professor from Harvard University by the name of Lowell was speaking many years ago to a gathering on Columbus Day.

He said that there were three profound things about Christopher Columbus' discovery of America.

And, Oh, by the way, Zachery Bower told me he learned last week that it wasn't really Christopher Columbus who discovered America – it was the Vikings.

But Lowell said:

First, when Columbus left Spain he didn't know where he was going.

Second, when Columbus arrived in the New World he didn't know where he was.

Third, when he returned to Spain to report to Ferdinand he didn't know where he had been.

And he did this all on borrowed money.

And history has made Christopher Columbus a hero.

There are many successful people in our world today who are heroes in people eyes, but totally lost in the eyes of God.

B. God tells us that He has Plans for us.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Jeremiah 29:10-12

God tells us that He has a plan and a Purpose for every one of our lives.

Rick Warren says, “Today the average life span is 25,550 days. That’s how long you will live if you are typical. Don’t you think it would be a wise use of time to figure out what God wants you to do with what you have left of your life.?”

And the Best way to find God’s purpose for your life is to allow God’s Word to speak to you.

What a terrible waste of our life to come down to the end of life and realize we’ve regrettably missed it.

Listen friend, God has a future purpose for you and me.

And in that future God has a Hope for us.

And James does say that our attitude at all times must be: *“If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or do that.”*

Spiritual Application:

So I need to be clear here this morning.

What James is trying to say and I’m trying to say is not intended to minimize the need for planning and preparation for every day of our lives.

But instead to stress the overriding importance of living every day of our lives in complete dependence and surrender to the will of God.

You see – that is where the spiritual rubber meets the spiritual road so to speak.

The problem and the sin of mankind is they plan and they don’t consider God into their every day life.

And James is warning us that life is fragile and uncertain.

How can a man or a woman live their whole lives and never consider God as they plan their plans and walk their own paths?

The tragic answer to that Answer is self-sufficiency.

If you were to approach the average person in this area or any area of our nation today where less than 20% of people go to church on any given Sunday and ask them about their dependency on God, you would get a variety of answers.

The tragic response of many of them would be – “Why do I need God? - What do I need to go to church? - Why is all that religion stuff so important?”

Illustration:

In one of Arthur Miller's plays called, *The Price*, a middle-aged couple is reminiscing.

Life for them had turned out to be a great disappointment.

They thought they had it all mapped out.

They knew what they wanted to do, the schooling they needed.

Their goals seemed clear.

But they never realized their goals.

At a climactic moment of the play, the wife says to her husband,

"Everything was always temporary with us. It's as if we never were anything. We were always just about to be."

Application:

Wouldn't that be awful/ a tragic thing towards the end of your life to be like that?

But tragically that happens more than what we would realize.

Many of us enter middle age and look up the road toward a retirement that is not all that far away, and we might wonder what happened?

Too often people live their whole lives without ever thinking about God or His church.

Or maybe we are already at the stage of our life; and we ask, "What happened? Where did it all go? Where did we make the wrong turn?"

Or maybe at a crucial moment, we just failed to decide or we made the wrong decision.

We have to be honest with ourselves and say, "We were afraid to do that!"

"We were afraid of taking the risk?"

Or possibly – we just felt self reliant and didn't feel we needed God or His church.

So we might be asking the question that was in a popular song a few years ago: "Is That All There Is?"

Every one of us have plans for our lives, but how can we be sure that we plan our lives and live our lives in a way that includes God and is pleasing to Him?

See the Word of God tells us that Self-Sufficiency without God in our life is self-destruction.

II. A Life without God is Presumptuous.

James describes a business man planning his future business as though he was really in control.

“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 are 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.’”

Presumption here is a sin.

Its’ arrogant

It displays pride

It carries with it the idea of the swagger of the rich fool in Luke chapter 12 who thought he had many years to flaunt and enjoy his wealth.

But God said to him, *“You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God?” Luke 12:20-21*

How terribly tragic it would be for anyone to go through their entire life and not have any preparations spiritually to prepare themselves for eternity!

Or it could even be that quiet – understated presumption that motivates many of our lives, causing us to think we have all the time in the world to do whatever we plan.

Thinking, believing that we have everything in our life in our control.

We are presumptuous to think we are in control

The truth of the matter is – None of us is in control of the future.

Nor do we know what will happen in the future.

It simply amazes me how much effort and time we spend trying to predict the future.

The weatherman has his 7 to 10 day forecast of what the weather is going to be.

Whenever we have political elections, we try to predict who is going to be the winner.

We even predict who should win the NCAA football at the end of the season.

Then we have the horoscopes

Go through the grocery store and see magazines that will tell you what is going to happen to this earth this year.

You can purchase the farmers almanac that will show you all kinds of weather predictions for the year.

But James is going to tell us – You and I cannot know the future.

None of us know what is going to happen tomorrow, let alone what will happen tonight.

III. Failure to recognize the uncertainty of life. Verse 14

“Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist/vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes.”

Proverbs 27:1 “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.”

Do you remember where you were when you heard about the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001?

I remember where I was and how I immediately went home to watch in horror the events of that day.

All of us remember the picture of the Twin Towers

I remember watching as the second jet slammed into the second tower.

I watch people as they ran to get as far away as possible.

And finally a picture of the skyline without the towers and the billowing smoke from the destruction.

Application:

Here's the sobering point for all of us:

- No one who boarded those planes or went into those towers on that beautiful morning had any idea that they would die that day.
- All of them had plans for the day, and for later that night, or the next weekend, or the next year.
- But thousands of people went to meet God that day.
- Our life is just a mist and we never know when it will vanish.

All of us know what it's like to wake up on a foggy morning and have a hard time driving through the soupy fog.

And usually in about 2 hours the fog gets burn off by the sun's heat.

James says your life is like that. ***“You are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.”***

On December 26, 2004 a very large earthquake occurred under the Indian Ocean that resulted in a devastating tsunami.

Hundreds of thousands of people were caught unaware and were swept away in the flood.

Do suppose any of those people that day had any idea of the tragedy that was going to happen?

The way our world is going right now, none of us know what will thrust our nation into World War III.

Our lives could be eternally changed in a very short time.

Listen to talk radio and see what they are saying about our future.

- Some are saying we could be thrust into WWII
- Some are saying that Iran could give nuclear bombs to the Hezbalah.
- We all know they wouldn't be afraid to use it against Israel.
- We are sitting on a powder keg that could explode our world into utter chaos.

Folks, listen to me carefully, Every one of us need to be aware of and spiritually react to what could happen.

We cannot casually go about our living without realizing what could happen tomorrow.

All of us have heard that song from the musical Annie:

The sun will come out tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow, I love ya tomorrow; you're only a day away."

And don't get me wrong, in some respects living as if there will be many tomorrows is not a bad thing, but in some respects it can be very presumptuous.

Conclusions:

A Plan of Action

There are three things we should be doing:

- 1) **Let's begin now to trust God with our lives and our futures, and to live one day at a time.**

Most of us are too young to remember an earlier generation that used to add the initials “D.V.” when writing letters that included future appointments.

The initials stood for the words “**Deo Volente**” meaning “God Willing”

I still from time to time will say to someone about the tomorrow: “**The Lord willing.**”

2) Secondly. Let’s Appreciate the Moment we have.

I look into the faces and eyes of my father and mother today.

I recall when they were younger and now they are old.

I don’t know how much longer I’ll have my Mom and my Dad.

But every time I see them now – I appreciate the moments I have with them.

3) Third, Let us not Delay Obedience

There is an old fable that tells of three apprentice demons who were coming to earth to finish their apprenticeship.

They were talking to Satan about their plans to tempt and ruin men.

The first said, “I will tell them there is no heaven.”

Satan said, “Ah, they’ll never believe that. This book of Truth is full of messages about the hope of heaven.”

The second said, “I will tell them there is no hell.”

Satan said, “No good. Jesus, while He was on earth, talked more about hell than of heaven. They will know in their hearts that their wrong will have to be taken care of some way.”

The final demon said, “Then I know the answer. I’ll just tell them there’s no hurry.”

Satan said, “Ah, Go, and you will ruin them by the thousands.”

The most dangerous delusion of all is that there is plenty of time.

But listen to me – None of us know the day or the hour of Christ’s return or for that fact when we will face eternity.

On that ground – We must not delay our obedience.

Invitation:

This morning I know there are people here who are stirred spiritually and they need to respond to this message.

We don’t know about tomorrow, but we know about Him who holds tomorrow.

We need to hold on to God’s unchanging hand.

And if you need Jesus Christ as your Savior this morning to forgive you of your sins, then don’t hesitate come and let me pray for you before you leave.