

We have been reading through the letter of James for several weeks and today we move into the end of chapter 4. We have learned that this letter is attributed to James who was the brother of Jesus and an early leader in the Christian church in Jerusalem. Many scholars think that this letter was finished by a writer addressing a wider audience later in the first century.

In the earlier part of chapter 4 we heard James address conflicts that had arisen. He advised his readers to be humble and to submit themselves to God. Throughout this letter we see a theme where James challenges the arrogance of his readers. We see that theme expanded in what we are about to read.

Read James 4:13-17 (Letarshia)

James clearly is not someone who has a high opinion of long-range plans. He knows that our plans and hopes and dreams can change quite quickly. Let us watch one clip of a family whose lives changed dramatically after a visit to the hospital to deliver their baby.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQJ9W5WKYA4>

All of us can look over our life and see events which happened which changed the direction of our lives. Sometimes those events were something good and sometimes not so much.

In this clip that we watched, this family's life changed due to a diagnosis that their child had a very rare genetic disorder. Maybe you know something about that. Maybe you know what it is like to make a routine visit to a doctor and hear a diagnosis that you or your loved one has something major.

Maybe you know what it is like for you or your loved one to venture out for a routine errand in a vehicle and then have a major accident that changes everything. Maybe you know what it is like to walk into your job and think it will be a normal day only to be called into your boss' office and told that you are being fired.

Maybe you know what it is like to receive a letter in the mail informing you of a major financial expense that you had no idea was coming.

Or maybe you have received some incredible and life changing news that impacts your life for the better. That notification that you have been hired for that dream job or accepted into your college of choice. The letter informing you that some relative that you didn't really know has left you quite a sum of money. That proposal from the person that you love that you were never quite sure was ever going to come.

These are all events which can change our lives dramatically. We all have those types of moments that are significant and life altering. James recognizes this in this part of his letter that we have read.

James says you do not know what tomorrow will bring. And none of us do. Every one of us is just one phone call, email, text, letter, or moment away from something that can have a dramatic impact upon us and our family.

Our first reading has something to say to all of us as we look to the future. The gospel of Matthew quotes Jesus preaching a sermon we call the Sermon on the Mount. In this sermon, Jesus says to not worry about your future. Don't worry about what you will eat or what you will drink or what you will wear.

Jesus asks if life is more than food and the body more than clothing. Jesus then points to the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. Jesus says that they do not need to worry so why should we. Jesus asks why we should worry about tomorrow and ask questions about what we will wear or what we will eat. Jesus says to strive first for the kingdom of God and the rest will take care of itself.

James picks up on this theme. James even says that when we look to the future we should make plans with the moniker that what we want to do will only be accomplished if the Lord wishes. I think about my Muslim friends who, when we say we have a meeting in the future, they always add “Lord willing.” Or as others may say, “Lord willing and the creek don’t rise.”

James even says that our lives are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. We are not nearly as important and influential as we may think we are.

But, alas, we live in a world that wants us to be worried about tomorrow. As we approach the elections in 3 weeks we are hearing a barrage of commercials about how if we elect someone from the other party then we will all experience calamity and chaos and the destruction of civilization.

Whenever you watch a political add, ask yourself this, is this ad trying to get me to be worried about tomorrow? As you watch your favorite news channel, ask yourself this, are the newscasters trying to make me worried about tomorrow?

Because if you worry about tomorrow then you have fallen in the trap prepared by the world. But both James and Jesus tell us something very different about tomorrow. Rather than worrying about tomorrow, they tell us to instead spend our time in the present and the future striving for the kingdom of God. James makes it simple by saying that we should strive to do the right thing and that if we don’t then we sin.

Your life for the rest of this day may go as you plan. Your life this week and maybe for the next month and years may go exactly as you plan. And that is fine. But something may happen today, tomorrow, next week, or next month that may dramatically alter your plans. Good or bad, who’s to say.

And if that does happen, if something happens to you that dramatically changes your plans, that is OK. It’s OK because it is not our life to live. We are to seek to live our life faithfully to God and do the right thing and trust that God is the one in control.

As James reminds us, we are mist and one day we will disappear. But while we are seen in the mist, we seek to do the right thing and trust God to be in control of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. AMEN.

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-Given: October 21, 2018 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)