

Whose Will Is It Anyway?

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James 4:13-17

On the last Sunday of the year 2018 and in my last sermon of the year, I talked about four points based on Phil. 3: 12-14:

-Look Back

-Leave Behind

-Look Forward

-Look Upward

Year 2018 is history. We probably took time to **look back** and evaluate our lives. We did learn from our mistakes. We also were thankful for the blessings God gave us. We thanked God. We will **leave the past behind** and move on. We will then **look forward** and **look upward** for strength and wisdom from God.

In my last sermon of 2018, I quoted this phrase I once read on a Christmas card we received from Armenia:

TOWARDS THE UNKNOWN FUTURE
IN THE HANDS OF THE ALL-KNOWING GOD

What do we know about 2019?

Not much, even though many people try to predict.

God doesn't want us to know the future. St Augustine said:

“God will not suffer man to have a knowledge of things to come; for if he had foreknowledge of his prosperity, he would be careless; and if understanding of his adversity, he would be despairing and senseless.”

Indeed, we live in a world where many things are unknown and we are always faced by surprises. My mother always said, “Orhnyal Anoroshoutioun” (Blessed Uncertainty).

I would love to start a new series from the letter of James. James is a practical man. His letter is about **“Walking the Talk.”** **Let your faith be manifested in your**

life. James' letter is a great letter that motivates us to make decisions and keep them. (Like New Year resolutions.)

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”
(James 1:22 ESV)

Another translation says:

“Do not merely listen to the Word...Do what it says. Do something about it.”

Today I see it appropriate to jump to the fourth chapter. (I will be back next Sunday and start from the beginning.)

So in this section he is addressing people who are planning to do some business.

What's wrong with having a business?

Work is a blessing; work is gift from God. Yet James finds a problem with these people whose plans exclude God. **They plan and do things without seeking God's will.**

People may decide to do certain things then they want Jesus to endorse them.

Many of us made New Year resolutions.

Is God in your resolution? Do we follow Jesus or we want Jesus to follow us?

Let us examine the passage:

1. Planning Without God*

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.” (James 4:13 ESV)

Those merchants are doing all things without searching God's will in their life. There is nothing wrong in planning. But do you see their attitude?

- a. You may make plans without God: “today or tomorrow we will go”
- b. You may decide where to go without God: “into such and such a town.”

- c. You may decide the time frame without God: “spend a year there.”
- d. You may plan activities without God: “and trade or buy and sell” *arevdour* in Armenian

The Greek word for buy and sell is *Emporeumai*

“Emporium: to travel to a place for the purpose of doing business.”

- e. You may estimate your profit without God: “and make a profit.”

Just count the **verbs** these people use: **go, spend, buy, sell, travel, and make profit...**

These words are not problematic but they show that these merchants think they are totally in charge of their life plans.

2. Determining life without God

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. (James 4:14 ESV)

I have made a habit of writing a journal, not on a daily basis but weekly, sometimes biweekly, and sometimes monthly. I glanced over my journal entries from previous years.

As I come to my new church at PACC, I am asking to God to show me what to do, how to serve, what to preach, how to relate and connect with the congregation. Here is one of answers from God.

The scripture reading of that day was:

**Thus says the LORD,
who makes a way in the sea,
a path in the mighty waters,
who brings forth chariot and horse,
army and warrior;
they lie down, they cannot rise,
they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:
“Remember not the former things,
nor consider the things of old.
Behold, I am doing a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.
(Isaiah 43:16-19 ESV)**

And indeed God made ways in a sea and made ways in the wilderness. I think Isaiah is saying **God can do the impossible**... just trust HIM.

I experienced this literally. I experienced this Lebanon, in Beirut, in Ainjar, in San Francisco, and now in Fresno.

A few years ago I took a sabbatical. I did not know how God was going to use me in Lebanon, Greece, Canada and Armenia.

I did not know how God would shape me. One thing I knew, God was going to open the way.... God was going to do the impossible....

These merchants were planning to do things here and there, new business, new cities, new timetable... They were arrogant..

As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. (James 4:16 ESV)

Arrogance in Greek is plural. So the literal translation would be: “you boast in your arrogances.”

But who knows what is tomorrow?

“Watch out” says James, “life is like vapor”:

“For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.”

In the Bible there are so many references to the shortness of life.

“We are here for only a moment, visitors and strangers in the land as our ancestors were before us. Our days on earth are like a passing shadow, gone so soon without a trace.” (1 Chronicles 29:15 New Living Translation)

“Indeed, you have made the length of my days [only] a few inches. My life span is nothing compared to yours. Certainly, everyone alive is like a whisper in the wind.” (Psalm 39:5 God’s Word Translation)

3. Instead...

Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” (James 4:15 ESV)

There is nothing wrong in planning. However, seeking His will is a priority to guide us to do the right thing, with the right motive. Here is some guidance on how to seek His will:

A. Does your plan (goal) glorify God?

Paul says:

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31 ESV)

I take this seriously. As your pastor, I always ask you this question before any activity we plan. The same is true your personal goals and plans. Do they glorify God?

B. Is it biblical?

Do your plans contradict the Biblical teachings? Are you going to convince yourself that what you're about to do is from God, although you are disobeying his Word? Christians cheat and lie; they lie to the IRS. Christians try to justify their unbiblical actions. Watch out.

C. Is your plan motivated by God's Love?

Most of us know John 3:16. I preached about it two weeks ago. God loved the world, and He loved us. And we have a new life because of His son.

However, most of us do not quote 1 John 3:16:

“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.” (1 John 3:16 ESV)

Why should our plans be motivated by God's love? Why should we make goals based on love? **God is love and He wants us to communicate with love. Also if our actions are not motivated by love, human beings become projects. You run over them just to reach your goal.**

That is not a biblical way of doing things. Watch how you treat people.

Paul knew how selfish the church of Corinth was. He says to them:

“Let all that you do be done in love.” (1 Corinthians 16:14 ESV)

Do it in love. God's love can transform **all kinds of work into a ministry.**

What are your plans for 2019?

Do You Follow Jesus or you Want Him to Follow you?

Do they glorify God? Are they it biblical? Are they motivated by love? Do you say: “If the Lord wills...”

“God can do anything, you know — far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams!” (Ephesians 3:20 MSG)

Amen

*These points are adapted from Dr David Jeremiah.

“If God wills...” see these verses about this topic:

Acts 18:21

I Corn 4:19

I Corn 16:7

Philip. 2:24

Hebrews 6:3

“Life is short, like vapor....” See these verses about this topic:

1 Chronicles 29:15

Job 7:6

Job 7:7

Job 9:25-26

Job 14:1-2

Psalm 39:5

Psalm 102:3

Psalm 103:15-16