

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Deo Volente James 4:13-17

I would like to read for you an excerpt from Chuck Colson’s book entitled “*Kingdoms in Conflict*.”

The United Nations complex sits on sixteen acres of New York City’s choicest real estate, bordering the East River and Manhattan. The lean, immense Secretariat building rises into the sky, the sun reflecting off its window walls. Bright flags of the nations of the world fly in the breezes off the river. The most prominent is the blue and white UN flag, its two white reeds of olive branches surrounding the world.

A visitor is immediately struck by the grandeur of the building, stirred by the sight of dignitaries stepping out of black limousines to cross the massive plaza. He realizes that if this place represents the powers of the world, one might well want to see the place of worship, where the nations bow before the One under whose rule they govern.

The information personnel are bemused. “The chapel? We don’t have a chapel. If there is one, I believe it’s across the street.”

The visitor darts across the thoroughfare, dodging New York’s taxis, and successfully arrives at the opposite building’s security-clearance desk.

“Well, there’s a chapel here,” responds the officer, “but it’s not associated with the UN.” He thumbs through a directory. “Oh, I see, all right, here it is. It’s across the street. Tell them you’re looking for the meditation room.”

Again the visitor dashes across the pavement. An attendant tells him the room is not open to the public; it’s a “nonessential area.” And there has been a personnel cutback. But a security guard will escort the visitor through long, crowded hallways and swinging glass doors. Again there is the pervasive sense of weighty matters being discussed in the noble pursuit of world peace.

The guide pauses at an unmarked door. He unlocks it and gingerly pushes it open. The small room is devoid of people or decoration. The walls are stark white. There are no windows. A few wicker stools surround a large square rock at the center of the room. It is very quiet. But there is no altar, rug, vase, candle, or symbol of any type of religious worship.

Lights in the ceiling create bright spots of illumination on the front wall.

One focuses on a piece of modern art: steel squares and ovals. Beyond the abstract shapes, there is nothing in those bright circles of light. They are focused on a void. And it is in that void that the visitor suddenly sees the soul of the brave new world.”

So writes Charles Colson as he brilliantly underscores the view of God which lies at the heart of the secular world. The nations have come together for a noble pursuit - the peace and the prosperity of all mankind, but without any reference to God.

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Indeed, there is a calculated indifference to God, even a skepticism about His existence. Our brave new pleasure-dominated, pleasure-seeking world is increasingly filled with people who live their lives with no reference to God.

So pervasive is our culture's arrogant independence of God that even many (most)? Christians attend church, marry, choose their vocations, have children, buy and sell homes, expand their portfolios, and numbly ride the currents of culture with an arrogant attitude of self-sufficiency in planning daily life activities in total disregard for God. James, in the passage that we will examine this weekend, challenges this arrogance.

Let us read **James 4:13-17**, “**Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” (14) Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. (15) Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.” (16) But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. (17) Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.”**

In challenging us in this passage to become less caught up in our will and more caught up in God's will, he begins with telling us what we must never say!

What We Must Never Say!

We must never say anything that arrogantly communicates that we have control over our lives. Let us look at **V. 13**, “**Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.”** Notice the particular group that James identifies in **V. 13**. His attack is specifically aimed at the materialistically focused Christian merchants in his congregations who arrogantly mapped out their destinations and their sojourns on the basis of profitability and assumed that they would be successful. And what is important for us to notice is that they did all this planning as if God did not even exist. They went about their planning as if God was a non-factor.

Shortly after their conversions, these Christian merchant men may have truly tried to live their lives according to the will of God. Shortly after their conversions, these Christian merchant men may have understood the Lord's sovereignty in all matters of their lives and would humbly acknowledge, accept, and desire his sovereign will over their lives. But as time went by, it appears that the cares of this world came to dominate their thinking while at the same time the Lord and his plan for their lives became an afterthought. The group of merchant men are representative of many, many professing Christians today. Perhaps you may even be one of them.

How often have you set about making plans for your life or the lives of your family without considering what the Lord would have you to do? It is a very easy thing to do. Why? Because it seems that very often our planning has such good results. We decide to get married and it happens. We decide to have children and it happens.

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We decide to change jobs and it happens. And often times what we have decided turns out to be a fairly decent decision. All of this positive movement can bring us to the place where we deny the Lord His rightful place in our lives while we begin to depend more and more upon our own reasoning and understanding..... Looking to ourselves as we go about planning our lives is very foolish.

Let us again look at the passage but this time let us look at **V. 14, “Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.”** In this verse James gives two important reasons why those who presumptuously leave God out of their planning are foolish.

We are ignorant of the future. Look at the very first part of **V. 14, “Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow.”** Life is far from simple. It is a complex matrix of forces, events, people, contingencies, and circumstances over which we have little or no control, making it impossible for anyone to ascertain, design, or assure any specific future. Yes it may be true that many of the plans that we have made have actually come to fruition and perhaps from our perspective have produced a good result but let us not foolishly imagine that we are in charge of our lives. We are simply a cork on the ocean of life and hopefully we will not forget this.

So many professing Christians work so hard to work out their plans, believing that their plans will lead to a better life for themselves and their families, only to see their plans slip through their fingers, leaving them with a numbing emptiness. How much better for us as believers not to expend so much energy pursuing our plans but rather the Lord’s, who controls the wind, sea, and the waves.

Secondly, those who leave God out of their planning are foolish because their lives are brief (Job 7:6,9; 9:25; Ps. 102:11; 103:15-16). Let us again look at **V. 14, “Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.”** Life is as transitory as a puff of smoke from a fire; the steam that rises from a cup of coffee; or one’s breath, briefly visible on a cold day. How foolish, in light of the brevity and frailty of earthly life, to plan and live it without consideration for God’s will.

Evidently the Spirit of God wants us to grasp and internalize the brevity of our lives because the Old Testament contains so many parallel similes. **Job 7:6**, says, “**My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle.**” **Job 7:9** says, “**When a cloud vanishes, it is gone, so he who goes down to Sheol does not come up.**” **Job 9:25**, says “**Now my days are swifter than a runner; they flee away.**” King David said in **Ps. 102:11**, “**My days are like a lengthened shadow; and I wither away like grass.**” And then again we hear David speaking in **Ps. 103:15-16** “**As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. (16) When the wind has passed over it, it is no more; and its place acknowledges it no longer.**”

Oh, how I wish we could get a good grip on our mortality. It is said that long ago when an Eastern emperor was crowned at Constantinople, the royal mason would set before his majesty a certain number of marble slabs. One he was to choose then and there for his tombstone. The ancients thought it wise for him to remember his funeral at the time of his elevation, for his life would not last forever.

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Perhaps this would be a profitable ceremony, say, at high school or college graduation. If those who are young or in the best of health could sense how short it all is, and how unpredictable, it would perhaps be so much easier to surrender our will to His.

Why is it so foolish to leave God out of our planning? First of all, because we are ignorant of the future. We are ignorant of the future because we have absolutely no power to impact what happens tomorrow. We are simply a cork on the sea. And secondly, it is foolish to leave God out of our planning because our lives are brief. Not only can we not control the events of our lives and therefore our future, we cannot even control our own lives. We may be here today but there is absolutely no guarantee that we will be here tomorrow. James now moves on in the passage from telling us what we should never say to what we should say.

What We Should Say!

Having shown the folly of announcing what we are going to do tomorrow or next year without reference to God's will, James gives us a godly alternative in **V. 15, "Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that."**

When we say, "If the Lord wills" we should not think that it only means that we acknowledge God's sovereignty. It also means that we accept God's sovereignty. It not only means that we acknowledge and accept God's sovereignty, but it means that we welcome it. Certainly this was exemplified by Jesus when he went to the cross when He said, "Not my will but Thine be done." And it was taught by Jesus when he told us to pray in this manner, "Our father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

The expression "If the Lord wills" does not appear anywhere in the OT, though it is used several times in the New Testament (Acts 18:21, 1 Cor. 4:19). Paul promised the **Ephesians in Acts 18:25 "I will return to you again, if the Lord wills"**. To the Corinthians he said in **1 Cor. 4:19, "But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant, but their power."** However, in similar instances he talks confidently about his future plans without using the phrase. In Acts 19:21 he says, **"Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia, and Achaia, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."** Then in Rom. 15:28 we read, **"Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain."** And then in 1 Cor. 16:5 we read, **"But I shall come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia."** Sometimes Paul uses the phrase and at other times he did not.

Obviously it is not the words themselves which is the problem, but the heart attitude that accompanies the words. For us to tell someone that our plan is to invest X amount of dollars over X amount of years in our company's 401K plan and retire at 62 is not sin. The sin is telling our friend that we are going to invest X amount of dollars over X amount of years in our company's 401K plan and retire at 62 without ever humbly coming before the Lord in prayer and involving Him in that decision.

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The sin is telling our friend that we are going to invest X amount of dollars over X amount of years in our company's 401K plan and retire at 62 without ever humbly acknowledging the Lord's sovereignty over our lives and embracing whatever might happen in our lives as God's gift to us.

Despite the fact that using this phrase or not using the phrase is not the real issue, the phrase has been immensely popular at different times in church history. The Puritans loved it and filled their speech and correspondence with the Latin equivalent Deo Volente, "God willing," and the Methodists followed the same practice. In fact, godly Methodists regularly signed their letters with the initials D.V., and placards and circulars about coming events also had D.V.

It is not without significance that the Puritan epoch, as well as the Wesleyan revivals, were golden ages of evangelical Christianity. "God willing" is the posture of a burning heart. The phrase "God willing" humbly acknowledges it is not us but the Lord who is in charge, and not only acknowledges it, but accepts it and welcomes it.

Deo Volente is to be the constant refrain if not on our lips in our hearts as we conduct the affairs of our lives. "If God wills" must be written over students' plans -- the choice of a life partner, future education, all everyday activities. Older people need to say from the heart, "If God wills, I will spend my time If God wills, my children will become If God wills, I will take up this ministry If God wills, I will wake up tomorrow." All of us should have this attitude. If there is a God, let us treat Him as such and not relegate him to the symbolic and meaningless status of the meditation room at the United Nations building.

James interjects a jarring note after this call to elevate the Lord's plans for our lives above our own in how we conduct ourselves in **V. 16, "But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil."** Rather than acknowledging God's rightful place in their lives by the phrase "Lord willing," these certain merchant men were going about treating God as a non-factor saying, **"Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit."** James identifies this type of expression as evil.

Perhaps no one has expressed this defiant attitude toward God any more clearly than William Ernest Henley in his poem "Invictus."

Out of the night that covers me, Black as the Pit from pole to pole, I thank whatever gods may be for my unconquerable soul... In the fell clutch of circumstance I have not winced nor cried aloud. Under the bludgeoning of change My head is bloody, but unbowed ...Beyond this place of wrath and tears looms but the horror of the shade. And yet the menace of years find, and shall find me unafraid..... It matters not how strait the gate, how charred with punishments the scroll, I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul.

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CONCLUSION

Who is the master of your fate? Who is the captain of your soul? Hopefully you will declare the Lord is the Master of your fate and the Lord is the captain of your soul! If this is your declaration, then we need to act like it in the way we approach our personal plans and stop tendering the Lord like a non-factor in our decision making. **V. 17 “ Therefore to the one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.”**