

Facing Your Future
James 4: 13-17 and 5: 7-12

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Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

This past Monday I got a letter from the Social Security Administration. It was, they said, a report designed to help me plan for the future and to show me when I will be able to retire. "Retirement, what a great idea," I thought.... I'm not sure what got into me but I was daydreaming about sailing down the intercoastal waterway for weeks at a time.....or traveling around the world, you know, retirement George Lobien style! So I opened it and looked at the actual figures. "You've got to be kidding," I said out loud. "I'm going to be working until I'm 87! What kind of future is *THAT* going to be?!"

I think about the future, and so do you, I'm sure, no matter how old you are. I think about the issues involved in planning my future: finances, how my health will hold out, about kids, grandkids, about the ministry here, and about the future of our country. Sometimes I call it "thinking" and sometimes I call it "worrying," and sometimes I call it PLANNING. But the future is out there and it's coming.

What about you? Ever worry about the future? Or how long this sermon will be?

In today's text from James 4 and 5, **James talks about three basic mistakes that Christian people make when they are thinking about and planning for their future.** The illustration James uses is a simple one: a couple of businessmen talking about their plans. "*Today or tomorrow we will go to this city or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make a lot of money.*" Sound familiar? We do stuff like that all the time! And what's wrong with that picture? After all, we do have to make money, sometimes we have to travel to do, far more than James could ever imagine, and we have to have business plans....even in churches do. So these guys are just covering their bases, right? What's wrong with that?

Plenty, says James. And why does he say that? Because there's not a single mention of God in their plans. The men knew what **THEY** wanted to do and how they were going to make it happen, but, says James, **mistake number one is that they failed to involve God in their planning.** It's just plain foolish, James says; to plan ANYTHING without God is just plain foolish.

There's an old saying that if something can go wrong, it will. What is it? Murphy's Law. Murphy was an engineer building airplanes. He observed that if there was any possible way an assembler could put a part in **WRONG**, it would happen. He watched it, time and time again, enough to determine that it was truly a Law.... If there is any way something can go wrong, it will go wrong.

By the way, Murphy was driving his car one night, and what do you know....his car ran out of gas. Murphy's Law application number 1. So he started walking towards the gas station, following all the rules: wearing white, walking against the traffic, when all of a sudden a British tourist, still driving British-style on the wrong side of the road, ran into him and killed him.

Mistake number two, James says, is that we can presume far too much about tomorrow. Again, James' words: (vs 14-16) *"You don't 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 and do that. As it is, you boast and brag and such is evil."*

None of us needs reminding that life is unpredictable. It can be feast or famine, high or low, good or bad, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, til DEATH do us part....and people still get upset when they find themselves on the south side of one of those equations!

We cannot let the fact that life is, by its very nature, an uncertain thing frighten or worry us. It's simply a reason to trust in God more....and to draw back the lens of our spiritual eyes and see life as God does....from an eternal perspective. God DID create us so that we could live with Him forever.....and He has promised that He will love us through this life and into the next.

What's the solution here? Matthew 6 contains Jesus' own words: *Don't be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of that. Live one day at a time.*" Each day God gives us is a gift to be unwrapped carefully, relished hour by minute, and lived to the fullest..... because once it is gone, it is gone forever.

The third mistake James shares with us is that far too often we PUT OFF doing good. Here's James again...."*anybody who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins!*" Is anyone here a procrastinator? Raise your hands, later. Here's a little poem for you:

Procrastination is my sin, it only caused me sorrow.

I know I ought to change my ways. In fact, I will, tomorrow.

I often wonder what motivated James to write this particular text and here's what I've come up with. James had rejected Jesus' ministry until after the resurrection of Jesus, when he converted to Christianity. Don't you wonder how many times in later years James kicked himself for missing out on long and intimate spiritual conversations with Jesus? If only he had believed sooner!

We know that our salvation was fully and completely won for us by Jesus Christ on the cross. His sacrifice paid for our sins. We can't earn it, don't deserve it, and cannot buy it. Christ DID it and offers it to us free of charge out of love. I know this is something each of us rejoices in every single day!

What matters is our response! We don't DO our salvation but we DO respond to it because God has created each of us to DO things that are in His will. Paul reminds us in Ephesians 2: 10, "*We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to DO good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.*"

Whatever you feel God moving you to do, DO IT NOW. Thinking about going to adult bible class? Start today. Thinking about singing in choir (some of you may need to think twice on this one)? Sing now! Is God moving you towards tithing? Why not receive the blessings God offers tithers by starting now!

There's a story about procrastination in Acts 24. Paul was arrested and was called to appear before the Governor, a man named Felix. He spoke to him about Christ's righteousness and about the coming judgment. Felix appeared to be listening and then, abruptly, cut Paul off, saying he would call him back some day when it was a more convenient time to listen. That time never happened.

God offers each of us the opportunity to serve Him right now. He promises each of us that He wants to bless our lives when we involve Him in planning for our future. Let's get specific: Thinking about retiring? About your education? About career changes? About moving? About serving? Take it to the Lord in prayer, often and again.....because God has promised to listen.

God has also promised to answer.....but.....and here's the rub..... answer in HIS time and according to HIS will. And on the part of God's people, what does this then require? Lots of patience! And that, my friends, is a tough topic! Do you have just a moment to hear what James has to say about patience? He gives us three circumstances when we need an extra dose of patience.

First, we need patience when things seem to be beyond OUR control. His example: farmers and EVERY part of farming is out of their control!
Second, we need patience when the people around us are unchangeable! His example: the prophets. Their job? Change people..... that rarely went well.
Third, we need patience when our problems seem to be unexplainable. His example is the Prince of Patience who played in the Superbowl of suffering: Job.

What is James telling us with these 3 illustrations?

First, the farmer waits EXPECTANTLY, expecting a harvest. And while he waits, he doesn't just pace the floor. Instead, he sets the groundwork in preparation for what happens when God BRINGS the harvest: he gets the storage bins ready, sharpens his tools, and lines up his labor, all in anticipation of what God will do. If God has asked me to wait, there may be things that I can do to prepare myself for the time when He will answer! What are you waiting for God to do in your life? Are you using that time of waiting to prepare yourself for His answer? Jesus waited 30 years to begin His ministry, a time of study, learning, growth and, of course, expectation!

Second, James mentions the prophets who struggled with stubborn people who didn't want to listen to them! What does James say: **Wait PEACEFULLY!** Don't grumble and don't judge, because those who JUDGE will BE judged! Instead, we can focus on God's patience with us and use that to develop our patience with God's people.

Finally, James says, like JOB, wait CONFIDENTLY. God IS in control. This is GOD'S WORLD and we are GOD'S PEOPLE and He does love us. He has a future planned out for every one of us....a future in this world, yes, and even better, a future with Him forever.