

“You’re Going To Do What?”

James 4:13-17

In 1912 the Titanic was launched in Liverpool, England. It was proudly announced by the ship builders and owners that this vessel was "unsinkable." So haughty was the rhetoric surrounding the Titanic's safety and structural integrity that it caused great anxiety in the heart of one God-fearing woman. After reading the shipbuilders' claims, Mrs. Hart believed, and stated, "This is flying in the face of God!" You can imagine her consternation when her family was unexpectedly transferred onto the gigantic liner for its maiden voyage.

Mrs. Hart was the mother of seven-year-old Eva Hart, who recalls that her family was saved from tragedy because of mother's spiritual convictions. Throughout the voyage, Mrs. Hart stayed awake at night waiting for disaster to strike, and thus was able to move her family to an upper deck almost immediately after the ship collided with an unseen iceberg. Because of her vigilance, the family did not join the 1,500 others who died that night.

As I reflect on this story, the words of the Scottish poet, Robert Burns, come to mind; “The best laid schemes of mice and men often go awry.” Proverbs 18:12, makes an even sharper point, *“Before destruction the heart of man is haughty; and before honor is humility.”*

When the Titanic was launched near the beginning of the 20th century, many people were putting their faith in new science and technology. They believed that science in the twentieth century could and would provide answers to solve all their problems. The loss of the Titanic was a tremendous blow to their confidence. It’s too bad; we haven’t learned much from their experience. In this 21st century many around us are making the same mistake.

In our text for today, James warns us about the danger of making plans that exclude the God factor. Our study today is taken from James chapter four, verses thirteen through seventeen. The title of the message is, “You’re Going to Do What?” Now I’ll read our text.

Read James 4:13-17

Our text reveals four WARNINGS that relate to our making plans for the future.

The First WARNING is,

Unrealistic Expectation

I find the beginning words of verse thirteen to be quite interesting; “*Go to now.*” The modern equivalent would be for us to say something like, “Oh, come on,” or, “Now wait a minute.” Younger people would say, “Get real.” These are expressions of disbelief. What is it that calls these expressions of disbelief? It is people who make plans without taking God into consideration.

I hope you don’t get tired of me reminding you, but James is writing to believers, to followers of the Lord Jesus. Don’t you find it easy to make plans without thinking about the God factor? Too often I find myself in this mode of thinking. Someone asks me, “Will you be at the meeting on such and such a date?” And I respond, “I sure will.” But who actually decides whether I’ll be there or not? God does. I need to be aware that some of my expectations may be unrealistic. I really don’t know if I’ll be there or not. Lots can happen between now and then.

Does that mean it’s wrong to plan ahead? Of course not. In Proverbs chapter six, God tells us to take a lesson from the ants. They plan ahead by gathering in the harvest in preparation for the time when gathering is impossible. In Luke chapter fourteen, Jesus talked about the importance of planning ahead when he gave the illustration of the man who started to build a tower, and then discovered he didn’t have enough money to finish it. And the apostle Paul, in his first letter to Timothy spoke of planning ahead when he said, “*If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*” I believe Scripture is clear; there is nothing wrong with planning ahead.

It is wrong to make plans without considering our expectations may be unrealistic. The verb tense expresses repeated or continued activity. So we could read, “You who **are saying**, today or tomorrow... we’ll do this or that.” This isn’t a mistake or a moment of forgetfulness. This is a deliberate mind-set that excludes God from the plan. That was the problem with the wealthy farmer in Luke twelve who said, “*I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But [then] God said unto*

him, You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you: then whose shall those things be which you have provided?"

What are your expectations for the future? Have you considered the God factor? Psalm 10:4 informs us, *"The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts."* This could be read, "God is not in his thoughts at all." That's the wicked man. But what about the righteous, how does he make his plans? Psalm 90:12 tells us how the righteous make their plans. *"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."*

I believe this first warning is clear, don't make plans without considering God, or your plans may be unrealistic! You don't know what will happen tomorrow.

The Second WARNING is,

Unexpected Condensation

There's a bit of a play on words here. James likens our physical existence to vapor. What is vapor? It is condensation. As water is heated, the arrangement of the molecules is changed and become vapor or steam. Water droplets become suspended in mid-air. The visible evidence of the vapor is very short-lived. That's how James describes the length and the durability of our lives. Just like a breath of air on a cold day. Almost as soon as it is out of your mouth; it's gone!

That's how we as followers of Christ are to view life. But that's not how the unbelieving person views life. *"Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue forever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approves their sayings,"* Psalm 49:11-13. They don't see their lives from God's perspective.

There's another meaning for condensation. It means to shorten or compress. Many of you are familiar with condensed books. In those books they took a variety of stories and shortened them. They removed "nonessential" parts of the story in order to make a shortened version.

James' reminder in verse fourteen is very pertinent for this discussion. We have no promise of tomorrow. Jesus reminded us that our lives, in comparison to eternity, are like the

grass of the field: here today, gone tomorrow. That is why we must always take His plans into consideration when we're making our plans. He knows things we have no access to.

How quickly our lives can change in a moment of time! *“The days of our years are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they be eighty years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away,”* Psalm 90:10. We don't know if our “book” will be the condensed version or the unabridged. Only God knows that. Someone has said, “You can tie your shoes in the morning, but the undertaker may untie them tonight.” How true that is for every one of us. It is a warning not to forget the brevity of life as we make our plans.

The Next WARNING is,

Unqualified Approbation

In verse fifteen James uses this warning to explain a very important principle. But first, let me explain what I mean by unqualified approbation. The word approbation means approval. And using the word, unqualified, in this context, simply means unrestricted. In other words, we can't do anything without God's approval. Sometimes that approval is explicit. We know for sure God wants us to do something. Other times that approval may be tacit, God allows us to do what we want.

In contrast to those in verse one who say, “This is what we will do,” James says we ought to say, “If God permits we will do this or that.” I recall as a child seeing announcements for special meetings at our church. They would list the meeting dates and times, the guest speaker and other pertinent information. But somewhere on that announcement, either just under the heading, or else at the bottom were the capital letters, D and V. As I got older I learned that those letters stood for the Latin words, *Deo Volente*, which mean, God Willing.

Those who planned the program were acknowledging they needed God's approval for this meeting to take place. They made the plans, but only God could decide whether or not those plans would come to reality. You know something; I seldom see those letters on any announcements today. Yes, I know, the letters themselves, or even the words can become an empty, ritualistic form. But I wonder, in our fast pace of life, have we forgotten the need for

God's approval of our plans? Proverbs 16:33 reminds us, *"The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD."*

As in all other areas of life, Jesus is our perfect example in this one too. He lived His life in such a way that he could say, *"I do only those things which please the Father."* He moved only within the sphere of his Father's unqualified approbation. Where did it lead him? To the cross, at the prime of his life; approximately thirty-three years of age. When someone in our circle of acquaintance is taken from this life at that age, we tend to see it as a "waste." We must be surrendered to God so we too, can say, "If the Lord wills we will do this or accomplish that."

The Final WARNING is,

Unfaithful Deviation

Have you ever been warned not to do something, but went ahead and did it anyway? Those who refuse to take God into account during their planning are doing just that. The previous verses explicitly warn us not to make the mistake of leaving God out of the picture. But in this case, not only was God left out, those making the plans were boasting in their humanly devised plans. Like the sailor on the Titanic who reportedly said, "Not even God could sink this ship." Those were foolish words. James reminds us that this kind of boasting is grievous to God.

Where does that kind of arrogant attitude lead us? Verse seventeen says it leads to unfaithful deviation. Deviation means to turn aside from an established way, principle, or standard; in this case, God's way and His standard. This deviation is not the result of negligence or deception. It is outright disobedience! It is knowing what is right and proper, what is expected, then refusing to do it. It reminds me of the parable Jesus gave us in Luke chapter twelve.

"And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he comes shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he has. But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delays his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looks not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two, and will appoint him his portion with the

*unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. **For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.***"

Do you see the point of Jesus' words? Those who know what is right and deviate from the path will be held to a higher standard than those who do not know better. James says that the one who knows what is right, yet refuses to do it, misses the mark and turns away from the path of righteousness. When a person turns away from the path of righteousness, what are their other options? There is only one; the path of wickedness, and that leads to destruction.

In Romans chapter one, the apostle Paul warns us about what happens to those who do not want to acknowledge God. *"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers..."* and so on.

That, my friend, is where unfaithful deviation leads a person; away from God. And for those who don't want God in their plans for the future, He will oblige them. When life is over, they will not be in His future plans. They will have cast their lot with the enemy, Satan. They will join him in the lake of fire for eternity.

That's a sobering thought. I urge you to carefully consider these warnings in any plans that you are making. Be sure God is included in those plans. Remember that life is short. Seek not only His permission, but His unqualified approval. And do not refuse His direction. If you heed these warnings you can be assured your plans will not end like the Titanic.