

IF THE LORD WILL

James 4:13-17

"Go to now" is an interesting expression. It is a term that infers dissatisfaction, almost contempt, for the actions of the one addressed. It is a term designed to get the reader's attention.

James mentions the boastings of the tongue. The tongue boasteth great things. It boasts its self-sufficiency—"we will go, and buy and sell and get gain." How easy it is for us to assert our own sufficiency. The tongue also boasteth its self security. It dares to prophesy its future, and to proclaim what it is going to do by and by. How can a man boast of tomorrow? Yet, this is the spirit that dominates many people. Men may propose, but God will dispose. No man knows what shall be on the morrow. Moreover, the tongue boasts its self-ambition. "We will buy and sell and get gain." This is the ambition of many a life.

James also informs us of God's stirring response to man's boasting. God says three important things. "Ye know not what shall be on the morrow." Why should we boast of tomorrow, when tomorrow is hidden to us? Tomorrow has been called Satan's day. It speaks of procrastination or delay. Many are not willing to be saved today, but perhaps might be tomorrow. Day after day rolls by and they are not saved. With the Christian there is often delay. He has every intention of doing some special thing, but not today. We do not know what lies ahead of us and it is well that we do not. If we knew our coming successes and victories, we might become vain. If we knew the disappointments and struggles that await us, we might become discouraged. It is far better to live a day at a time.

God also said, "Your life is as a vapour." Everything about us is passing; nothing is permanent. All we have is the present. Yesterday is gone; it cannot be brought back or altered. Events of yesterday cannot be undone. We should make the most of today. We cannot be sure of tomorrow; for us its sun may never rise. Unforeseen circumstances may make it necessary to change our plans completely. If possible, do today what you know should be done.

Note that the men mentioned here are great planners. They mean to follow a set order; they intend to hold to it very exactly. They fully expect to make a journey to a certain city. They are very confident that they will make the trip and get there, and they mean to start today or tomorrow. There are two things wrong with these bustling traders; they are boasting about what they intend to accomplish, and forget that God might intervene. They are talking as though they are the lords of their own destiny. They forget that tomorrow may never come; also, that should it come, it might bring some very great surprises. They forget that many have started on journeys, but never reached their destinations.

The men of our verse are going far beyond tomorrow. They have plans all set for a whole year. They talk as though they would be there for that length of time, again forgetting that God might intervene. How well to leave our plans in the hands of the Lord and to ask Him to lead, guide and overrule if necessary. It is wrong to boast of the future, as though you were the Lord of it. Life is full of surprises. Many a day has ended altogether differently than expected. There are startling events happening continually. Perhaps it is well that tomorrow is hidden from us. If we knew the many disappointments that lie ahead, we might be too discouraged to go on. As we receive them one at a time, we manage to overcome them, but if we could see them all at once, they would look extremely black.

There are some Christians who are not guilty of boasting and planning for tomorrow apart from God, but they are very much worried about it. This is to shut out God equally with

the boasting schemer. The one is sure to do great things without God; the other is forgetting that his Lord is able to take care of him, and will let nothing happen to him except what is for his good.

"What is your life?" "Of what nature is your life?" James answers this question in such a way as to make his readers think. Life is a mystery. What is the purpose of life? The Bible alone gives us the answers to this question. The chief purpose is to trust Christ as Saviour and to bring glory to God.

"What is your life?" This is a very important question. It has to do with the uncertainty of life and the consequent importance of timing everything thereto. It has concerned serious-minded people throughout the ages. It deserves and demands our attention. It challenges the whole plan and program of life for us. It warns all to take God into account, to intertwine life with Him, and to tie in with the eternal lest life be lost and its labor spent in vain.

I. Life Is A Preparation.

1. Prepare to live.

Your purpose should be to make life count for what is noblest and best. The highest life is impossible apart from Christ.

2. Prepare to die.

(1) Our days are few.

God conceals their number. We live as if we expected to abide here always. The philosopher Seneca said, "We are always complaining that our days are few and acting as though there would be no end of them." Another said, "All men count all men mortal except themselves."

(2) Time mispent can never be recalled.

(3) We must give an account for the way we use our time.

(4) Our admission into heaven depends upon our preparation.

Life is but a preparatory school for the college of eternity.

II. Life Is A Pursuit.

We are ever reaching out after something.

1. Some pursue pleasure.

Bulwer said, "A life of pleasure makes even the strongest mind frivolous." Shenstone said, "What leads to unhappiness is making pleasure the chief aim in life." The tragedy of such a life is that it moves among sublimities but never sees them; plays marbles with diamonds but never suspects their value. Poem-- "Pleasures Are As Poppies Spread, etc."

2. Some pursue worldly praise.

Some are diseased with the notion that only publicly touted folks are interesting. Dante said, "Worldly fame is but a wind that blows now this way, now that, and changes name as it changes direction." Worldly praise is fickle and the bouquets the public throws are frequently followed by brickbats. None can afford the feast today that brings a fast tomorrow; the comedy today that ends in a tragedy tomorrow; the gain today that brings a loss tomorrow; to miss the crown tomorrow by refusing the cross today.

3. Some pursue ease.

It is the law of this universe that nothing good is gotten or held by an easy means. Great is the danger and disgrace of abandoning one's self to a life of ease in the face of the wonderings, wanderings, and wickedness of this head-dizzy, body-weary, heart-hungry, soul-sick world with so many who are untaught and mistaught, unled and misled. The race of life is not to be run in short heats

amid the plaudits of spectators. Life is an endurance test and its hardest stretches are run without applause, amid misunderstanding, abuse, discouragement, and disillusionment.

III. Life Is A Power.

A life is always sending out influence, as a magnet sends out attraction, or the sun sends out light and heat. The question of whether or not you are a Christian is not a question for you alone, but also for every friend and associate you have. No one can measure the silent forces that go out from one's personality and take hold upon other lives and influence them. "No man liveth unto himself and no man dieth unto himself." Influence is that silent, subtle, sovereign something that goes out from every life like heat from a fire or fragrance from a flower and gives shape and color to other lives.

1. The reality of influence.

Every individual has some influence either for good or bad. By our influence we increase or diminish the sum total of human happiness. Our influence may be involuntary or voluntary.

2. The responsibility for influence.

We are responsible for our thoughts, feelings, words, and actions. Men have tried to evade their acts and have blamed others for their misdeeds.

(1) Influence is permanent in its character.

When once exerted, it cannot be destroyed or undone. Whether for good or evil, influence survives the stroke of death, outlives the pulverizing process of the grave, and will be found working when time hushes and eternity dawns. A dying man, whose life had been poorly spent said, "My influence, oh, that my influence could be gathered up and buried with me." It could not be done. He had put in motion an agency which he was powerless to arrest.

(2) Influence involves others.

One cannot touch another life without leaving a mark upon it. One cannot live a pure and righteous life without somebody being helped and the world being made better by it.

Years ago, the jurist, Erskine, was pleading a case. He was widely known for his eloquence and persuasiveness. But as he tried to speak, he stammered, hesitated, and faltered. The courtroom was crowded with spectators who said in their hearts, "Erskine has failed." Just then a new glow came into his face. A new inspiration possessed him. He rose to the heights of eloquence. He almost lifted the people out of their seats in one of the greatest perorations his generation had ever heard. When he had finished, someone asked, "How is it that after you had stammered and hesitated and faltered, you came back in such a marvelous way?" He said, "As I hesitated, I seemed to hear my mother leaning over the jasper walls saying, 'Speak, Erskine, speak.' I heard my wife say, 'Speak, Erskine, speak.' I heard my children say, 'Speak, Father, speak.' When I realized that those who are depending on me were calling to me, it gave me a new inspiration."

If we will only listen, we will hear calls that are challenging and inspiring. And certainly, if we will listen, we will hear a voice distinct and clear above all other voices--the voice of Jesus saying, "Speak a good word for Me wherever you go."

God tells us what we ought to say, namely, "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." This verse tells us that it is not wrong to plan for the future, but that we must ever remember that we are in the hands of the Lord. Also, that death may overtake us at any time, so we must plan accordingly. Let us always acknowledge that

our times are in His hand. Everything we do is subject to His will. The will of the Lord may be altogether different than we anticipate. If we plan without Him, He can put mountains of difficulty in our way. If we plan with Him, He can remove every obstacle. He knows what is best for us. Whatever His will, let us accept it graciously, not as something to be endured, but something to be enjoyed, because we know He means it all for our good. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28.

How vain it is for a man to boast of any accomplishment, apart from God! There is nothing that we are, and nothing that we can do, save as He leads the way, and permits, and gives power. Men boast of many things. They boast about what they have done, what they are doing, and what they intend to do. They boast about their capabilities, their possessions and their achievements.

From verse seventeen we learn that to know the Word and even to teach it to others is not enough; we must do what it teaches. This is perhaps the most striking verse in the Bible on the sin of omission. To know right and not to do it is as sinful as doing wrong. Knowledge brings responsibility. The moment we know the will of God, it makes us responsible to do it. The better we know and the more we understand, the greater our responsibility. When we do a wrong, not knowing it to be wrong, it is wrong nevertheless. But when we do a wrong, knowingly, it makes the wrong doubly serious. When it comes to doing good, many think they have the liberty to choose between doing it and not doing it. This verse says, the knowledge of good makes it a sin if we do not do it.
