

Introduction

A very short passage today, but doesn't it pack a punch? I hope you've been enjoying the book of James as I have. It's been challenging hasn't it. What he challenges us with makes us squirm and it makes us a bit uncomfortable, doesn't it. Because he reveals our actions, our motives, our attitudes, our desires, and asks us are they in line with God's word? Are we living out what we're learning from God's words. and in particular, in chapter 4 James has been calling his brothers and sisters in Christ to be humble. And we've just heard about how we are to be humble in the way we speak to one another, and now James is challenging us to think about how to humble ourselves before the Lord in the way that we make plans.

Who is James asking to listen? It's the people who say.. Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money. I'm thinking, this looks pretty similar to how we would make a plan, it's look like very normal planning. In fact to some of you, this planning isn't quite up to the standard. Where are the specific details of these plans, some of us plan right down to the minute. But these plans look pretty reasonable. Their goal is to make money, and here's how they're going to do it. We plan to make money and save it, ~~and whether it's planning to do extra studying to get qualifications,~~ we plan to find the right job, We plan what we're doing tomorrow, we plan our holidays, we plan our futures. In fact, if you're parents you would be very keen to see this kind of future planning in your children - you're happy when they start thinking about decisions that they need to make now, decisions that will affect their future. ~~It's a relief for parents when their kids start thinking about these things.~~ This kind of planning that James expresses here seems normal to us, it's sensible and good planning. So why is it that James tells us off for this?

Verse 14 James highlights the underlying problems that happen when we make plans like in verse 13 and the problems seems to be more with our attitude to making plans, than what our actual plans are.

He begins by getting us to realise 2 things:-

1. That we don't know what's going to happen tomorrow
2. That our life is fragile

Reality no. 1 - what do you know about tomorrow?

Our world teaches us to believe and have the attitude that we can control our lives. You can make your dreams come true, with your hard work, with good planning, you can do it. You can be in control of your future, we have forecasts for many things, It was amazing when I went to some night markets in Hong Kong, there was a whole long row of tables with fortune tellers and psychics, and there were always people there trying to learn about their future - so that they can plan their future. And it's not just in the east we see people trying to predict their future, here in the West we have endless forecasters trying to predict the stock market, trying to predict house prices, trying to make certain a future so that we can be in control, so that we can plan. But the world is telling us a lie - we can't be in ^{Complete} control of ^{Our} the future, no matter how hard we try to.

There are too many examples in our lives, in the lives of our friends where we've seen the truth that we don't know what tomorrow will bring.

We prepare and plan for a lovely sunny day only to wish that we had an umbrella when it starts raining. Or perhaps you had great plans for your life, but you didn't get into the uni course you wanted, or you got injured and it stopped you from having that sports career you so badly wanted, or perhaps you thought you were going to be in that job for a while longer but you were let go, or perhaps your plans were to be married by 25 - but that hasn't happened yet, or you're married and you don't even have a Partner, or you didn't plan that your partner would have

depression or anxiety, or you didn't expect that they would be abusive. or perhaps you wanted to have a family, - but you've not been able to get pregnant. ~~Or perhaps you plan your life~~

~~where you or a loved one gets hit with the news of a long term illness, or perhaps you plan to live your life to a good age of 80 only to be given the news that you don't have long to~~

There are endless ways the world reminds us that we're not in control and we can't
Predict the future.

James says Hear the truth - you really don't know what's going to happen tomorrow.

Reality no. 2 - what is your life?

The second thing James challenges us with is to reminds us that our life is fragile. That our life is like a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. We can't assume that we'll be alive tomorrow, or in the next year to make our 2 year goals. Our lives are uncertain and can be taken away at any time.

Now those are pretty somber realities aren't they. They're not really things that we want to hear or perhaps even believe. It can be too easy for us to live life ignoring these realities. And we could keep on going making plans in this way but we can't ignore these realities if we want to live humbly before the Lord.

Can you see now the reason why the example James gives us is sounding arrogant. How they've spoken demonstrates that they have a confidence in themselves. If your plans work out as you've planned, then you pat yourself on your back saying good job! To assume that it's all gone well because of your skills and good planning.

Is boastful and arrogant thinking! You see the problem isn't that we make plans, it's that we make plans with no reference to God and we are arrogant because we think we can make these things happen.

Or do you make plans thinking you're in total control? P

How do you make plans? Does your understanding of God and his word inform the plans you make? How are we to plan without boasting and arrogance? Just before I answer that question I want to address another feeling other than boastfulness that you may be feeling based on the things that I've just said, perhaps after hearing that we're not in control and our lives are fragile, maybe you feel scared and uncertain but this is not the response James wants us to have, he doesn't want us to Replace planning with indecision, the beauty of James answering v 15 is that it addresses our boastfulness and our uncertainty. This is what you ought to say... If it is the Lord's will we will live and do this or that.

If it's the Lord's will

We have a very brief time this morning to get into this packed verse and there are lots of things to say on this point.. so I'll briefly touch on a few points but continue to discuss these things at home, or in your growth group, or please come and speak with me about these things... What does it mean to make plans by saying if it is the Lord's will and how does this stop us being boastful and help us in our uncertainty.

1. So my first point is that James says you're not the one in control, but we know the one who is. God's word teaches us that the future is in HIS hands. God is the one who is in control. We don't know what will happen tomorrow, But God does. Saying if it is the Lord's will we will live, and do this or that - shows that we understand that God the creator of the world is in control over our lives, and over everything that happens in the world.

SO as we make plans, how definite are our plans in our minds? How do we respond when our plans aren't quite the way that we planned? Is it part of our thinking that our plans are written in pencil not pen? That they could change, and that when they do, the unexpected won't be devastating? That we understand that it is part of God's plans? Now, please don't hear me say that you shouldn't feel devastated if unexpected things get thrown at you in life, because the reality is we will be devastated, we will be sad and grieve that loss. But we can continue to live life and be comforted in knowing that God is in control, that he's not a malicious God trying to make your life terrible, but that he is always loving and always good, and that he has got in you in his hands.
2. My second point is that saying 'If it's the Lord's will' isn't some kind of magic words that you put at the end of all the plans you have and you'll be doing the right thing. If you've been in church for a

while, sometimes this phrase, If it's the Lord's will, or someone saying God willing, can feel a bit of a cliché, or just something that is said, but there's actually no real meaning. And it's not something that we have to say all the time, like, I'll meet you at the movies at 7pm, God willing, or I'll be home at 5pm, if it is the Lord's will. We'll be singing the last song after this talk, God willing. What is important is that when you make plans, you understand that it is all happening only if it is the Lord's will. And I think it's good to occasionally use the words, so that we don't forget, but not too often so that it becomes meaningless.

3. The third thing is that when we say if it is the Lord's will, it should make us think differently to how we make plans. Because we're thinking about the Lord's will. What would the Lord's will be in this situation. It helps us to examine our intentions, our goals when we put them alongside God's will. ~~What are we trying to achieve in life?~~ It's a basic question for us to ask

about our goals and intentions, how do my goals and intentions measure up to the Lord's will in so far as I know it from God's word. As someone who trusts and follows Jesus we aim to Serve the Lord and to please the Lord in the goals and plans that we make. Is this a godly thing to want to do, or is it a selfish thing? Is it something pleasing to God or is it something that I want? Or are our plans aligning with what the world says to want? It challenges our decision making and plans.

And this brings us to verse 17. It's a warning that James has written throughout his book. It's a warning to say that you've heard and listened to God's word and so now go and live and act it out. If you know God's plans and will for your life, and you don't do it, then you are sinning. You are ignoring God in your life. I encourage you to think about your plans and decisions.

Is God saying to you be involved with this ministry, but you don't do it because you're comfortable as you are?

Is God saying go and help someone in need - but you don't do it because it's not convenient for you right now?

Is God calling you to be generous in some way, but you push that thought aside.

Are we making plans that suit our desires and wants, rather than making plans that are in line with God's word and will?

As we trust and follow Jesus, let's remember that God is in control, and that knowing he has our life in his hands, should affect the way we plan our lives.