

## A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES

### Sermon # 9

#### “Right and Wrong Ways To Deal With the Future”

#### James 4:13-17

Mankind has always demonstrated an almost insatiable desire to know the future. Psychics in this country rake in millions of dollars annually because people want to know what the future holds. Probably every major newspaper in this country runs a daily horoscope for its readers.

Even Christians are fascinated by a desire to know what the future holds. Dwight Pentecost, a long time faculty member of Dallas Seminary, is held by many to be a premier scholar on biblical prophecy. He stated that when he spoke on some subject other than prophecy the attendance at his meetings was greatly diminished. He related that he had made a study of the New Testament of every reference to the second coming of Christ. In his study he stated *“I was struck anew with the fact that almost without exception, when the second coming of Christ is mentioned in the New Testament, it is followed by an exhortation to godliness and holy living.”* [Charles Swindoll. *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart and 1,501 Other Stories.*(Nashville: Word, 1998) p. 227]

That is exactly the point that James is making, knowing the future is not near as important as being prepared for the future.

Perhaps all of us know at least one person who claims to be an atheist. Although I must admit that it seems odd to me that someone would take the time to take a stand against something or someone that they say does not exist.

The concept of atheism is still a strange idea to most of us! Atheism is of course the denial of the existence of God. The word atheist is made up of two Greek words *theos* – God and *a* – the letter of negation and thus the meaning of *“no god.”* Scripture refers to those people in this way, *“the fool hath said in his heart there is no God.”* Psalm 14:1.

Avowed Atheist, are not that prevalent even in our modern world. But perhaps one of the most prevalent sins of our modern day is simply leaving God out of our lives. When one talks, plans and even implements those plans with a total disregard for the will of God, regardless of what they may say they believe, that man is in practice an atheist. The test of what one believes is not found in what one says, but in how one lives. Many people today profess to believe in God, but nevertheless continue to live as if there were not.

We discovered last week that it is a wonderful thing to live in uncommon grace.

But there is a tendency to live with the benefits of God’s grace, yet not acknowledge it. It is all too easy to get to the point as a Christian that you start living as if God does not matter. Now of course we would never say that in words, yet we live like it. We can get so use to the grace of God that we take it for granted. Some has suggested that the steps are that we

- Experience Grace
- Become Accustomed to Grace
- Expect Grace
- Finally we think we deserve Grace

The situation attitudes the James addresses in this passage are not so very different from the attitudes of today, when people live in total disregard for the wishes of an all-knowing and all-powerful God. In this passage we see both right and wrong ways to deal with the future.

The Wrong way to Deal with the Future

*Three Common Mistakes in Dealing With the Future.*

Mistake Number One: Planning Without God. (v. 13)

“Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”;

What is under consideration here is not open defiance of God, but of an utter disregard for God. This is an attitude of arrogant self-sufficiency. It is possible for one to acknowledge God’s existence with their mouth and yet live their daily life in such a fashion as to deny in a practical way all that they say.

James rebukes this arrogant self-sufficiency by saying, “come now,” today we would say, “*Oh, come on now.*” It is a plea for re-examination, expresses disapproval of this way of thinking.

It is directed to “you who say,” literally it is “*the ones continuing to say.*” The present tense signifies that it is a habitual practice that needs to be corrected.

By rehearsing their plans he reveals that they treat the future as something that they can not only know, but have control over. At least in their minds the plans have already been implemented. They have decided on a precise time, “today or tomorrow,” a particular place, “such a city,” the predetermined duration of the stay, “spend a year there,” the planned activity, “buy and sell,” and the profit they expect to gain, “and make a profit.” The complete picture is one in which the will of God is not even considered. These men who undoubtedly are decent, respectable, even consider themselves religious men, but in their daily lives they live as if God had no place in their plans. To thus live independently of God is to live as an atheist regardless of the beliefs one may say that they hold dear.

*Mistake Number One: Planning Without God.....*

Mistake Number Two: Presuming To Know The Future. (v. 14)

“whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.”

I began this morning by noting America’s fascination with psychics. One of the most famous of America’s psychics was Jeane Dixon. In late 1996 Dixon announced plans to join the 1-900 telephone network with her own “*Jeane Dixon’s Psychic Network*” unfortunately she did not foresee her own imminent death. She died January 25, 1997 apparently unexpectedly.[Watchman Fellowship Profile. *Psychics*. [www.watchman.org](http://www.watchman.org)]

The key word to understanding verse fourteen is the word, “know.” The Greek word conveys the idea of “*knowing for sure or being absolutely certain.*” Since it is impossible, even for the supposed psychics of “Psychic Hot Line” to know what the future holds, their decision making is highly presumptuous. The futility of their attitude is shown by exposing the assumptions on which it rest.

1. There is a failure to comprehend the purpose of life.

“For what *is* your life?” With a question James seeks to lead us by answering it to a proper attitude toward life. Implicit in our Scripture lesson is James’ answer: Life is a gift. And, Life is opportunity. The way we look at life makes all the difference in the world.

*“Alfred Adler told a story — an intriguing encounter that took place in the main train station of inner Austria, back in the early 1930’s. A well-dressed businessman got off the train and was walking through the lobby, when an alcoholic beggar stopped him and asked for just enough money for one more meal. The businessman said he usually did not respond to such requests, but he would this time on one condition. He said, “Tell me, how has an intelligent-looking person, as you appear to be, allowed yourself to get into these straits?” With that the beggar turned red in the face with anger and responded, “Listen, if you had happen to you what has happened to me, you wouldn’t be asking that question. You would be exactly where I am.... I was one of several children. My mother died when I was young. My father was an abusive and very cruel man. The state finally took my brothers and my sisters and me away from him and put us in an orphanage. During World War I a battle raged around the orphanage, the building caught fire, and I had to flee into the night. I have never seen any of my family since. I don’t know whether they are alive or they are dead. It’s been that way all my life. Every time I get on my feet, something knocks me down. If you had happen to you what’s happened to me, you would be standing in these very shoes.” The businessman said, “It’s interesting that you should say that, because as you tell your story, it does, in fact, parallel my own.” Shocked that their stories were so closely related, they began to talk more fully. As you probably have anticipated by now, they discovered that they were in fact brothers, separated years before and now, mysteriously, their lives had intersected. Dr. Adler used this story to raise the perplexing question, “Why is it that some humans respond so differently to the same circumstances?” Here were two individuals who had the same genetic background, who had much the same things happen to them, and yet, while one had allowed those circumstances to crush him to the ground, the other had somehow used events that went against him as energy to move forward. Why did these two brothers respond so differently to the same set of circum-stances?” [Chuck Jones. “You Can Make Plans Providentially.” ([www.horizonsnet.org/sermons/james09.html](http://www.horizonsnet.org/sermons/james09.html)). pp. 3-4.]*

It is how we look at life makes all the difference in the world. We often run across people in life who have an attitude problem. We have all met young people who are doomed for a life of misery because they have developed or inherited a rotten attitude. We have all be around adults we do not like to be around, and if we HAVE to be around them then we think, “*I wish they would realize how much*

*their attitude shows and how much it effects everything and everyone around them!*" Because we realize their attitude makes their lives and the lives everyone around them miserable.

It is true such an attitude and negative outlook on life is a failure to comprehend that life is a gift and an opportunity. Modern man seems to have no real sense of accountability to God, and no awareness that life is a gift from God. He forgets that the Lord gave, and that the Lord can just as easily take away.

2. There is a failure to comprehend the complexity of life.

Solomon warns about the sin of presumption in Proverbs 27:1, "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth." We tend to forget that we are just finite human being. A biblical example of this type of thinking is found in the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21). In this parable Jesus tells of a rich man who was so wealthy that his barns were filled to overflowing. He said to himself, "I will pull down my barns and build greater, and they will store all my crops and my goods." But the Lord said, "You fool, this night your will be required of you." In the parable the man is called a fool, not because he was planning for the future, but because he thought he was in control of his future. To fail to consider God in one's plans is to pledge one's self to ultimate disaster.

3. There is a failure to comprehend the uncertainty of Life.

The merchants not only have assumed that they know what will happen tomorrow, but have assumed they will be alive tomorrow.

Underlying this whole attitude is the assumption that our life span is guaranteed. People sometimes speak glibly about the biblical "three score and ten" of Psalm 90:10 as if it were some kind of guarantee. They resume on life and they presume on health when in fact neither is guaranteed.

James reminds us that life is life a vapor. The word "vapor" is used to describe a puff of smoke, steam rising from hot water or like breath coming from one's nostrils on a cold day. The Bible uses other terms to describe the shortness of human life such as, "breath" Job 7:7, "cloud," Job 7:9, "grass," Psalms 103:15, "shadow," Psalm 102:11, and "smoke," Psalm 102:3. In the face of the brevity of human life it is utter foolishness to ignore an unchanging, never dying God as one proudly plans his few brief moments of life. The advice of David is timely, "So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." (Ps. 90:12)

Since life is so short, we cannot afford to "spend our lives," and we certainly do not want to "waste our lives." We must invest our lives in those things that are eternal.

*Mistake Number Two: Presuming To Know The Future and...*

Mistake Number Three: Delay Of What Should Be Done Today. (v. 17)

"Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin."

What is being described here is what we call the "sin of omission." Sin is not only doing something wrong; it is the failure to do something right.

When you know someone who needs a word of encouragement and you withhold it.

When you know your wrong about something yet you refuse to apologize for it.

When you know someone needs forgiveness yet you will not give it.

When you know someone who needs the truth yet you withhold it.

James says when you know the right thing to do and do not do it – it is a sin!

Hundreds of years earlier the writer of Proverbs had written, Proverbs 3:27 “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, When it is in the power of your hand to do so.”

Knowledge of what is right and the ability to do it creates the obligation to do so. Their failure to have such a submissive attitude leaves them without excuse.

#### THE RIGHT WAY TO DEAL WITH THE FUTURE (vv. 15-16)

First, we need to acknowledge God's will for our lives. “Instead you *ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that. (16) But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.”

“*If it is God's will*” needs to be more than a statement from our lips, it should be an attitude of our hearts. James is reminding us that our dependence should be on the Lord rather than a well thought out plan.

Christians are often guilty of not only leaving God out of their planning but of boasting about what they were going to do.

#### Conclusion

The Bible has written the word NOW in large letters throughout the Gospel message. Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:2 “... *now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*” The Time for obedience is always now!!!