

Boasting About Tomorrow

¹³ Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—
¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. (James 4:13-17)

As you and I go through the many activities of an ordinary day, we make so many, many spontaneous decisions. Most of them are not life-changing decisions, but they are all important in some way, and all of them do have consequences.

We often make them quickly, because the situations dictate that it be so. And it all happens so quickly and so ordinarily that we barely realize the effect of what we are actually doing.

The reality is that we have conducted ourselves as if we were the sole author and controller of our daily existence. And that kind of behavior is what God wants to warn us about here in these words.

Such behaviors are a subtle, but very real form of “pride”. The kind of “pride” that is clever, hiding itself within the dozens of miscellaneous activities and decisions that we make each day, becoming our “normal behavior”.

And no, we don’t recognize that it really is “pride” that’s taking place, because we don’t mean to intentionally leave God out of our decision making and our activities. We just get caught up in our own plans.

The truth is, from our earliest ages, we live and move and have our being each day as if we really are the one who is “in charge of our private world”, that we and our “free will” have power and authority over everything we think and say and do.

And I marvel at our foolishness, especially my own! I have read and studied these scriptures for so many years now, you would think that I would better

understand the real truth about the many things that take place each day, the truth that beneath the surface of daily life, God, our loving Father is always at work guiding and directing all those many events that are taking place each day.

Yes, I know that you and I really do have a “will”. And we do exercise our will and we do all the things that we do each day. But folks, the simple truth from these scriptures tells us that along with our Will, there is also another Will taking place, a mysterious guidance reaching in from the spiritual realms of God into every occurrence of our lives, causing things to take place in a “concurrence” of effect, God’s Will and our Will coming together and somehow, becoming one.

Our Westminster Confession of Faith describes it by saying,

God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

Simply put, there really is a very intricately designed working relationship between the activities of God and the activities of man, a working relationship in which, yes, we make decisions, and we carry them out all throughout our day, but within all that we do, God is also guiding our activities in a direction that He wants us to go.

And no, I don’t really know how that mystery works, but oh, how blessed we are when we give up and surrender our wretched Will and join God in His.

Thinking back over my life, I confess that I have gone about most of my days saying and doing what I thought to be my own plans. Sometimes I was successful in those plans, sometimes I was not. And I just accepted those results as being whatever they were. Thankfully, now as I look back at some of those events, I can see where God had reached in and guided the outcomes.

And folks, that is so whether we are talking about personal matters of life or business decisions that we make. God’s hand really is in each of them.

Being a businessman most all of my working years, I was accustomed to forming plans for our business activities, a "Tactical plan" for the short term, and a "Strategic Plan" for the long term. And my co-workers and I really tried to live by those plans, making annual "budgets" based on those plans, and even making long term plans, hoping against hope that unseen obstacles would not arise to change the plans we'd made.

This COVID19 pandemic is one of the best examples of how our plans can be changed. Businesses across our world made plans for 2020, but none of those plans worked out. None of them!

Our family, along with several other friends and family members had made plans for a 2020 cruise to Alaska. And we had actually paid money ahead for some of those expenses. But God had other plans for this world that we had not counted on.

Sadly, many of my Christian friends think very differently than I do on this question about who it is that makes all the decisions of daily life, especially those who hold to strong beliefs about "Free Will". To many of them, the occurrences and the outcomes of their daily activities are just random occurrences, determined by some mystical form of "chance", or "fate".

And too often, I have heard some of them say to the effect that "I only consult God on the big stuff". "He expects us to take care of the smaller matters of life".

And often, when they do pray, their prayer is mostly to ask God for His "rubber stamp" on the plans they have already made.

And again, I do confess to you, that too often I am personally guilty of many of those same behaviors. I like to make plans. And I do have hopes and dreams that I want to come true. And I go about my day as if I were the real "decision maker" within my life, without consulting God until my plans are well along their way. Then I talk to Him.

And in making wrong decisions, I have had friends console me by saying that it's alright because everybody does that. But folks, we know that just because that is the way that most people do something doesn't make it right. God really does want you and me to acknowledge that He is sovereign, and He wants us

to talk to Him first before we do things. Remember those precious words in Proverbs 3 that we have quoted so often.

⁵Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding.
⁶In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Those words are ever so important folks. Yes, believing in the Lord is what we do as Christians! But this goes so much further than just believing. This is “trusting” in the Lord. And this word “trust” means that we not only “believe in Him”, but that we also are “depending” upon Him to actually direct everything that we think and say and do.

And if that be so, then we really ought to invite Him into the conversation about our hopes and dreams and plans long before we start to put matters into motion.

“Trusting” acknowledges that the Lord Jesus already has a plan in place and that His plan is so much, much better than our own. And that our plan needs to join in with His plan, forfeiting any part of our plan in order to make room for His.

But again, it is so easy for us, in the rush of our day, to become distracted and to begin to behave as if we were the only “decision makers” that counted. And it would seem that that is when the truth of the words here in verse 16 rears its head.

¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.
(James 4:16)

I confess to you that the word “arrogance” seems a bit harsh. Because in most of our minds, we think of “arrogance” as being intentional and purposefully offensive. And yes, arrogance is often that way! But the question still needs to be asked by each of us, “Is this verse talking about me?” “Am I arrogant?” “Do I have arrogance quietly residing within my soul?”

It may be. The dictionary describes arrogant people as being prideful, self-centered, conceited, egotistical and boastful. And we have often witnessed that manner of behavior in people.

But arrogance is also a very clever form of sin that doesn't always present itself in those obvious behaviors. Arrogance can also be very "subtle", and almost imperceptible. And that can be especially so within the heart and the character of a genuine believer, "arrogance" manifesting itself in quiet and seemingly harmless ways, such that we might never recognize that it is present within us.

Recall that most all the words given in this Book of James are addressed specifically to believers, believers like you and me. And here, God is giving a warning to us as believers that, yes, those of us who do earnestly believe in Him and who do earnestly desire to be "good Christians", can not only "stumble into", but can actually live out most all the days of our lives bound up within subtle forms of arrogant behaviors.

And may I counsel you and me that we are not usually the best source to ask this question about, "am I arrogant"! When it comes to criticisms of ourselves, we, too often, are not completely honest with ourselves. So then, if we are seriously seeking to know truth about ourselves, the very best source to go to is the One who knows us best, God Himself.

And in Psalm 139, we're given the perfect prayer to ask such questions about ourselves. Listen carefully to the words of Psalm 139, beginning in verse 1.

1 O LORD, you have searched me and known me! 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. 3 You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. 4 Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. (Psalm 139:1-4)

And then in verse 23 of Psalm 139 is a prayer,

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!
24 And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting! (Psalm 139:23-24 (ESV))

If we really want to know if arrogance abides within us, then God is the one we must go to first for that answer.

Turn back with me to our text and let's consider these words carefully!

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— 14

yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.
(James 4:13-17 (ESV))

To the average reader, plans such as these in verse 13,

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit".
(James 4:13)

These are very ordinary plans, especially if a person works in a field such as "sales". Salesmen and their sales organizations must, of necessity continually be on the look-out for "new markets" for their products. And it is not a sin for us to make plans, even very detailed plans.

Also, having been in a school environment most of my life, I'm reminded that every good teacher needs to make plans for their teaching schedules, planning for the subject matter that they will teach in September and in December and in March and in May.

Planning is such a very important thing to do. So then, yes, plans are good. And plans in themselves, are not sinful. The warnings given here about how sinful behavior can creep into our planning process has not so much to do with the plans themselves, but with our "presumption" that the times and the activities that we are planning are solely within our own hands and our own control, that if we plan it well and execute it well, our plan will turn out well. But folks, that kind of thinking is a special form of sin that these scriptures call "presumptuous", or the "sin of presumption".

A "presumptuous spirit" ignores, sometimes even denies, that God is anywhere to be found, denies that He truly is sovereign, denies that He has plans and desires for the activities and the behaviors of our lives.

And the very time that we begin to think and to say such things as, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit", or perhaps more appropriate for us, we might say things like, "I think I'll move to Jackson and find a job there." Or even, "I want a

new truck or a new car. I think I'll be on the lookout for one". The "sin of presumption" is rearing its head.

Such underlying thinking seems to believe that the events of this world truly are just "random chance occurrences", that perhaps we might, "by chance", "get lucky" and find our fortunes.

But folks, these scriptures tell us clearly that such is not the way that God governs the daily affairs of man. Not at all! God is "Sovereign", and His "Providential" Hand is ever and always at work guiding and directing every activity that takes place.

And if our heart and our mind has not first brought God and His plans fully into a consideration, then we have probably crossed the line onto the sinful path of "presumption" and "arrogance", and we are denying the sovereignty and the providence of God.

I'm reminded of the parable that Jesus told in Luke 12 about the "presumptuous" farmer. There He said,

16 . . . "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, 17 and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' 18 And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" 20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'
(Luke 12:16-20)

And also in Mark 8, we read,

36 "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? (Mark 8:36)

Look with me again at these words of James 4, and note carefully the manner in which God worded verses 13 and 14. These two verses are intentionally set in direct opposition to each other so that you and I won't be confused about the point God wants to make to us. Verses 13 and 14,

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— 14

yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. (James 13-14)

God cannot be any more clear to us. We really do not know what tomorrow will bring. Our life really is like a “mist”, a “vapor”. And while we might think that we can “catch life in our hands and control it”, this comparison of our life and our plans being like a morning “mist” is so fitting.

God’s words are clear. The moments that we live each day and our length of days on the earth, no matter how long they may be, are still only an evaporating “mist” as compared to eternity. And “eternity” is where God lives. And in these words, God is exhorting you and me to join with Him, and to have Him and to have eternity always in view, in every thought, word and behavior of our day.

And in everything we do in this life, He want us to always remember the warning He gives to us in Ecclesiastes 12, that He

14 . . . will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:14 (NASB))

Again, as you and I make our plans, perhaps we really are not intentionally trying to leave the Lord out of our considerations. But please understand that by our presumptuous words and behaviors, we might as well have been intentional. If we live every moment by our own wits and abilities, are we not doing the same thing as those who intentionally declare that they will be the “masters of their own destiny”? If we look and act and behave like them, are we not one of them?

You and I must begin today to change our behavior. Verse 17 tells us, that whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him, or for her, it is sin. You and I now know these truths about asking God to guide us in all the plans that we make each day. And now, as we first rise up each day, we must pray and ask God to help us and to guide us in all those things that we will be doing during that day. And we must

⁵Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding.

⁶In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)