

Coach House Church BEACONS

BOASTING ABOUT TOMORROW

30TH APRIL 2020

Hello, everyone. Today, I thought it would be fitting to talk about our plans in life. Often, we can become a bit prideful towards how life should go for us. Perhaps it is a product of modern or post-modern society, but there is a lot of emphasis on self-sufficiency and independence in life. Politically or socially, these are big, bold, key phrases that have defined more than a few national identities.

Now, today, when we are all secluded in our homes and life has clearly not turned out how we declared it should have been a few months ago, I want to take the time to bring a short passage from the Bible into this. The Epistle of James is a letter said to be written by James, the brother of Jesus, and it has a general theme on persevering through difficult times. Let us turn to James Chapter 4, verses 13 to 17, where the passage speaks on tempering our attitude towards life:

13 Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. 17 If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them.

This passage is a warning against an attitude of prideful independence from God. The theme here is that our attitude towards life should be emphasized by general humility and a dependence on God.

Since ancient times till today, there are merchants and salesmen who go around from city to city to make a living. Now, James here is not denying this career in life, as we all need to take on respectable careers to feed ourselves in this world. What James is speaking against, however, is a kind of arrogance of the heart. James speaks against a heart that seeks control over an individual's lifetime, daring to plan all things for themselves.

For both ancient merchants and modern-day entrepreneurs, confidence is key to successful business. And that's certainly fine. But what kind of merchant or entrepreneur thinks that they can account for every single resource they have and close every business deal they will encounter, all within the first few budget plans they draw up? Here's one answer: someone who has too much faith in what they imagine life to be.

James, in this passage, is not saying that it is wrong to plan for the future. No, it is wise to understand your situation and make plans accordingly. However, it is foolish to ignore your human limitations and impose your absolute will over the future. This may be hard to swallow, but the truth of the matter is that your present life is never fully under your own control and your future will never be solely up to you to decide. James here is asking us to remember that life is like mist, a bit of moisture in the air that is here one moment and gone the next. This is not a new idea, and has been reiterated throughout the Bible that human life is delicate. Life is like a shadow at sunset or grass that shrivels up. For us people on earth, it does not last very long, and, as I am sure many of us have realized, our lives are not such small things that they bend in whatever shapes we desire.

Life is hard, and James here is saying that we are being arrogant if we have an inner attitude of living and moving as we please. Who are we to think that we can control time and space, as to make the world serve us? This is the kind of proud independence and boastfulness that James is speaking against, applicable not just during his time but also our own.

For Christians, whose lives are supposed to be committed to God as part of the package of Christian living, these principles James is talking about are even more

important. For Christians, it is simply wrong to think that we can move and live independently without an awareness of God in our lives. As Christians, we plan for events every day, like everyone else who are not Christians. However, Christians should never make up a plan that assumes independence from the God who sustains our lives. We believe in a God who is more than human, after all. We believe in a Creator God, who has a grand plan for not just humanity as a collective whole, but for each one of us individually.

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There are many reasons why we plan for our lives. It could be that we are dissatisfied and stressed. It could be that we are compulsive worriers or that, to put it bluntly, we are control freaks. It could be that we are driven and ambitious. Is there a bit of unreasonable self-sufficiency in our lifestyle? Are we the type of people who think that something must succeed or the world would have failed us?

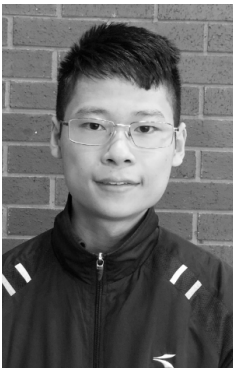
Whatever the case, we need to seriously take a moment and ask ourselves what kind of attitude we are taking on when we face the future. The theme of the passage, again, is humility towards God and dependence on His grace. The solution is recognizing the concept that our future is out of our control and reliant on the grace of God.

Towards the end of the passage, James seems to suddenly change topics. From going on about boasts and schemes about life, James almost seems to switch gears to how, if people are aware of what good needs to be done, they should do whatever good there is. Otherwise, we would have had sinned.

Of course, this is not just some random afterthought. Rather, this is carrying on from what has just been said. We may now know or be reminded of humility and our dependence on God. However, it is still easy enough to know and not do what we know.

This is James' challenge and concern for all those who call themselves Christians. If we claim to know God's will and sovereignty over our lives, then how can we dare not act upon what we know? We must live out what we know. Our attitudes must reflect the fact that the future is not up to us, that the world will not passively bow to our control, that we are not kings over what little that has been given to us, and that we are accountable to God.

The One whom Christians call Lord should be called Lord for a reason. It is not an empty title, nor is God the Creator or Life-giver meaningless titles. We are accountable to God, so we should plan our lives in a way that actively accounts for God's sovereign will. When we become humble towards the uncertainty of life, there should be comfort in taking the time and effort to rely on God. Amen.



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