

8-20-23

Sermon: Setting Priorities

Scripture: James 4:13-17 CTW: reading 476

Hymns: 473, 474, 475

Theme: Even though we all know that we are born to die, we often lose track of the important things in life. Today James talks to us about setting priorities.

James 4:13-17: 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 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 and brag. All such boasting is evil. 17) **Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.**

I. Introduction: Are We Losing Track of the Important Things?

A. Illustration: We Must Look At Our Lives: There was a man who had a loving wife and three sons. He had worked hard all his life and earned a decent living. Many times he had been passed up for promotions at work because he did not want to sacrifice time with his family for the sake of his career.

At his funeral, his children were all present and spoke highly of him. His wife had nothing but good things to say about him. Yes, she admitted that sometimes things were tough. Occasionally, they had to pinch pennies and they even had to put off Peter to pay Paul.

But she said that his legacy was in his family's devotion to each other. The epitaph on his head stone read, "Here lies a loving and

wonderful father and husband who will be fondly remembered for setting his priorities well, and because of that, sorely missed.”

As I read that illustration, I thought about the epitaphs that would be on other people’s headstones. I came to the conclusion that I do not think I will ever find a headstone that would read something like, “I wish I had spent more time at work.” or “I wish I had spent more time away from my family.”

B. The point is, even though we all know that we are born to die, we often lose track of the important things in life.

Proverbs 27:1 Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day it may bring forth.

We all should know by now that while we can certainly spend hours and hours planning what we will do, where we will go, etc., but God will remind us that He is in charge, and it is His leading and scheduling that we should all pay most attention to.

I know you have heard me repeat the advice that says before our foot hits the floor in the morning we should all be in prayer asking the Holy Spirit to guide every step we take. Doing this puts our focus where it must be from the start of the day until the finish.

II. However, we make the mistake of letting life (the world) dictate most of our actions. It is good to have goals in life but we cannot lose sight of the fact that God is in control of every part of our lives. James here describes what most of us have been like in life:

James 4:13 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.” Do you make plans like that? Yes, we all do in one way or another.

A. Our first priority has often been money if we are truly honest with ourselves. Most of us have planned or do

plan for retirement. We scrimp and save and put away for the future.

Or we plan for a vacation and take money that would otherwise be put in the offering plate or used for support of our families and hide it away. What did Jesus teach us about money?

Matthew 6:24 gives us an important reminder: "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

When money becomes our first priority, then we are replacing God as the center point in our lives. When we do that, then what we seek after, **becomes the God in our lives**. Do we truly serve God if we seek money first?

The fact is that we do not know if we are going to wake up tomorrow. For that matter, we do not even know if we are going to be here till the end of this day.

God has numbered the very seconds we will live and his clock is winding down. Pretty soon, time will be up and he will have His final judgment.

Are we really ready for the return of Jesus Christ? Have we sought after him the way we have sought to make our lives and the lives of our families more comfortable?

James 4:14 reminds us of the real truth: "Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while then vanishes."

B. We have been deceived by Satan. His presence on this earth has fooled many into believing that they have plenty of time to decide whether or not to follow Jesus Christ.

While we are like the morning fog, Satan is not. How did he respond to God when God asked Satan where he had been?

Listen to the words of Job 1:7 The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the Lord, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it."

Satan is walking among us. He is present in this world. While we are not able to physically see him, we do know that he is here and 'roaming'. Watch TV news for just a short while and you will see that Satan is very active!

We cannot let Satan deceive us into believing that we have plenty of time. The fact is that we do not know what will happen from one minute to the next.

Life is short no matter how many years we live. Eternity is forever. Our time here needs to be spent preparing for that eternity.

III. Today is THE day that God has given us. Today is the day we are to live for Christ first and then for our families. If it were not for Jesus Christ and His work in our lives, we would not have our families like we have them now.

A. If it were not for Him, we would not have the lives we now have. We owe our very souls to Him and as such, we need to pass on His love, compassion, and mercy in all that we do. Take the time at the end of every day to review what you did and why you did it...odds are you will see room for change!

James 4:15 says: Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

If it is the Lord's will. When we make our plans, do we **constantly and consistently** consider checking with God to see if it is his will? When was the last time you earnestly prayed for his will in your life?

When was the last time you asked him to bless something you were already planning on doing? Was your plan in line with God's will? (Your pastor has "been there, done that!")

B. When we keep Jesus first and foremost in our minds, we allow His guidance in all aspects of our life. While time of trials and persecutions will come, it will be nothing uncommon to man and He will protect and guide us through it.

When we align ourselves with God, something miraculous happens, we lose sight of things that we thought were oh so important. We become more aligned with His good and perfect will in our lives.

His plans have a way of becoming our plans and our communication with God becomes more personal. We begin to realize just how evil our own plans were.

James 4:16 says: As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. When we are filled with our self-pride and make our plans, we boast about it.

C. Our boasting is evil in the perfect eyes of God. If we replaced him with whatever it is we are boasting about, we are worshipping a different God.

Our boasting should be in the Lord and His saving grace. Boasting about our plans when we are out of alignment with God's will is a sin of commission.

James 4:17 concludes: **Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. OUCH! This behavior rises to the level of SIN!**

James also tells us about sins of omission as well. Knowing the good we should do, and then choosing not to do it, or putting it off in hopes that someone else will do it is also a sin.

And the end the result of sin is death. We should keep in mind that "The unbelievers acts of righteousness are like filthy rags to God", so how much filthier, as believers, will our sins be?

IV. So the question of today's lesson becomes "What Are You Omitting from Your Life?"

A. How many times have we walked by the bucket for the Salvation Army at Christmas time... and kept on walking, thinking to ourselves, "Let me take care of my family's wants before I give."

How many of us actually returned to give? When tragedy strikes, we all tend to answer the call, we give of our personal belongings and help families when they lose things like houses and loved ones... but how much is enough? Is it by our standards or God's?

B. How many of us know a family that is having trouble just meeting a bill?

How much difference would a bag of groceries make in a family's life? Simple ways we can make a difference. I have to offer a praise here though, this church, as a whole, has done amazing things with its resources. As individuals we need to demonstrate that same spirit of Christ in our own personal lives.

C. We can conclude this passage with the conclusion that "While it is reasonable to plan for tomorrow, it is most important to keep God's will for us first." Our plans brought us death and destruction. His perfect and Holy Will brings us life everlasting!

Our plans and self-indulgence tend to exclude God. James' advice to all believers is that you must **Place him first in your life, live as He lived for us and help those around you.**

Do what is right in the eyes of the Lord, not in our own eyes. We are here only for a little while and Lord willing, we will make a difference for His kingdom.

Amen, let us pray!