

Good Lord Willing and the Creek Don't Rise

(James 4:13-17)

1/13/15; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

The big game was on Monday night and my team lost...

But not 20 minutes after the game was over, the poll for next year's college football season was released.

That's right. The 2015 season was over around midnight, and the poll for 2016 was already coming out..

Even as they talked to players on Clemson's team, they were already talking about next year's national championship.

One player said that Clemson would be playing in the next year's national championship.

Now, I understand why these polls are released, and I even get why players speak about the next year even though the last year just ended...

But there is one thing that is really unsaid when things like this occur...

And it is this...

No one really knows what next year holds in store...

There are so many things that can happen that could cause things to be different before now and next August when football season starts..

But on top of that, and though we may not like to think about it, what assurance do we even have that football season will even take place next year...

Though we all pray for peace and desire peace in our world, who knows how the world may be different in 8 months...

And even on top of that, how does a player even know that he will be playing next year?

Again, it is not something that we like to talk about or even think about, but tragedies strike young people all the time...

And though I don't think it is necessarily a sin to look the the future and talk about what may happen, it could be depending upon that person's heart.

Tonight, we are going see what James says about people who do that...

I have entitled this message....

Good Lord Willing and the Creek Don't Rise because that is a familiar phrase that you often hear from people when you talk about the future...

It goes something like this...

"We will see you on Sunday at church."

Ok. We will be there there, good Lord willing and the creek don't rise.

And though people may use it out of habit, the meaning behind the phrase is that the person's plans to be at church on Sunday unless God has different plans for them....

Or unless the creek that lies between their house and the church gets too high to cross....

We may stick that on the end of a sentence out of habit, but that's actually a good habit as long as that is the true desire of our heart...

Because that phrase originated out of the principle that we will see in James 4:13-17 tonight...

The outline for this passage in on the screen...

I. The Plans of Presumption (13-14)

II. The Words of Wisdom (15)

III. The Attitude of Arrogance (16-17)

If you have been here for the past few Wednesday nights, you now understand that God inspired James to write a letter to the church to help people determine if they were truly saved or not...

We have already looked at 8 tests of true salvation in the book of James...

The test of a person's response to trials,...

The test of person's view of temptation...

The test of a person's reaction to God's Word...

The test of a person's treatment of others..

The test of a person's obedience to God..

The test of a person's speech..

The test of a person's wisdom that they live by..

And last week, we looked at test #8, which was a test of a person's war against the desires of his sinful nature...

Tonight is test #9, and it is a test of a person's view of tomorrow...

Let's begin by reading all the verses of James 4:13-17....

Then we can go back and turn over every word to find some more understanding of this incredible passage....

James 4:13-17....

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." 14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. 15 [i]Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." 16 But as it is, you boast in your [j]arrogance; all such boasting is evil. 17 Therefore, to one who knows the [k]right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

Let's begin tonight by focusing on verses 13-14, which I have called the plans of presumption..

I. The Plans of Presumption (13-14)

As I grew older and become wiser and more sinful as a teenager, I figured out where my dad would keep my Christmas gifts..

We didn't have a huge house and the attic was easily accessible along with his one closet, so I had had a few options of where to look..

And most of the time, the gifts were kept in the top of his closet...

One Christmas, I saw that some new bags were in the closet, so I decided to take a look...

And in one of the bags, I found this really nice sweatshirt...

I was thinking it was a Carolina Panthers shirt or it may have been a nice Clemson pullover...

I really can't remember.

I just remember that I really liked it and couldn't wait to get it on Christmas..

And I remember tearing into presents on Christmas, but that shirt never showed up..

Turns out, my dad was keeping some of his girlfriend's gifts for her...

And the sweatshirt was a gift that she was going to give her daughter's boyfriend or something like that..

I just simply remember being totally disappointed about it..

Now what was I guilty of...

Other than the fact of being deceitful and nosy....

I was guilty of being presumptuous.

Presumption is the act of assuming something to be true before it actually happens or before the facts come forth..

Some presumptions are worse than others..

If you presume that your wife's fresh baked cookies on the counter are for you, but it turns out they are for the neighbors, you will be in trouble for a while..

If you presume that you will wait to get saved until later in life, but it turns out you die at a young age, you will be in trouble for eternity...

In verses 13-14, James warns against presumptions that keep God out of our planning...

We feel confident that James is writing to people who claim to be Christians in this letter....

Some were and some weren't, and the tests that James gives in this book were meant to sort out the people of true faith from the people of false faith.

In these final words of chapter 4, James begins this test by talking to business people in particular....

But the test extends to everyone who reads his letter...

Here is the situation of these opening verses...

Business men or merchants of James day were making plans for the future...

They were setting their business calendars up for the new year...

We may go today or tomorrow or the next month to this city....

And we will stay there for this amount of time, and we will make money from our business...

That is the point of verse 13.....

And let me be clear, there is nothing necessarily wrong with doing that....

Making plans in business is not necessarily a sin...

The same would be true for other kinds of planning...

Whether that is a family vacation or a early retirement or a new home or a trip to the store...

We all make plans...

We just came out with a calendar for the new year here at Pine Grove...

It is full of plans..

So, there's nothing wrong with that unless your plans are made without any thought of God...

And that is what was happening in the plans of these business that James is talking about...

And that is what happens often in the plans that others make as well...

People sinfully plan as if God doesn't exist...

Even people who claim to know God, and that is where there may be a problem....

In James, a test of true faith is looking at your plans and making sure that the pattern of your planning also includes God in the plans...

Here is what I mean...

We all know what an atheist is...

He or she is a person who says that God doesn't exist...

And they live according to that belief...

They don't believe in God and their actions go along with that belief...

We all know where that person stands...

There is no mystery about that person...

Atheists are clearly unsaved people...

However, there are people who say that God exists, but make plans like He doesn't.

In reality, that person is no different than an atheist..

He may claim to know God but he lives and plans like God isn't real.

And in that case, that person proves himself to be an unbeliever even if he says that he isn't...

And that is who James is going after in these verses...

There were obviously people like that in the early church...

They claimed to know God but they lived and planned like God didn't exist...

And when that happens, that person proves that their claim of faith isn't real at all...

It is what we have seen before in the book of James, it is a lot of hot air...

So, verse 13 is the presumption, and let me be clear...

Is it not easy to spot a person like this...

Often planning that doesn't include God in it is simply a heart issue...

Two people could make business plans for the next year and they look exactly the same on paper...

One could be pleasing to God because the plans were made with God in mind...

The other could be displeasing to God because the plans were made without the slightest thought of God in them...

So, this isn't a test that is easy to give to someone else and see the results of it...

This test is a test of a person's heart...

Now, there are two problems with making plans that don't include God, and they are found in verse 14...

#1.... The first problem with people who plan for the future with no thought of God is this...

They have no idea what will happen tomorrow...

Simply put, things change in this world...

The weather may change your plans...

Your financial situation may change...

Your job may change...

The world is a fallen world and though it is a fairly predictable world in some ways, it is also very unpredictable as well...

Things happen that can change the surest of plans...

If you don't know the future, then your plans are only as good as what you think will happen....

But #2 and maybe more importantly....

You may change as well...

In fact, you may not even be around to fulfill your plans....

James reminds us that our life is but a vapor...

I don't need to describe that for you....

Simply go outside tonight in the light and breathe out...

Your breath will show up in a vapor but it will be gone as fast as it appeared...

And the same is true for this life...

It is here today and gone tomorrow...

I am 41 and it has passed in a flash...

The same is true for those who are 51 and 61 and 71 and 81....

But not only does it appear quickly, and pass quickly...

Sometimes, life is simply cut short...

368 people under the age of 40 die every day in America.

It is hard to think about, and I don't have any desire to be depressing tonight...

But that isn't news to you...

Everyone knows that happens...

And the simple truth (though no one talks about it) is that no one knows when their time is up...

And for those simple reasons, a) that no one knows the future, and b) no one knows how long their life will be...

It is important to allow for the sovereignty of God in your planning....

You cannot presume on God, and you surely don't need to...

God through James warns us of planning without giving any thought to the Lord...

It is something we should always avoid...

And in order to plan with the Lord in mind, we need to fill our minds with the Lord...

And when that happens, you plan according to what you see in verse 15...

II. The Words of Wisdom (15)

These are really the words of wisdom in this passage...

As James moves from the wrong way to plan to the future, he offers some counsel on how to plan for the future...

And he tells his readers that they ought to say...

“If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”

Which is really the point of the test...

People who are truly saved consistently plan with the Lord in mind...

They know that the best of plans can change if God desires them to change...

They know that their lives will end whenever the Lord desired them to end...

And because of that, they look and plan for the future with God at the top of the calendar...

Now, with this in mind, let me offer a few practical suggestions here...

First and foremost, this doesn't mean that you have to stick "Lord willing" on the end of every sentence...

This is not necessarily a verse that means a true Christian has to say this every time he talks about the future...

Your heart is what is important as you plan for the future...

You simply need to know and understand that the plans you make are nothing if God has something else planned for you...

Now, I stick this phrase on at times and sometimes I don't...

That really isn't the point here...

If you make "Lord Willing" a part of every sentence, it becomes routine and without meaning...

Always try to plan with the God in mind, even if you don't express it verbally every time...

And there is one more thing that needs to be said here while we are talking about what to do....

And it is this....

If you are someone who says that you plan with God in mind, don't lose it when your plans get changed...

It is easy to say....

“Oh yes, I always plan with God in mind. I know that things change and I know that I may not be here, so as a good Christian, I plan with the Lord in mind.”

But the proof of your proper attitude in planning is not seen in the planning often, but in your reaction to having your plans changed...

If we truly believe that God is in control and that we should make plans knowing that, we must realize that sometimes plans will change..

It is like the man who goes out to play golf, and he tells all of his buddies...

Hey, I don't care if I win or lose today, I just enjoy being able to play...

But then he loses and he pitches a fit..

If he truly didn't care, then you would see it when he lost...

The same is true when it comes to our making of plans...

If you plan by saying, "God these are my plans, but I know you have the power to change them..."

Don't be surprised when HE actually does change them...

And often times, a change of plans can be a great opportunity from the Lord..

Maybe the Lord kept you longer at the grocery store because He wanted you to share the gospel with somebody...

Maybe the Lord moved you to a new job so that you would have more free time to serve Him..

A change of plans is not always an inconvenience; maybe God is at work to bless you or grow you in your faith...

If you don't know the future (and you don't), don't be surprised and upset when it doesn't turn out like you planned....

The wisdom of this passage leads us put God at the top of our day planner, our week's schedule, and our yearly calendar...

And the wisdom of this passage leads us to be prepared for plans to change and then to look for the blessing when that happens...

So, we have seen that people of true faith consistently make their plans with the Lord in mind...

They know He is sovereign...

They know He is in control..

They know He is the God of the future...

And so though they aren't perfect in their planning, the pattern of a true believer's life is that they plan with the Lord in mind..

This brings us to verses 16-17 as James moves back to the negative to end this section...

He began with the problem of how people plan with no regard for God...

Instead of acknowledging God in their plans for the future, they were making plans of their own without any thought of God...

WE will go here, we will do this, we will make money...

So, why does that happen?

What causes people to forget God in their plans...

And the simple answer to that is going to be found
in verses 16-17....

It is the attitude of arrogance...

III. The Attitude of Arrogance (16-17)

James simply writes in verse 16 that people boast in their arrogant planning...

The attitude behind all planning that doesn't include God is pride and arrogance...

It is the idea that if we put our mind to anything and plan well, we can accomplish anything...

It is the sin of trusting in human ability over God's power...

People who plan without God think that the key to doing anything in life is human wisdom, skill, or cleverness...

In their world, they have no need of God because they are their own gods...

If they want, they get it.

If they plan it, it will happen...

And though we may like to tell our kids that "if they put their minds to it, they can accomplish anything," that simply isn't a good view of yourself or of God..

The bottom line is that God is in control and we aren't.

It is fine to plan to retire early...

It is fine to plan to be a nurse and and go to college....

It is fine to plan to head to the beach this summer...

But all of that planning is done in humility, not arrogance...

They arrogant person says, "I am going to be a nurse no matter what."

The humble person says, "I am going to be a nurse unless the Lord leads me in a different direction."

Arrogant planning puts you in charge...

Humble planning puts God in charge...

James then says that boasting in your planning is evil...

In other words, satanic influence controls the heart of someone who boasts in their sureness of their plans coming to pass..

Arrogance is evil because it boasts of human strength and intelligence..

Humility is good because it boasts in the strength and power of the Lord...

Not I, O Lord, but you...

This section then ends with a principle that applies to this situation but also applies to a number of situations...

James simply says,....

17 Therefore, to one who knows the [k]right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

The meaning in the context is this...

Anyone who reads James letter now knows that is contrary to the will of God for them to plan without giving any thought to God...

The right thing is for them to do is obey verse 15 and keep the Lord in mind as they plan for the future...

And verse 17 simply says...

Now since you know the right thing to do in how you plan, you are in sin if you don't take the Lord into account as you plan for tomorrow...

This is now an issue of disobedience...

If you have been around children, you understand this...

“John Andrew, if you touch the stove, you are getting a spanking.”

“Yesterday, JA didn’t know that the stove was sinful, but now he does.”

And he needs to act accordingly...

The same was true for those who read James letter...

If they didn’t know it was wrong to plan without thinking about God, now they did and they needed to stop it..

In other words, knowledge makes you accountable to do it...

Though that applies to how to plan for the future, it also applies to other areas of the Christian life as well....

That is why Bible reading and Bible preaching and teaching is so dangerous...

When you expose yourself to truth, they are but two options....

Obedience or disobedience....

Obedience keeps your heart soft and your life more and more usable to God..

Disobedience hardens your heart and makes your life less and less usable to God.

Conclusion

Let's leave this passage with a couple thoughts in mind...

Remember, this is a test of salvation...

People who are truly saved will plan with God in mind.

Though they won't do it perfectly, it will be their heart's desire and a pattern of their life...

On the other hand, people who aren't truly saved will not plan with God in mind...

They will plan as though they ruled the world and not God...

With that in mind, let's go through a quick list of things to take with you tonight...

1) It is not a sin to plan for the future, but it is a sin to plan for the future without God in mind.

Plan for the year ahead.

Budgets and calendars and plans for next week and next month are a very valuable help in this life...

Jesus even said that anyone planning to build a tower should plan for the cost of the tower...

Planning is a part of life, but God is the biggest part of life.

2) Be careful not to make a ritual of out “if the Lord wills” in verse 15..

This means two things....

First, I said this earlier but nothing in this verse indicates that you have to say “if its the Lord’s will” in every conversation about the future..

You can talk about the future and have a biblical perspective of it without having to say it out loud...

But second, just because someone doesn’t acknowledge the Lord in their plans for the future, don’t assume they aren’t saved....

God looks on the heart and so should we.

3) If you commit to planning with the Lord in the center of it, be content when your plans change.

It is easy to say.... “Oh yea, God is in control,” but it is harder to live that out when His control creates inconvenience for you...

If you believe God is truly in control, look for His blessings when things don't work out like your planned...

Sometimes, plans change because the world is fallen...

But sometimes plans change so that God can put you in a place where you grow or even be a blessing to others...

Let us pray tonight...