

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

James 04: 13-17

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. This week we'll be reading James chapter 4, and today we'll read from verse 13 to verse 17.

James' burden is to help the saints to live out a life full of virtues in their daily lives, being a good testimony for Christ. When a person believes in Jesus Christ, their spirit is regenerated, and they receive the indwelling Holy Spirit. After that, they begin to live a sanctified life, partaking in God's nature, and bearing the fruit of the Spirit in their souls. Furthermore, they progress to live a virtuous life in their bodies. This is a process from the inside out, from life to nature, and then to the testimony of living.

In Ephesians 1:3-14, Paul tells us that this is the result of the coordinated operation of the Triune God: there is the will of God the Father, which includes election and predestination; there is the execution of the Son, Christ, which includes three plans: the redemption plan, the oneness plan, and the inheritance plan; and there is the application of the Holy Spirit, which includes the sealing and the guarantee. We must recognize that every person's salvation, sanctification, and eventual glorification are not simple matters but the result of the concerted effort of the Triune God.

And God's adversary, Satan, will certainly use various means to disrupt God's plan. In James 4:1-10, it points out the common tactics Satan uses: the deceit of fleshly desires, worldly temptations, and the snares of sin. Our salvation is entirely the work of the Triune God. However, on the other hand, Satan also uses his evil trinity—sin, world, and the flesh—to try to destroy God's plan. James uses common examples from daily life to remind us that we must have the right source and walk on the right path to reach God's intended outcome. In verses 13-17, James gives another example: making plans for tomorrow must also include the Lord.

Verse 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'."

"Come now" is an interjection used to draw attention, and in the NIV, it is translated as "now listen." What are we to listen to? "You who say"—this refers to a common phrase people use. What is being said? It is about planning and purposing for the future. The passage states, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city." The name of the city is specified, and the location is confirmed, indicating that time was spent understanding the city's local customs, industrial structure, and economic situation. The decision is made to stay there for a year, engaging in business and making a profit.

This involves considering what business to engage in, the costs involved, the expected profit margins, and when profitability can be achieved. These matters must have been thoroughly thought out and carefully calculated, with a one-year timeframe set. By that time, a profit should be realized, and further planning can then proceed. From a human perspective, this not only seems correct but also commendable, as it shows someone planning their life and methodically working towards their goals. This is far better than someone who idly wastes his life.

However, for Christians, this is not enough. Christians are not to avoid these activities but are to consider more than the worldly aspects and take an additional step. Dear brothers and sisters, 1 John 2:15 teaches us not to love the world. Some believers interpret this as doing nothing and simply waiting for God's provision, especially young people who, under the pretext of not loving the world, become lazy and indulgent.

We need to recognize that after the fall, laziness became inherent in human nature. We cannot be passively idle, as this leads to corruption. Paul also says in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, "For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat." So James is not saying not to plan, nor is he saying not to be proactive and hardworking, but rather that something is missing from your plans. What is missing?

Verse 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."

James then points out the insufficiency of the previous plans. The world does not have the hope of eternal life, so their plans only consider earthly matters, which is understandable. However, Christians have eternal life and therefore must include heavenly considerations in their plans. Hence, James says, "Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow," and that our lives are not in our own hands. Human life is fragile and brief, like a vapor.

The word "vapor" implies something like mist or water vapor, which appears for a little time and then vanishes away when the sun rises and evaporates it, or when a strong wind blows it away. Human life is similarly transient and uncertain. Some might think, given this brevity, that they should just eat, drink, and be merry since they are still alive today. However, this is not what James' means, nor should it be the attitude of Christians. Precisely because this life is short and uncertain, we should not hold onto it ourselves but rather seek the God who controls tomorrow.

There is a hymn called "I Know Who Holds Tomorrow," which has a beautiful melody and profound lyrics. The hymn tells us that there are many things we don't know and actually don't need to know in this world, but there is one thing we can be certain of: "I know who holds tomorrow, and I know who holds my hand." God loves us and will give us the best guidance. Therefore, we should use the short time we have on earth well, storing up for ourselves eternal glory.

Verse 15: "Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'"

It's important to note how James emphasizes the phrase "if the Lord wills" here. This indicates that we should bring our plans and intentions before God, seeking His guidance and surrendering our sovereignty back to Him. "If the Lord wills" implies submitting to God's perfect will rather than seeking mere permission from Him.

Within each of us, there are two sources: the Holy Spirit and the desires of the flesh. Externally, there are also two environments: God's arrangements and the temptations of the world. As we are still in the process of sanctification, discerning between these sources and environments can be challenging. Therefore, it's crucial to bring our plans and intentions before God, seeking His best will, not just His permissive will.

Every saved saint has an eternal purpose and plan from God, and God orchestrates various circumstances over time to refine our faith and fulfill His commissions. By bringing everything before God in prayer, saints can gradually understand God's will and commission. Understanding God's will is one thing; be able to submit to it is another matter, enabling us to fulfill God's entrusted tasks. At times, we may lag behind in following God's guidance, but in His mercy, He may permit us to proceed according to His permissive will as a second option. However, if we fail to seek or involve God in our plans, we are no different from those of the world.

Verse 16: "But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil."

James clearly states that boasting about future plans without acknowledging God's will is arrogant and evil. He emphasizes that for those who have received salvation, our life plans must involve God. We cannot act independently of Him because Jesus Christ paid a great price to redeem us. We no longer belong to ourselves but to the Lord. Therefore, before making any plans or taking any actions, we must always include the phrase "if the Lord wills." This is not just a verbal expression but a genuine willingness to understand and obey God's will.

Verse 17: "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin."

"This statement, taken by itself, seems to say: failing to do what is good is a sin, which aligns with Romans 3:23 where it defines sin as 'falling short of the glory of

God.' Because sin is not just doing evil deeds but also includes not doing the good that should have been done, it falls short of God's glory and is also considered sin.

However, when considering the context, this verse is not just about failing to do good deeds. Here, 'doing good' does not simply refer to acts of kindness but to doing what aligns with God's will. When we bring our plans before God, through ongoing communication with Him, and understand His will, if we refuse to revise our plans despite knowing what is good, it becomes our sin. Alternatively, if we understand God's will, adjust our plans accordingly, but then fail to execute them wholeheartedly, this too is knowing what is good but not doing it, and thus it is sin.

In this passage, it seems to be telling us that understanding God's will isn't enough; we must also obey it and put it into practice. If we only understand but do not obey, it constitutes sin. Bringing our planned actions before God, seeking His guidance, and including 'if the Lord wills' signifies our desire to understand and obey God's good and perfect will. Knowing God's will is based on His law, and once we understand it, our duty is to obey.

"If the Lord wills" can sometimes be used in an extreme way, attaching it to everything and bringing everything before the Lord in prayer. While this may seem spiritual, in reality, there are many things in life where, if we understand God's laws, we don't need to seek guidance; we simply need to obey. For example, when mealtime comes and you're hungry, it's natural to eat; you don't need to pray about whether to eat. Similarly, when it's time for a gathering, it's a matter of God's command, so you don't need to pray about attending; you just go. Of course, there are times when there's a special leading to go beyond natural laws, like fasting and prayer in response to a burden from God.

Dear brothers and sisters, James reminds us in this passage to bring our plans before God and seek His good will. When we say "If the Lord wills," we express our willingness to obey His good will and live a godly life.

Let's pray: "Lord, thank You. You shed your precious blood on the cross, paying the price for our lives, redeeming us. We belong to You. Therefore, in our life's planning, we must always include You. Help me bring my plans before You, seeking Your will,

to understand Your purpose for me and the specific tasks You entrust to me. Grant me a willing heart to obey Your good and perfect will, to follow Your guidance, and to be a faithful witness in my life. Bless my life. I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.