

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS / NEW YEAR'S EVE SUNDAY

JAMES 4:13-16
THIS YEAR'S MANNER TO PLAN

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"; 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. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

Q. What's the difference between today and tomorrow? A. Today is 2023. Tomorrow is 2024. But what's really the difference? Not much. Not much changes in a day—your height, your weight, your strength. Today, 12/31/23, and tomorrow, 1/1/24, are different—on paper. It's like the day before your birthday and the day of your birthday. But turning the page on a new year does provide an opportunity to look back at the past twelve months, the past "year" according to the sun, and measure progress or lack of progress—depending on your definition of progress. Turning the calendar provides an opportunity to look ahead as well—to plan for another year.

Today's text talks about planning for the future, *Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit.* Whether it's calendar year, a month, or a growing season—whatever it is—God has given you a brain. He expects you to assess, to make changes, to plan ahead. Even some creatures store up food for the winter or build a nest to raise young. But creatures do that by instinct. They do not have the ability to plan and figure and calculate as man does. You and I are very different from the animals. Man is not just a bigger better animal, but is a created responsible and answerable to God for conduct.

There is one basic "given" that always stands in assessing the past or planning for the future—whether it be last year, or this year, or next year; ten years ago when you were less experienced in life or ten years from now when you will be more experienced. This basic "given" is two-fold. 1) You are a sinner before God. You transgress His will. You trespass where He says, NO. You fall short of the mark, where He says, HERE. In His "balances," you are weighed and found wanting. 2) Yet at the same time, you, a sinner, are redeemed by God. It is not because He is obligated to bail you out. It is not because He is being forced to bail you out. In His love and kindness, in His mercy and compassion, He has done so. He has willingly taken it upon Himself. He has, at His own expense, paid the price to set you from your dismal record of wrong and rebellion. *"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16). These two facts never change from day to day or year to year. Through Jesus, the God-man, born at Bethlehem, crucified at Calvary, risen from the tomb on the third day you have been bought back and brought back into God's family.

So how then do you, redeemed sinner, go about your plans for the future? *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."* Ok, what are some things for which you plan? I assume you plan to provide for yourself and your family's needs, which means in our system to make money to buy food, clothes, electricity, etc. Surely your plans also include to make enough extra money to do extra things—buy a car, remodel the house, buy more land, expand your operation, to pay off debts at the doctor and the repair shop, to repay the loan at the bank.

But there are other plans too. To get more schooling perhaps at college, to go on a trip, to find the right young lady or young man for your wife or husband, to have children, to have a certain number of children, to stay healthy, to start retirement, to get more involved in community matters. So many plans!

But, dear redeemed child of God, beware! *You do not know what will happen tomorrow!* James says be careful with your planning. Do not get so locked in on what you will do. Planning has its limits. What's the quote from literature?—"the best laid plans of mice and men." Plans must always be flexible. You can plan all you want to go to Bismarck on Wednesday, but if there's a blizzard, plans change. You can plan all you want to bale hay on August 22, but if it rains, nothing doing. You can plan all you want to have Christmas at your house next year, , but if sickness comes, scratch that. *You do not know what will happen tomorrow!*

Flexibility in planning is easier for some than others. For some it's more natural "to go with the flow," to figure things out as they come along, even to the point of "I'll take care of it sometime. Later." However, plans left unattended or unmade can easily mean missed opportunities or great complications—because structured plans were never made or carried out. For others planning is a meticulous art, seeking to leave no detail to chance, striving to ensure a guaranteed smooth experience. However, it impossible to plan for every scenario and for the unexpected "detours" that come. Then plans come crashing down leading to great deal of stress and frustration. God has made people differently. There are pro's and con's for each.

But the point is, as James writes, *For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.* Things change. Life itself I is not guaranteed. Life is a vapor. It can be here today and gone tomorrow. Have any of you faced an unexpected death in your family or among your close friends this past year? In fact, today could be your last day on this earth, your last day to say Thank You or I Love You. Have you ever watched the vapor escaping a kettle or teapot? It doesn't last long. You can't grab it or track it. It's just gone.

In planning for 2024, do not get too tied to your will. The psalm-writer says, *As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more (Psalm 103:15-16).* He goes on, *But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him (Psalm 103:17).* The Lord and His mercy—His mercy in Christ—it the foundation on which to focus and to build.

As the text says, *Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."* How can you argue with that? That is the key for each redeemed sinner in planning for the future, for this year, for this week, for tomorrow, for this afternoon. If the Lord wills, we will go to Denver this summer; if the Lord wills we will expand our operation; if the Lord wills, we will have a bumper crop; if the Lord wills, I will get married and have children; if the Lord wills, I will get taller than my Dad or my brother; if the Lord wills, we will gather again for church next Sunday.

And what is the bottom line for "the Lord's will"? Simple. "God our Savior will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Timothy 2:3-4). God's will is that you know Jesus and cling to Him by faith, so that you are righteous through Him and live forever in heaven. He will allow nothing in this life to drag you away from Him. It is not just a matter of fate. If you wish to walk away from Him and disregard Him to your own ruin, you may. He forces no one into His kingdom. But in His love, He directs events in your life, even the ones that are difficult for you, to draw you closer to Him. *"If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."* If my plans and sense of progress are out of line with my eternal salvation in Jesus, or detrimental to someone else's, the Lord will block those plans. In this manner, live and plan each day, knowing that your dear Father in heaven, who has sent Christ to be your Savior, is leading the way.

But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. If it's pride that drives your plans for 2024, you need to reconsider. Beware "I will do this, I will do that, I will make it happen, I am accomplishing much, I have wisdom, I want it now, I have no patience for that, I have done well, I have no need of forgiveness, I trample on anyone in my way, I will make 2024 a good year." Too much "I," that's for sure. *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"; 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. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.*

Dear children of God through Jesus, what's the manner of planning for 2024? Live and plan the New Year, the new week, each new day of life, as sinners redeemed by Jesus, Seek to follow, to serve, to please your Savior and Lord as you travel His safe path through life, the best and only path to heaven!

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---