

**Intro:** When we come to the pages of the Bible, we find some of life's greatest and most important questions. Each of these questions are designed to knock us off balance and grab our attention. They are designed to cause us to take a hard pause, stop, and consider their implications for our lives. One of the most provocative questions was uttered just moments before Jesus was handed over to be crucified, and Pilate asked him: "What is truth?" The most important question is provided by Jesus to Peter and his disciples, when he says, "Who do you say that I am?" in Matthew 16.

But there is another question James provides that is almost as provocative and important as these two.

**"What is Your Life?"  
James 4:13-17**

I hope these four words will knock us off balance today. I hope they will cause us to look within, and more importantly, look to God to discover the answer. How would you answer that question? Some might say: my life is the sum of deeds, the sum of my accomplishments. Others would say: my life is the sum of my relationships. Some would say, no, no, it's all of that and so much more. "What is your life?"

This question seems to control the message James wants to convey to his people. His thoughts on our plans, our time, and our actions all relate to this all-encompassing question . . . The thrust of what James is going to say in these five verses is simply this:

**The Point: Your life is a mist, so live with humility and maximize it for God's glory.**

In order to show you this, I want to answer this question in three ways. #1 . . .

**I. Your life is more than the sum of your desires (4:13-16).**

- The first century was a time marked by growing commercial activity. The Pax Romana opened up ways of travel never before seen in the world to that point. For many, business was extremely good, so good that they began to make presumptuous and arrogant plans.
- That is why James lays down some hardcore truth for their consideration in order to humble, correct, and guide them into the path of wisdom.
  
- Verse 13 begins with the words "Come now" or as some translations say, "Now listen!"
- The words are given to raise the attention of the hearers/readers for what follows...
- He goes on: "You who say, 'Today...'"
- Don't miss how James, once again, shows how what comes out of our mouths reflects what is in our heart. That is all of chapter 3 and all of chapter 4! What do they say? "Today or tomorrow *we will go into such and such a town and we will spend, and we will trade, and we will make a profit.*"
- Do you see the self-dependence and arrogant presumption in this statement?
  
- But James is not going to let that ride, because he understands the economics of God's kingdom: "God opposes pride, but he gives grace to and exalts the humble."
- **C.J. Mahaney** says that: "**Pride is when sinful human beings aspire to the status and position of God and refuse to acknowledge their dependence upon him.**"
  
- So James first exposes the folly of their prideful plans by hammering the uncertainty of tomorrow. He says: "Hey, you who are so confident about tomorrow, 'you do not know what tomorrow will bring.'"
- Who can say without absolute certainty anything that will happen in the next 24-48 hrs.?
  - We have no way of knowing if Stock Market is going to be bearish or bullish.
  - We have no way of knowing whether it will take us 15 minutes or 30 minutes to drive home.

- We have no way of knowing if the Sox will bounce back in 2015.
- Why? Because we are not in control of future events. We all like to be in control, right? I know some of you are control freaks. Your day, your plans, your relationships, your ambitions... you want them all to go just as you envision, and if someone or something disrupts that, it exposes anger or frustration or impatience, or all of the above. ☺
- What then is the solution to our prideful, control-driven plans?

#### Solution

- Verse 15 gives us the answer: “Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”
- With those four words, “If the Lord wills” we have the crux of God-centered planning. All of our plans should be made in light of the will of God.
- This simple phrase undercuts the self-reliance, independent, presumptuous spirit of verse 13.
- The fundamental problem of those rebuked in the text is that they took God out of the equation. In essence, they engaged in a form of practical atheism, separating their business and “secular” life from their Christian and “sacred” life. But Jesus is Lord over every sphere of life: business, science, medicine, the academy, politics, education.
- There are no “God-free zones” in life.
- And don’t miss the subtlety of the order in verse 15. I believe it is very important. He says: “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this and that.”
- Just start with your life... the reason blood is coursing through your veins is because God has given you life, and God, this very moment, is sustaining your life. We are utterly dependent upon God. And then we move to the details of life. Anything and everything we do is totally dependent upon God!
- So whether we say the words or not, the attitude of our heart in everything should be defined by these four words: “If the Lord wills”
- I will earn my degree... (if the Lord wills) I will tackle that next project... (God-willing)
- We will have a family one day... We will buy a house ... We will move to the Virgin Island and sip on strawberry daiquiris while the rest of you are back in Boston shoveling snow... ☺ (if the..)
- How about this? We will see God grow this church to the point where all Medford must take notice...
- All of our plans, every single one of them, are subject to the sovereignty and providence of God.
- To leave God out of our plans is foolish, but to do so in a pompous manner is evil.
- Verse 16: “As it is you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.”

T: Now arrogance is evil, but is James saying that planning is also evil? Absolutely not.

- That is implicit in verse 15. James is not encouraging to delete our calendars or forget about our goals.
- Planning is not only necessary; it is wise.
- What does Solomon write in Proverbs 6:6-7? **“Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.” (Proverbs 6:6-8)**
- The ant is commended not only because of its work ethic, but also because it executes a plan for survival. As the modern day proverb says: “A failure to plan is a plan to fail.”
- So by all means: Have Desires! Make Plans! Dream great dreams!
- **“Make no little plans: they have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized.” – Daniel Burnham**
- God is a God with a plan. Jesus lived his life with a definitive purpose saying no to some requests while focused on fulfilling his planned mission in the world.
- Our church has a plan, a vision:

- “RHC exists to \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_ as a \_\_\_\_\_ transformed by \_\_\_\_\_.” Alright. Fist bump.
- And . . . who remembers this? **2014 Vision**
- Our Toronto team has a plan...

So let’s be clear: James addresses not the fact that we make plans but *how* we make those plans.

*Trans:* James says, “Your life is more than your desires, because there is a God who is over all of our desires and all of the affairs of our lives.” Secondly, this passage shows us that . . .

## II. Your life is more than the sum of your days (4:14).

We do not control the events or circumstances of our lives, and we do not control the length of our days.

- Like Jesus, James knew how to ask a good question. He knew how to provoke thought and provide the platform for change in their lives. This time he does it with an incredibly sobering question before providing an equally sobering answer.
- “What is your life?” [Again, what gives your life meaning? What defines you? Is your life defined by your accomplishments, your relationships, your hopes and dreams? Is it defined by how long you live?]
- There’s the sobering question... Now for the sobering answer: “For you are a mist...”
- You are a mist. How’s that for a dose of reality? Go home this afternoon, look in the mirror and say, “you are a mist.” Some translations say “you are a vapor.” “You are a breath.”
- What does he mean? “you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.”
- The Greek is even stronger. It says, “You are a mist, *which being seen for a little while even then is disappearing.*”
- Did you get that? We appear and then disappear, and even while we are here, we are in the process of disappearing... Wow!!! P - - - -
- This is a theme that is clear throughout Scripture. **Psalm 39:5 says, “Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! (Psalm 39:5)**

Let me give you two encouragements about our lives and our time:

### 1) Life is really, really short, so consider eternity!

- *Practical Arg:* We have been reminded of the brevity of life this past year. Matthew Cirelli, a recent graduate of Medford High, died in December of cancer at the age of 19. Actress, Skye Bartusiak, died this year at the age of 21. In the past two months, a 39 year old man and 40 year old woman, died here in Medford. Tony Gwynn, the 15 time MLB all-star, died young this year at the age of 54.
- Some of my heroes in church history: David Brainerd, Jim Eliot, and Robert Murray McCheyne all died at the age of 29. Henry Martyn was 31. Oswald Chambers, 43. Even Charles Spurgeon didn’t make it to 60, dying when he was 57.
- [Met a young man on the plane... (Engineering Grad from Case Western Reserve; said he was coming to Boston to steal a job from some MIT students ☺) We had a great conversation! Story... “You know, I’m really busy with things right now, but I’ll get around to it one day.”]

### 2) Life is really, really short, so maximize your time!

- This truth should not discourage us. It should motivate us to spend our lives well and maximize the time God gives us.
- As the Psalmist says in **Psalm 90:12: “So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.”**

- Jesus taught a lot about stewarding our time, investing wisely, being ready...
- **“We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.” (John 9:4)**
- Urgency! Every moment matters... This is James. Right? All day. Every day. We’re going to sing in a bit... “Christ Be All Around Me. Your life. Your death. For every moment. Every moment!”
- Perhaps the best, or at least clearest verse on this in the Bible is Eph. 5:15-16: **“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.” (Ephesians 5:15-16)**
- **Jonathan Edwards**, in a discourse written in 1734 titled “The Preciousness of Time,” said: **“Time is so short, and the work which we have to do in it is so great, that we have none of it to spare.”** Then Edwards goes on to argue that time is more precious than money and says no one in their right mind would walk down the street and throw their money away. (Medford Square)
- So if time is more precious, more valuable than material wealth, why would we be so frivolous with it? **“Time is a thousand times more precious than money; and when it is gone, cannot be purchased for money, cannot be redeemed by silver or gold.”**
- Do you recognize that your life is but a breath? How much time do you waste in any given week? How many hours do you spend focused on matters that will blow away like dust when weighed in the scales of eternity?
- I believe Edwards points out how a casual approach to time is one of the characteristics of youth. It is characteristic of immaturity. You could be 60 years old here today (not that it old!) and very immature in your perspective on life.
- Valuing our days, numbering them, maximizing them, that is a sign of maturity!
- We have every reason to maximize every minute for his glory!

T: Your life is more than the sum of your desires. It’s more than the sum of your days. And finally . . . .

### III. Your life is more than the sum of your deeds (4:17).

- James sums up this discussion by concluding with a final word concerning God’s will in v. 17... “So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” God desires for each of us to live with his will in view, and when we know what he desires for us, we must respond in obedience. Anything less is sin.
- Sins of commission... (Sins we commit. We cross the line of God’s intention.)
- Sins of omission... (The good we fail to do. We fail to cross the line of God’s expectation.)
- Let me break this down from the book of James:
  - In our Anger, we commit sin (Commission), but we can also fail to “be quick to hear.” (Omission)
  - It’s one thing to “Show Partiality” (Commission), but it is equally wrong to fail to “Love our Neighbor” (Omission)
  - Harboring Selfish Ambition (Commission) vs. Seeking Peace (Omission)
- You may remember the quote from John Wesley I shared during the first sermon in our James series. He said, **“Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can.”**
- We are to be a people who are zealous for good works. We should wake up each day, not just concerned to pray: “lead us not into temptation.” But to also pray: “Your will be done.” We are to love righteousness & hate wickedness, like Jesus. We are to delight to do God’s will.
- And some of you may be breaking this down thinking: “Man, there is so much good that I could do, how could I possibly do it all man? I’m in big trouble!”

- We are not called to perform every conceivable good deed. That is simply impossible. But, we are to take advantage of the opportunities God places in front of us.
- **Galatians 6: 10, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone. . . .”**
- You may never meet my neighbors, but I can do something for them. I may not ever be able to extend care to the mom who’s child is sick in your workplace, but you can.

**Conclusion:**

Jesus gave up his life, so that we might have life. (Gospel!)

- Some here today probably need to really consider, deeply consider that our life is just a mist. In light of that, you should consider if are ready to meet the God who made you. You will only be ready through Jesus. Jesus would have never died on the cross if we did not need him to.
- Some of you hear the clock ticking on your life in a new way, and you are saying, “I want to maximize it. I want to do all the good I can.” That’s great. Guess what? You will only be able to do that through Jesus.
- The cross of Christ not only saves us from our bad deeds, but it empowers us for all of our good deeds. **Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6)** In everything. For every moment, Jesus gives life. The gospel provides the motivating power for everything, so let’s go to God and submit all of our desires, all of our days, and all of our deeds to him.