

WHAT IF THIS WAS YOUR LAST YEAR ON EARTH?

TEXT: JAMES 4:1-17

INTRODUCTION:

1. J. Wilbur Chapman was born in Richmond, Indiana in 1859.
2. Chapman pastored several churches, including one in New York City (1899-1902), prior to entering evangelistic work full time in 1893.
3. Chapman preached with D. L. Moody at the World's Fair and then began conducting many evangelistic meetings on his own. He hired Billy Sunday as his advance man, thus giving him his start in evangelism.
4. Chapman was a strong Bible preacher. In addition to publishing several good books, Chapman composed hymns -- "Jesus! What a Friend for Sinners!" and "One Day" are the two best known.
5. In a letter, dated December 26, 1917, Chapman wrote to a friend these words: "Nineteen Hundred and Eighteen will be a year of glorious opportunity, but it will also be a year of solemn responsibility. Only God knows what its history is to be. Perhaps, if we knew, our faces would whiten and our hearts would ache; but the year is to be made up of days and weeks and months, and we shall pass through some of these, and by our side the Master will walk, if we are but willing to yield our wills to His and to follow the pathway which He has marked out. It will be glorious to live in these days if our wills are in harmony with His."
6. His biographer, Ford C. Ottman, said Chapman "had entered upon the year with great enthusiasm and with no apprehension that it was to be his last on earth." J. Wilbur Chapman died that year here in NYC on Christmas Day, at the age of 59.
7. Think of the words in that letter: "Nineteen Hundred and Eighteen will be a year of glorious opportunity, but it will also be a year of solemn responsibility. Only God knows what its history is to be."
8. We could say, "The year 2015 will be a year of glorious opportunity, but it will also be a year of solemn responsibility. Only God knows what its history is to be."
9. I have entitled my message, "What If This Was Your Last Year On Earth?"
10. The other day an airplane flew out of Indonesia carrying 155 passengers and 7 crew members. It crashed out in the ocean, and as far as we know everyone on that plane has drowned.
11. "What If This Was Your Last Year On Earth?" Cf. James 4:13-17.

I. IF THIS WAS YOUR LAST YEAR ON EARTH, WOULD YOU PRAY MORE? (4:2b, 3).

1. James was called "Camel Knees" because he prayed so often that his legs were hard and callused.
2. J. Vernon McGee said, "Prayer is not to persuade God to do something that He didn't intend to do; prayer is to get you and me in line with the program of God."
3. George Muller said, "Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance. It is laying hold of His willingness."
4. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "Prayer does not reduce God to our level, but lifts us to His" (*The Apostle John*).
5. When we get to heaven we will discover how many blessings we missed out on because of prayerlessness -- "Ye have not, because ye ask not" (4:2b).
6. Evangelist John R. Rice said, "All our failures are prayer failures."
7. God has put this world together in a such way that certain things will not get done unless you or I pray for it. Alfred, Lord Tennyson said, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of."
8. God has put this world together in a way that it runs according to certain principles and certain laws. For example, there is the law of sowing and reaping. Galatians 6:7 says, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."
9. And here is another principle: "Ye have not, because ye ask not" (James 4:2b; cf. II Kings 13:14-19).
10. Our Lord said in Matthew 7:7 and 8, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."
11. God promises to answer all our prayers. Our Lord said in Matthew 21:22, "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."
12. However, some prayers go unanswered because the person is praying selfishly. James 4:3 says, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."
13. If a Christian prays selfishly, he is out of the will of God and he is not on praying ground. First John 5:14 says, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according

to his will, he heareth us." It is never God's will for us to ask amiss, that we may consume it upon our lusts (James 4:3).

II. IF THIS WAS YOUR LAST YEAR ON EARTH, WOULD YOU BE MORE SEPARATED FROM WORLDLINESS? (4:4).

1. When Scripture refers to "the world" in this context, it is referring to the secular, godless world that is controlled by Satan, "the god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4).
2. Kenneth Wuest said Satan is the head of the world, his demons are his emissaries, and all unsaved sinners are his slaves. He said the "world" refers to "the purposes, pursuits, pleasures, and places where God is not wanted" (*Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament*).
3. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "Worldliness is a spirit, an atmosphere, an influence permeating the whole of life and human society, and it needs to be guarded against constantly and strenuously."
4. Romans 12:2 says, "Be not conformed to this world," but sadly, many Christians are conformed to this world.
5. Few preachers preach against worldliness these days, and in fact many preachers themselves are very worldly.
6. The "world" as it is used here in James 4:4 and other Scriptures refers to a system that is energized by Satan, and that gratifies the flesh. The devil uses the world and the flesh.
7. The devil has things arranged (*kosmos* means "something that is well-arranged") so that lost sinners can be happy and comfortable without God.
8. But the Bible warns us that worldliness is spiritual adultery (James 4:4). A worldly believer is "the enemy of God."
9. The New Testament often refers to the dangers of the world (cf. I John 2:15-17; 5:19).
10. Galatians 1:4 says the Lord Jesus Christ "gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world."
11. Think about that. Jesus died on the cross to deliver us from this present evil world."
12. Three times in the Gospel of John, our Lord referred to Satan as "the prince of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).
13. Second Corinthians 4:4 says Satan is "the god of this world," who has "blinded the minds of them which believe not."
14. Unsaved people feel at home in this world. They were born into it, and it is all they know. But the Christian needs to understand that he has been delivered from this present evil world.

15. First Peter 2:11 says we are strangers and pilgrims in this world.
16. The unsaved person feels at home in this world, but the Christian sings, "This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through."
17. The Christian is to set his affections on things above, not on the things of this world. The hymnwriter said:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
 Look full in His wonderful face,
 And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
 In the light of His glory and grace.-- Helen H. Lemmel*

18. The world appeals to sinners. The world appeals to their fallen natures, and the world offers them the things the flesh likes -- worldly pleasures, worldly music, worldly entertainment, and worldly sins.
19. John Phillips said, "The world can mask its satanic nature behind a smiling face, offering pleasure, prosperity, and power...It is a total system, offering culture, religion, philosophy, art, science, organization, variety. And it can threaten, punish, persecute, oppress, and kill. It can be noble, inspiring, and attractive; or it can be base, disgusting, and cruel. But it is the world, and it is all the unsaved person has" (*Exploring the Epistles of John*).

III. IF THIS WAS YOUR LAST YEAR ON EARTH, WOULD YOU BE MORE SUBMISSIVE TO GOD? (4:7, 8)

1. Remember I began tonight with a quote from evangelist J. Wilbur Chapman, written not long before he died: "The year is to be made up of days and weeks and months, and we shall pass through some of these, and by our side the Master will walk, if we are but willing to yield our wills to His and to follow the pathway which He has marked out. It will be glorious to live in these days if our wills are in harmony with His." Cf. James 4:7.
2. James deals with prayerlessness and worldliness, and he then gives us the cure for both. You could say this is a prescription for revival. We have in verses 7-10 ten imperatives -- "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God..."
3. If each and every member of Bible Baptist Church would do this we would see a genuine, heaven-sent revival.
4. "But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (4:6). Pride is the root of all sin.
5. James 4:10 says, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up."

6. Pride is devilish. Referring to the qualifications for a bishop, I Timothy 3:6 says, "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil."
7. We need to be mindful of our own pride and our own sinfulness. We need to stop making excuses for our sins.
8. A.W. Tozer said, "It is our wretched habit of tolerating sin that keeps us in our half-dead condition."
9. We need to acknowledge our dependence on God. We must deny self and yield to God. "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself..." (Luke 9:23).
10. A humble spirit and a submissive spirit go hand in hand. You cannot have one without the other. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (I Peter 2:13).
8. These protestors who are screaming and cursing, and looting and stealing, and attacking the police, and starting fires, etc. are wicked rebels who refuse to submit to authority.
9. Let us be humble (4:10), and let us "draw nigh to God" and He will draw nigh to us (4:8a).

CONCLUSION:

1. This could be the last year on earth because the Lord could very well return this year.
2. Our Lord said, "Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not" (Luke 12:40).
3. That is why the Bible often uses the expression, "like a thief in the night."
4. The apostle Paul said, "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape" (I Thess. 5:2, 3).
5. If the Lord were to come back this year, and you are not saved -- there will be "no escape"!