

## James 4:11-17

### "What Is Your Life?"

In these final few Vs of the 4<sup>th</sup> Ch of the book of James, both our tongue & our time come into view. He began Ch 4 talking about *war with* God; he ends it speaking about the *will of* God. Of course it's not difficult to connect those dots, if you're at war *with* God, you're certainly not in the *will of* God.

But week after week James has been hitting us right in the heart. Giving us the proper perspective on trials, exhorting us to be doers of the word & not hearers only (thinking that having come to church & heard the word that we've done our part & are really growing in spiritual maturity). James says, "No, if the information doesn't translate into practical application, you're not growing & it's not doing you any good." We've been reminded of the meaning of "love your neighbor as yourself" & exhorted to let our light so shine that men might see our good works & glorify our Father who is in heaven. (The, "You show me your faith w/out your works & I'll show you my faith *by* my works," principle.) James has talked to us about taming our tongue, that what comes out of our mouth should be consistent w/the new nature we've received in Christ... A problem w/our mouth points to a problem in our heart, the tongue merely delivers the dictates of our heart... & As it pertains to our heart, Ch 4 drops the bomb that exposes that a problem in my relationship with *you* is really a problem in me; & my relationship w/*God*. It shows that I don't have the proper perspective of who I am *before* the Lord & that I'm not content w/the provision that's come *from* the Lord in my life (which is all that I have, what do I have but that I haven't received it? God is the One who provides for us).

It points to pride; we think we deserve more, or some other "lot" in life. Really, what we *deserve* is hell, & anything outside of that is testimony to the love & grace of mercy of God. So James says, "Therefore submit to God, draw *near* to God, cleanse your hands you sinners & purify your hearts, you double-minded." He's saying, "Lead a life that reflects the reality of Christ in you, don't laugh & make light of your sin, repent, & mourn, be ashamed of your sin." "Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, & He will lift you up." Our proper posture before the Lord is one of humility, submission & servitude. He is holy & we are not... & the truth is that our pride is decimated in His presence. Once you have a true encounter w/holiness you won't think you "deserve" *anything*, nor will you see yourself as better than *any one*.

So we don't want to be those who *war with* God, we want to be those found in the *will of* God, amen? (Vs 11)

## Vs 11-12

Well it would seem to me that we could spend significant time on these 2 Vs alone, doesn't it? James has had all kinds of things to say about the type of talk that comes out of our mouth & here he picks it up again. Vs 11 begins, "Do not speak evil of one another..."

Now to tie this into our context, we're coming out of the section that speaks on humility, submitting to God, drawing near to God. "Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord..." But when we're slandering, putting down, speaking evil of someone else that's not symptomatic of humility, but of pride. It points out how right we are, how great we are, but how wrong & messed up they are.

He says, "Do not speak *evil* of one another." The word "evil" here means to "speak against" or "to accuse; w/a suggestion of the false & exaggerated", this would generally be applied w/in the context of speaking ill of someone who's not there to defend themselves or bring context to what's being said. **It's the word that was used to rebuke Miriam & Aaron when they were speaking against Moses for marrying the Ethiopian woman. It's gossip w/the intent to in some (even subtle) way, malign the character of the one whom you're talking about...** Now you've put a lens over the eyes of the one to whom you're speaking & the unrepresented party will now have to earn or in some way prove they're not who you represent them to be even though they don't even know they're under the gun of such scrutiny.

When Miriam & Aaron were talking trash about Moses, God rebuked them & said to them, **"I speak with him face to face, Even plainly, and not in dark sayings; And he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant Moses?"<sup>1</sup>** They were speaking "against" him, *evil of him*, you see... Lowering their listener's opinion of him. One has said, "Some people think that fault finding is their spiritual gift." ☺ Sometimes it seems that way but it ought not be. We call these kinds of people "character assassins". Yet the bible is clear that our words are to be used in such a way so as not to *hurt* one another, but to help, & bring hope & healing to one another. (Leave the book of James & go quickly to **Eph Ch 4 [29-32]**)

**Titus Ch 3:2** says, **"...speak evil of no one,"** Peter said, **"Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious."**<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The New King James Version. 1982 (Nu 12:8) Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>2</sup> The New King James Version. 1982 (1 Pe 2:1-3) Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

You see, if God has been gracious to us, why then are we not gracious toward other people? Instead we malign & slander, put down & criticize their character. Think of how many friendships have been ruined & marriages destroyed due to the way we have spoken to one another. **How many people have been driven from the church? How many church leaders driven to discouragement & their kids driven to disillusionment? All because of how we as the body of Christ speak of one another...**

But slander & criticism is inconsistent & incompatible w/the spirit of humility that God desires to be on display in our lives. You see, again, we can't be evil toward our brother & right w/God at the same time. What did John say? He said, ***"If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also."***<sup>3</sup>

**James carries on & illuminates the principle for us that to speak evil of your brother or sister is to in fact "judge" your brother or sister. Even beyond that to speak evil (or to slander) of your brother/sister is to judge the law of God, to set yourself in the place of God as being above the law... It's saying that we know better than God in the given situation**

Now is this a reference to the Levitical law? It could be, but more likely in keeping w/the context it points us back to Ch 2 & Vs 8. The royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." **When we slander someone, criticize their character, we're definitely not loving them as we do ourselves. But if we decide to speak ill of that person, rather than love that person than now we're not a doer of the law, we're a judge.** But as James points out, there's only one Lawgiver, namely the one who is able to save & to destroy (even J.C. Himself). So who am I, who are you to judge another?

**You see, if I'm going to judge someone rightly/appropriately, it would require that I have all the facts about that person & that situation, including an understanding of their thought process, the motive of their heart, yet only God has the capacity to know our thoughts & search our hearts... That's why James says, "Who are you to judge another?" Translation: "Who do you think you are?"**

Of course we could consider the famous words of Jesus at this point couldn't we? Let's look together at **Matt 7** (Vs 1-5)

<sup>3</sup> The New King James Version, 1982 (1 Jn 4:20-21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Jesus is saying, “Why are you so quick to point out the sin in someone else’s life & not consider the same sin in your own?” He says, “Hey, consider your own sin before you shine the light on someone else’s. Because you are going to be held to your own standard of scrutiny.”

Now I want to point out that Jesus isn’t saying we’re not to make judgment calls concerning right & wrong. There’s never a place in scripture that says we aren’t to agree w/God’s word. If scripture calls it sin, we call it sin, that’s not judgment that’s agreeing w/God’s word. We’re to exercise discernment in a given situation. Paul said, *“Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.”*<sup>4</sup> John told us we’re to test the spirits to see whether or not they really be of God (1 John 4). Jesus said, *“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”*<sup>5</sup> So it’s not sin to measure a situation or a given decision up against the word of God & see if it comes up wanting. But we’re not to make hypocritical judgments that presuppose the position &/or the motive of a man’s heart.

The truth of the matter is that if we’d focus on our own obedience to the word of God rather than investigating whether or not someone else is obeying it there would be much more peace & harmony in the body of Christ. James makes it clear that the only one w/the right to judge is the one w/the power to exonerate through faith in Christ, or to punish – namely God.

If you be in Christ, than you’re my brother, my sister. We’ve *all* missed the mark, we’re *all* sinners, we’ve *all* been redeemed by the blood of Christ, filled w/the *Spirit* of God & are in constant need of the *grace* of God, amen?

So when it comes to our tongue, we do well to humble ourselves, rather than exalt ourselves to the place of judge. So when it comes to our time, we’re to walk in humility, notice.

### Vs 13-16

Now is James condemning the person who carries around a day planner & tries to organize their life? Is he saying that we should be fly by the seat of our pants kind of people & whatever will be will be & anything more than that is presumptuous sin? Not at all. God is Himself into plans, structure & organization.

In Luke Ch 14 Jesus spoke of building a tower & waging a war.

<sup>4</sup> *The New King James Version*. 1982 (1 Th 5:21-22). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>5</sup> *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Jn 7:24). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

He said, “Who doesn’t 1<sup>st</sup> sit down & count the cost to see if he has the resources available to finish the build lest having begun, his friends mock him when he can’t finish?” “Who (when thinking about war) doesn’t think through his ability to win the war in advance before he starts something he can’t finish?” **He said these things w/in the context of carefully considering your decision to follow Him, don’t start something you’re not prepared to count the cost & see it through.**

God had a plan when He created this universe, God had a plan when He created the human body (the nervous system, cardio vascular system, reproductive system, the muscular system, digestive system etc). We praise God that He had a plan to redeem mankind through the shed blood of J.C.

**When you get on a plan you better hope the pilot has a flight plan, the home builder has a floor plan, the coach has a game plan, the teacher has a lesson plan... you get the idea. So the bible doesn’t in anyway put down planning.** There’s nothing morally/ethically wrong in having a plan, nothing inherently sinful in thinking things through. That’s commendable. The issue here (as James points out) isn’t in what’s said, it’s in what’s *not* said.

In the list of everything this guy/gal has planned, thought out & ready to roll there’s no mention anywhere of God being apart of the equation. You see there’s no problem w/a well thought through plan... the arrogance, the audacity is found in presuming upon a plan apart from God’s sovereignty. **You see, as believers we are not our own, we were bought at a price. So to presume upon a plan apart from the will & want of God for my life is called arrogant pride, it disrespects God’s sovereign right to lead our lives according to His own desire.**

Remember a couple of weeks ago when we mentioned the fact that Satan wants you to be Mr. or Mrs. Independent? Self made man & all that? As to where God wants you to walk in humility & complete dependence upon Him, submitting ourselves to Him in all that we do. This is a caution against the attitude of approaching life independently from God.

**I mean, this guy has it all figured out. He’s got the “when”, the “where”, the “how long”, the “What” & the money he’s gonna make as the result. He’s going to “this” city, spending a year there, he’s gonna do business, make money & take off... Sounds like you got it all figured out... except the part where you have a heart attack tomorrow & die...**

He says, "You don't even know what you're going to do tomorrow, much less a year from now." Your house might burn down, your spouse might up & leave you, the company might cut back & suddenly you're unemployed... The complexities involved in this equation are unfathomable, yet we presume to know what we're gonna do & how it's gonna go. James says it's arrogant pride...

Allow me to illustrate my point. Dr. A. Cressy Morrison (former president of the New York Academy of Sciences) said it like this: "Suppose you put ten pennies, marked from one to ten, into your pocket and give them a good shuffle. Now try to take them out in sequence from one to ten, putting back the coin each time and shaking them all again. Mathematically we know that your chance of first drawing number one is one in ten; of drawing one and two in succession, one in 100; of drawing one, two and three in succession, one in 1000, (4 in succession 1 in 10,000) and so on; your chance of drawing them all, from number one to number ten in succession, would reach the unbelievable figure of one in ten billion."

Here's my point: if I can't even deal w/10 pennies in my pocket, how on earth am I going to control the infinite complexities of life on a daily basis that deal not only w/my variables, but the variables of everyone else's life whom I'll run across everyday? It's out of my control, & that's exactly James' point.

Leave James one final time & look at **Luke Ch 12** (Vs 16-21). This is what James is saying. Leading life w/no thought toward God, but when will your soul be required of you? You don't even know what tomorrow may bring... How often we neglect to factor in the brevity, the frailty & the uncertainty of life.

"For what is your life..." Think about that. James doesn't let us consider this question collectively, we all have to consider it personally. It's a question I'll often pose at a funeral service... "What is your life?" One might say, "My life is a paradise." The other might say, "My life is a prison." One life may be inebriated w/pleasure, the other wracked w/pain. If I asked you, "What is your life?" You might say, "My life is a failure" you might say, "My life is a success."

But when the scriptures deal w/the subject of life, by & large the emphasis is upon the transience of life. The fleeting nature of life; when you read the book of Job you discover that he thought a lot about life. He said that his days were swifter than a weaver's shuttle, & spent w/out hope (Ch 7). He said, "My life is a breath", like a cloud that disappears & vanishes away.

He said a man's life comes forth like a flower & fades away, it flees like a shadow & does not continue. Isaiah said that life is like the grass that withers & the flower that fades (Ch 40:6). The psalmist said that his days were consumed like smoke (Ps 102:3) (just disappearing into the air).

We don't know what's going to happen 5 minutes from now... We don't know what will happen tomorrow. We measure life in years. Moses said, *"So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom."*<sup>6</sup> We should learn to see the value in each day. The bible teaches that God holds our very breath in His hands; who are we to presume upon the future? David cried, *"Lord, make me to know my end, And what is the measure of my days, That I may know how frail I am. Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, And my age is as nothing before You; Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor. Selah Surely every man walks about like a shadow; Surely they busy themselves in vain; He heaps up riches, And does not know who will gather them."*<sup>7</sup>

What is your life? James says it's even a vapor, a puff of steam that appears for a little time & then vanishes away... Time is constantly slipping away from us, w/all the technological conveniences meant to save us time, we have less time now than we've ever had. Money can't buy more of it, science can't make more of it...time is running out on each & every one of us... it's collapsing all around us & There's nothing we can do about it.

Our plans (as thorough as they may be) are always tentative. Our plans aren't our own, our time is not our own, our lives are not our own. Maintaining this simple yet sober perspective will keep our arrogance at bay... How critical it is that we don't simply "spend" & certainly not "waste" our lives. We need to "invest" our lives into the eternal.

"Hey, if the Lord wills I'll do such & such". I'm not in control, God is in control. Now when James says, "Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills we shall live & do this or that.'" He's not necessary saying that we ought to verbally/audibly consent to God's will at every turn (though that's not a bad thing). But this is simply the attitude of our heart, its humility, submitted to the will of God, you see?

Many people are afraid of the will of God. They're afraid they'll wind up somewhere miserable or w/someone ugly if they submit to saying, "God Your will be done." Yet the bible says, *"The counsel of the Lord stands forever, The plans of His heart to all generations."*<sup>8</sup> What that means is that the will of God (the plan of God) comes from the heart of God.

<sup>6</sup> The New King James Version, 1982 (Ps 90:12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>7</sup> The New King James Version, 1982 (Ps 39:4-6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>8</sup> The New King James Version, 1982 (Ps 33:11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

His will is the expression of His love for you. It's the safest place you could ever be... It's when we're *out* of the will of God that we're in danger...

### Vs 17

We might find it interesting to make a list of what we consider to be the top 5 sins Christians may commit & compare those lists. We might say, "lying, gossip, lust, maybe stealing or coveting." But James' list would look a little different. Those things are what we refer to as sins of "Commission" we know it's wrong but we do it anyway. We commit sin.

But what James is talking about are sins of "Omission". Knowing what's right, but choosing to look the other way, or not do it. Like the priest & the Levite that didn't help the man on the side of the road left for dead beaten by thieves but the Good Samaritan helped him out. They knew it was right simply chose not to do it, that's sin.

Now we could talk about all the things in this world that are wrong that we may simply turn our head from... But to keep to our context James is saying, "Hey, we've talked about a lot of stuff. Stuff like trials, our tongue, our faith/works, self-centeredness, pride, arrogance, & humility, God's will, God's way in God's time. These are things that before you may've said, 'I didn't know...' Well now you know. You know that God expects you to walk in humility, to speak kindly, to measure your days carefully in light of His sovereignty, you're to be a doer of His word & not a hearer only & to know it & not do it...is sin."

Translation, now we're accountable. So again how important that we submit to God, realizing the brevity & the frailty of life, He could call us to give account of our lives today. Are you ready for that? What is your life?

#### Prayer Points:

God teach us to number our days. To realize how frail we are; at our best state a vapor that appears for a little time & then vanishes away. Help us that our lives might count for eternity. That we wouldn't be guilty of always wasting our time, but redeeming our time. Use our lives for Your glory & may Your will be done, not ours...

What is your life? Is your life hidden w/Christ in God? So many people come to church & have an emotional experience, perhaps they even come to the cross. The problem is they never get *on* the cross. They never die to self, they leave here & return to the same things, nothing changes, that's not salvation. The faith that saves your soul will change your life. If you've not submitted your life to God, than turn from your sin & trust in J.C. For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. Jesus Shed His blood for you, died upon the cross for you, rose gain 3 days later for you that you might be justified before God by faith in Him.