

Who Knows What Tomorrow Brings

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – James reminds his audience that life is short and to live for the will of God in all things
2. aim – to cause us to be careful about planning temporal matters in the face of the shortness of life
3. passage – James 4:13-17

b. outline

1. The Substance of this Reminder (James 4:13-14a)
2. The Soul of this Reminder (James 4:14b)
3. The Solution in this Reminder (James 4:15-17)

c. opening

1. the **title** of this pericope
 - a. the title above is **not** framed in the form of a question – it is simply a statement of **fact** that forms the substance of the message James brings in **4:13-17**
 1. **i.e.** it all depends on how you “say” the sentence – the question mark is “up” at the end
 - b. I **purposely** did not include a question mark because it is **not** being posed as a question – it is framed as a **statement of fact**. *no one knows what tomorrow may bring, especially you!!*
2. the **hub** of **chaps. 4-5**
 - a. **possibly**: a **transition** from **chap. 4** to **chap. 5** – however, the **basic** subject of worldliness simply continues in **5:1-6** with a discussion of wealth and its consequences
 - b. **probably**: a **hub** around which **both chaps. 4-5** spin – a central idea that is **core** to both discussions (**e.g.** the center of a **propeller**, with two blades spinning around it)
 - c. assuredly: a **reminder** – **a truth which we all inherently know** around which any discussion of worldliness or materialism must revolve (**i.e.** the “bottom line” re: life that effects our thinking)
3. the **parts** of this pericope
 - a. the **substance** of this reminder = the truth itself → the **soul** of this reminder = the reality that undergirds this truth about life → the **solution** of this reminder = the way that **believers** are to consider this reality in light of the way that they live and interact with this world ...
 - b. **IOW**: here is the **core** around which our view of the material world must revolve ...

I. The Substance of this Reminder (James 4:13-14a)

Content

a. the wisdom of James

1. “*come now, you who say ...*” = James draws his audience to listen carefully to his wisdom
 - a. **remember**: James is often called “the Proverbs of the N.T.” – it is wisdom such as this ...
 - b. James desires his audience to “gather around” (**i.e.** “*come now*”) and hear him
 1. *agō* = to lead; bring; carry; lit. pay attention; look at what I have to say
 - c. but, James also makes it clear *who* he wants to converse with (**i.e.** “*you who say*”)
 1. **i.e.** those who might be inclined to say the words he then “makes up” ...
2. “*Today or tomorrow ...*” = James draws up a quote that is an **example** of his wisdom
 - a. the words are an **analogy** – fictional words placed upon the lips of an **interlocutor**
 1. interlocutor = a fictional inquisitor that a writer addresses *in anticipation of his questions*
 2. **IOW**: James **makes up** a quote from a fictional individual saying this *in order to* address the **fundamental flaw** in the statement itself and make a larger point from it
 - a. **e.g.** Jesus’ statements in his parables that he puts on the lips of **fictitious** people
 3. James understands a **fundamental reality** that he needs to express at this point, so he uses this method in order to make get the attention of his readers ...
 - b. the words are from the mouth of a **fictitious businessman** – someone who is making plans **into the future** (“*today or tomorrow*”) to go to a “random” town (“*such and such a town*”) and spend some time (“*a year there*”) and open a business to turn a “**profit**”
 1. **question #1**: is James condemning Christians engaging in business *in general*? **answer**: probably not – again, the quote is designed to be **fictitious** to make a point *other than about business practices*; so, James probably doesn’t have a problem with “profit”, *per se*

2. **question #2:** so, is James *only* condemning *certain* people, those engaged in *future-looking* business practices? **answer:** definitely not – the point of the entire pericope will demonstrate that James is actually addressing *his entire audience* – the quote is just an **example**
 - c. the words are the kind of thing that **anyone in the audience** could say, but **in different contexts**
 1. **i.e.** we *all* make plans, and we *all* look forward to what we might do in the days ahead
 - a. **e.g.** the businessman plans to open a business, the rest of us have “other” plans
 2. **i.e.** we are *inherently* forward-looking creatures, but there is a *fundamental problem* in that
 3. “yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring” (**see title**) = James reveals his words of wisdom
 - a. **you are not omniscient** – as a human, you are *incapable* of *truly knowing* what tomorrow may bring (**e.g.** who could have thought on Jan. 1, 2020 what this year would bring?)
 - b. **theological aside:** the difference between the natures of God and of man re: time & space
 1. God exists *outside* of time – all of time is *eternally present* (**i.e.** no looking “into” the future)
 2. man exists *inside* of time – all of time is either past or future (**i.e.** no actual “present”)
 3. because all of time is “before” God, he knows it all (perfectly); because all of time is “beyond” man, he knows very little of it (past or future)
- b. the substance of this reminder**
1. there is no way to know as a *human being* what tomorrow may bring – since we cannot “see” into the future, we cannot *really plan* out that future
 2. **the fundamental flaw in the fictitious quote is that the person speaking it cannot say with certainty that any of it is even possible!**

II. The Soul of this Reminder (James 4:14b)

Content

a. the wisdom of James

1. James *again* asks a **rhetorical** question: “what is your life?” – designed to “deep dive” his point
 - a. this question probes to the “soul” of the matter – *what is the real problem we have?*
2. the keyword of the question: “is” – what *is* your life?
 - a. it is an **ontological** question – what *are* you, really; what *is* your life, really?
 - b. **IOW:** *why* can we not plan out our future – why do we have no control over our destiny?

b. the soul of this reminder

1. **answer:** this life is but “*a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes*”
 - a. “mist” = a fog; a dew; an *analogy* based on a simple atmospheric condition (**i.e.** a dewpoint)
 - b. **i.e. a very short existence of a tenuous nature with little lasting impact**
 1. short – just as a morning fog dissipates rapidly, so our lives are very short (**e.g. the dash**)
 - a. **e.g.** if human civilization is ~10,000 years, a 100-year-old man experiences <1% of it
 2. tenuous – just as a fog has little substance, so our lives have little substance day-to-day
 - a. **i.e.** most of our lives are about the mundane, just “getting along” with work
 3. little impact – just as a fog produces little, so our lives have little lasting impact (over time)
 - a. **i.e.** very few people (out of billions) have their name remembered one generation later
2. **note:** although human beings *invariably* know this, they are **terrified** to confront it (**why?**)
 - a. the unregenerate man **has nothing else** – he is forced to believe that this life is all there is
 1. therefore, he must strive to “make the most” out of life *now* (**i.e.** get all the *experiences*)
 2. **IOW:** he *actually believes* he can make the fictitious statement above ...
 - b. the regenerate man has *an eternal life* – he knows that *this life* is a small fraction of his existence
 1. **the Christian is to think of this life very differently – to understand his connection to this temporal world in much different ways than the man who only has this life to live**

III. The Solution in this Reminder (James 4:15-17)

Content

a. the wisdom of James

1. “*instead*” = a “rephrasing” of the fictitious statement above *with one significant difference*
 - a. specifically, “*if the Lord wills*” – a recognition that all of life is under the sovereign will of God, and *he* determines that outcome of all of our plans
 - b. **note:** James *shortens* the new statement to focus on that phrase specifically

b. the solution in this reminder

1. **principle: the Christian is to recognize that this life (for the elect) is to do the will of God in all things; to sacrifice one's personal goals and desires for the overarching will of God**
 - a. **e.g.** the submission of Jesus to the will of God in the Garden (**Matthew 26:39**)
 - b. yes, we are "free" to pursue our dreams, but we must be willing to sacrifice them for the will of God over our lives (**Proverbs 16:9; Luke 9:23**)
 - c. **problem:** most of our "dreams" are nothing more than *selfish ambition* and *worldliness* (**core**)
 1. as material creatures, we become *focused* on the pleasures of the world from which we spring
 2. and, we *forget* that we are but a "mist" that passes through, with little time
 3. so, we become **myopic** – *our* happiness, *our* success, *our* health, *our* wholeness, etc. – **us!!**
 4. **i.e.** "*you boast in your arrogance*" (**v. 16**) = you *actually believe* that what you are pursuing in this world *matters in the least* – that your "success" is important to your "self-fulfillment"
 - a. or, that you are **entitled** to a life of "meaning" or "ease" or
 - d. such arrogance ("*boasting*") is "*evil*" = it is *visible evidence* that you have embraced worldliness
 1. the unregenerate man is not condemned in these words – he knows nothing different
 2. it is the believer being condemned here – he "*knows the right thing*" (**v. 17**)
 - a. he knows that life is short, and we must make the most of it for the glory of God
 - b. he knows that "*it is sin*" (**v. 17**) to focus myopically upon himself rather than the will of God
2. **application: this life is short and tenuous – look away from yourself and see what God would will for your life to produce, for what will last into eternity** (**Luke 12:16-21**)

"The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."