

(Education for Exultation) if the Lord Wills

by John Piper

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a true view of life and God in our planning and decision-making, and warns against the dangers of arrogance and pride.

Duration: 36:02

Scripture: Psalm 37:5, Psalm 90:12, Proverbs 3:5-6, Proverbs 16:9, Proverbs 27:1, Ecclesiastes 3:1, Isaiah 55:8-9, Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:2, James 4:13-16

Topics: "Gods Sovereignty", "Christian Worldview"

Description

In this sermon, Pastor John Piper focuses on James 4:13-16 and the importance of humbling ourselves under the sovereignty of God. He addresses the issue of making plans without considering God's will and the brevity of life. James is upset with those who make plans without acknowledging the truth that life is like a vapor, here for a little while and then gone. Pastor Piper emphasizes the need to have a Christian worldview and to always include God's will in our plans, recognizing that our lives are in His hands.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at www.desiringgod.org. Our scripture text for this morning is James chapter 4, verses 13 through 16. Come now, you who say, today or tomorrow we shall go to such and such a city and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.

Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.

But as it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Lord, we don't want to boast and we don't want to be arrogant and we don't want to be accused of evil.

And so we ask that now as we've humbled ourselves before you in these songs, you would humble us before your Word and that we would be childlike in our readiness to hear from our Heavenly Father, from your inspired Word. Protect me from misleading these people. Grant that I would be faithful to these straightforward teachings here in James and that the application that you designed for us this morning would be made with a spiritual anointing that would be life-changing, even saving, and that all the purposes you have for us as a church in the decades and perhaps centuries to come would be fulfilled according to your great mercy, which we ask for now in every way, every mercy, Lord, we ask for in Jesus'

name.

Amen. This is now my tenth and final message on the theme of education for exaltation as we move into our pledging this morning. And we began on January 30th with God.

And we end today with God. The text is James 4. Keep your Bibles open, please. 13 to 16.

And what I'd like to do with you is assist you in, together with me, humbling ourselves as a people under the glorious sovereignty of God over all things. I want to walk with you through these verses. We'll begin at verse 13.

Come now, you who say, today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit. So James is reprimanding someone or some group. He's reprimanding.

Come now, you who say. This is a reprimand that he has here. Perhaps some businessmen or merchants.

It's stated generally enough, really, to apply to all of us. There are people he's reprimanding who do five things. Number one, they say they're going to set out on a trip.

Come now, you who say, today or tomorrow we will go. Secondly, they are people who plan to reach a destination. Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city.

Thirdly, they are people who plan to spend a certain amount of time there. Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city and spend a year there. Fourthly, they are people who intend to engage in some business there.

Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city. We'll spend a year there and we will engage in business. And fifthly, they are people who plan to have some success in their business with profit.

Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city and spend a year there and engage in business and we will make a profit. He has a reprimand for these people who plan to do these five things. And the question is, what's the problem? What's wrong with this? To plan is wrong.

To intend to do a thing is wrong. What's wrong here? No, it's not wrong to plan. It's not wrong to intend to go a place or do a thing.

We see that in verse 15. It's not wrong. It's perfectly legitimate to do this or that and plan to do it.

What's wrong in verse 13 is that these folks were making their plans to go and do and work and succeed without giving expression. Notice, come now you who say. And he's going to come back to that saying.

Rather you should say, he says in verse 15. These are people who are not thinking and they're not expressing a true view of life and a true view of God. And that matters to James and God.

So we have to ask, okay, if the problem here in the planning to go a place, spend some time, do a thing, have some success. If the problem there is not the planning and the intending, but the failure to plan with a mindset and an expression that has a true view of life and a true view of God in it. I want to know what that true view of life is and that true view of God is.

And that's what verse 14 tells us life and 15 God. So let's look at verse 14 to see what the true view of life is that was missing from this planning. He says to those who are planning their business venture.

Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor. That appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

In other words, your planning fails to take into account and have a mindset and give expression to come. Now you say it fails to give expression to a true view of life. You're a vapor.

You're here for a little while and gone. Now, at this point, I hear an American pragmatist, namely an American saying. What difference would that make? I mean, OK.

I'm a vapor. How's that going to change my planning? I'm going to go to Duluth. Spend a year there, set up my business, make a profit and then maybe come back to the cities.

I'm a vapor. What difference does that make? What's the bottom line difference in believing or saying that I'm a vapor? That's the way all pragmatists talk. Just give me a bottom line.

What's the difference? Now, think about this. I don't think it makes any difference in your bottom line. You'll plan your trip and you'll set up your business and you'll spend a year or 10 years in Duluth and make a profit.

Maybe. So what's the point, James? And the point is this. It matters to God whether in your planning, whether it makes any difference at all at the bottom line that you think truth and say it.

That's amazing to me. It matters to God in all your planning, whether it makes a bottom line difference or not, that your mindset accord with truth, that it be actively functioning in your brain and that you give expression to it with your words. That matters to James and it matters to God.

Now, think about that, all you pragmatists. Think about this issue of truth and whether it matters to God, whether your mind is functioning with the true view of life and your words are expressing a true view of life, whether it makes a difference or not in your bottom line. Think about that.

That's an amazing thing. That is an amazing thing. Now, why would that matter? Why would it matter if there's no bottom line difference? Why does God care about having our minds filled with true thoughts about life and our voices expressing with words true views of life? Namely, that we are a vapor.

We're here for a short while and then we disappear. Why would that matter if it's not the bottom line? And the answer is this. God created you for more than moving your body to Duluth and setting up a business and getting gain and moving back to the Twin Cities.

That's not what life is mainly about. Life is mainly about truth. Life is mainly about thinking the way God thinks, feeling the way God feels, speaking the truth over the things we do.

It matters that the trip be made with the mindset of truth. It matters that the trip be spoken about in the context of verbally expressed reality. God created you to say true things about the bottom line.

Namely, it's very fragile like a mist. It's very short and has no durable substance. And you're going to disappear with it very soon.

Say those things. Think those things. Whether you can see any bottom line difference that it makes or not.

James is very upset and I presume he is speaking for God here with these folks who are making a simple innocent plan to go someplace and do business and don't give any expression to a Christian worldview. Namely, life is a vapor. We're here for a little time and then we disappear.

Those truths should be in our mind and on our lips whether you see a bottom line difference or not. Don't use your ability to discern bottom line differences to decide whether you will be a person of truth, saturated with truth, speaking the truth, exulting in the truth, making the truth known in the world. That's verse 14.

Verse 15 tells us not the truth about life, but the truth about God. What truth about God was being omitted in verse 13? We're coming to make pledges here in a few minutes. We're going to plan.

We're planning. Pledges are plans. They're just plans.

We could do it all wrong. We could do it all wrong as we walk and throw our little cards in the baskets. We could do it all wrong.

We could do it like verse 13. So what's wrong? Come now you who say today or tomorrow, we'll go to such and such a city, spend a year there, engage in business, make a profit, give it to the church. Verse 15, instead you ought to say, notice his focus on the saying.

I'm talking verbal expressions here, not just silent beliefs, not just private religion. I'm talking the way you talk at work. Rather, you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.

So the right view of life is that your life is a vapor. You appear for a little while and then you disappear. Keep that in your mind.

Give expression to that. The right view of God. What is that? What is that? If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.

He tells us two things about God in this verse. One is contained in the words, if the Lord wills, we will live. And the second one is contained in the words, if the Lord wills, we will do this or that.

Those are two truths about God you should never, ever forget. Let's take them one at a time. What is he teaching us about God when he says you should say before your business venture or your pledge handing in? If the Lord wills, I will live.

Here's what he's teaching. The duration of your life is in the hands of God. Or to say it another way, God governs how long we will live.

Or to say it another way, God is ultimately in control of life and death. If the Lord wills, we will live. If he doesn't, we die.

And there's no in between. God decides who lives, God decides who dies. And when.

Which is why we should talk that way. Listen to Paul. Acts 18.21, he left Ephesus.

I will return to you again if God wills. 1 Corinthians 4.19, he writes, I will come to see you soon if the Lord wills. In Paul's ministry, until he had that decisive word from the Holy Spirit that he was going to make it to Rome, for years and years he never knew whether the next city was his burial place.

He came very close to it over and over again. If the Lord wills, I'll be back to Corinth. If the Lord wills, I'll be back to Ephesus.

God means for the truth of his sovereign rule over my life and your life to be spoken, to be believed, and in our planning to be thought about. Let it flavor all of your thinking about your planning. If the Lord wills, you will get home today.

And if he doesn't, you will die before you get home today. James is very concerned about this. God is very concerned about this.

God wants a true view of himself to be known and believed and embraced and cherished and kept in mind and spoken about. Instead, you ought to, rather than say that, say this. That's the first thing we learn.

God is the one who controls life and death. If you live, he willed you to live. If you die, he willed you to die.

Your life and your death is in the hand of God. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Point number two in verse 15. What does he mean when he says, if the Lord wills, we will do this or that? If the Lord wills, we will, in Duluth, do this or that. It means that God governs everything you accomplish in life.

God governs the doing of this and the doing of that. God governs your successes. God governs your accomplishments.

God governs your achievements. Instead, you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we will live. He governs life.

And also, if the Lord wills, we will do this or we will do that. And if the Lord doesn't will it, you won't do this or do that. Our lives, our businesses, our death, our successes are in the hands of God.

So, what's wrong with the planning in verse 13? Come now, you who say, today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, engage in business, make a profit. What's wrong with that? What's wrong is this. The people were making their plans, perhaps writing their pledge cards, without a mindset that takes into account a true view of life and two true views of God.

They were not thinking and they weren't saying, I'm a vapor. I handle my money like a vapor. I'm here for a little while and I'm gone.

They weren't even thinking that. Never entered their mind when they wrote their pledge card out or brought it to the front. I'm a vapor.

What is money to me? I'm a vapor. I'm a vapor. I'm here for a little while, gone.

And my place will remember me no more. And they weren't thinking, God governs how long I'm here. If my vapor-like life lasts a year, God gave me that year.

If it lasts 80 years, God gave me those 80 years. He owes me nothing. He decides whether my vapor is long or my vapor is short.

On human terms, on eternity, it's always short. And they weren't taking into account, all my ability to pay this pledge is from God. All my business is God's business.

Everything I can accomplish in life and everything I may fail to accomplish in life is governed by God. Well, I don't want us to make this mistake. I want us in the thinking of our pledges to think true view of life.

I'm a vapor and a true view of God. He governs my life and He governs my accomplishments. Keep that in your mind and speak it tomorrow at work.

Everybody you work with is a vapor. And they don't know it. They need to know it.

They really need to know it. And God governs how long their vapor lasts and they need to reckon with this God. And you do too.

Is there a deeper problem than just failure to speak a right view of life and a true view of God? Is there a deeper problem? Yes, there is. Verse 16. The deeper problem is arrogance.

But as it is, the way you are talking about your planning and the way you are thinking, you're boasting in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So all they said was, today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there and do business and make a profit.

That's all they said. And James says, your problem is arrogance. Now at this point in my sermon preparation, I just folded my hands and I put my face on my desk.

And I said, Lord, I want to say this not with overstatement or understatement. I don't want to say it too powerfully or too weakly here. But I want to say it the way it is in this text.

Here's what it says. Not to believe in your heart and confess with your lips that life is a vapor and that God rules over your life and all your accomplishments is arrogant. I'll say that again.

Soft tone of voice, straight out of the text. Not to believe in your heart and confess with your lips that life is a vapor and God is sovereign and governs over your life and death. And all your accomplishments is arrogant and yields boasting expressed in simple planning minus the truth.

The reason I approach it like this very soberly is because the accusations of arrogance today are many. I eat the bread of the accusation of arrogance. Why? I have to think very soberly about this.

If I took my adversary's word for it, I would be one of the most depressed, paralyzed, immobilized, discouraged pastors in the world. Because today, if you say of a certain theological viewpoint, just pick any error you think is an error and say, this is wrong and harmful. You will be accused of arrogance.

Just simply say that with no loud voice. This is wrong and harmful. You will be accused of arrogance.

Or if you say, we should pray for our Jewish friends that they believe in the Messiah Jesus and be saved. You will be accused of arrogance. Or if you pursue a wayward church member who's in sin, say sexual sin, and you take him and you say, stop, please repent, return.

You may be accused of judgmentalism and arrogance. You can hardly do anything today that's rooted in truth that doesn't get you accused of arrogance. So we've got to get clear on what arrogance is.

Or we're going to go under. Well, this is not a sermon mainly on arrogance. But I can say this about arrogance.

And that's all I'll say. I won't go beyond the text. I'll just say this.

James says, the people who are planning their lives without the mindset in their heart and without the confession on their lips. Come now you who say, rather you should say. They don't have it in their heart and mind.

They don't have it on their lips. What don't they have? They don't have the view and the confession that life is a vapor. And that God rules if the Lord wills we will live over life and death.

And God rules if the Lord wills we will do this or that over what they do. And not to believe that and not to say that is arrogant. That's just what the text says.

Now let's apply it to our situation. Here we are on the brink of pledges. Application number one.

Therefore, education for exaltation means educating our children to have a true view of life. That it's a vapor and they may not live beyond the sixth grade. And God will decide if they do or not.

That's the truth we will teach our kids. Let me just stop here and ask you parents and children. Who or what would you prefer to have govern the length of your life? The devil? Chance? Disease? Your adversaries in the world? Would you rather they have in their hands how long you live? Or a loving father? Who plans your days according to a perfect wisdom? You need to know.

You need to know this. This education for exaltation is about a vision of God. Not mainly about a building.

You need to know this because some of you will not want to vote for that vision with your dollars perhaps. And I wouldn't want your dollars if you don't believe in the vision. It's a vision of life.

It's a vapor we will teach our children. Life is a vapor. It is a vision of a sovereign God who governs our lives and gives us eighty or eight years.

And he decides according to a perfectly wise plan. Tell me when your eight year old gets leukemia and is breathing her last breath. What are you going to say? You're going to blame it on the devil? And have her say, but where's God? I know what I'm going to say.

If it has to be Talitha. I'm going to say, he loves you. And he has designed for you eight precious years in my house.

And I have loved you. And now he wants you home. And I don't know why he prefers to have you there than here.

But I submit and let's submit and pray and get ready to go. That's what I'm going to say. And that's what I'm going to teach your children to say.

And if you don't want to pay for that vision, don't make a pledge. This is a vision of God, not of a building. It's a vision of a God who is in charge of my life and my kids' lives and your lives.

And a vision of God who decides whether we do this or whether we do that. And to that vision, I pledge my life and my money. Number two, corporately as we make these pledges, let's say, whisper it to God, to each other.

If the Lord wills, we will be able to pay. If the Lord wills, I will have the money I hope I will have. If the Lord wills, I will have a heart on March to finish it off or in October.

If the Lord wills, this will be sustained in my life. And if He doesn't, then I won't. Let's honor the truth with this statement, if the Lord wills.

Third application, enjoy the security of the teaching that your life is in God's hand. Let's enjoy the security of a sovereign God who sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to purchase sinners like us so that now His omnipotence flows not in the channel of wrath, but in the channel of mercy so that everything that befalls the children of God, no matter how painful or how pleasant, is good for them. Let's rest in that.

Let's rest and enjoy the security of this vision. And last application, finally, if God so rules over your life, and if He so rules over all that you do this or that, then surely this God is able to make all grace abound you so that you may have enough of everything and may provide an abundance for every good work. 2 Corinthians 9, 8. Surely we can make our pledges with confidence that He'll meet our needs.

God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Lord, everything we do with our money, everything we do with our mouth, everything we do with our arms, our legs, everything we do at home and at work, we want it to be to display Your worth. We want people that we work with to know how worthy You are.

We want them to be saved, Lord. We want the nations who've never heard of You to hear the gospel and be saved. We want communities and pockets like Somalis and others in this city who don't understand the gospel yet to hear it come out of our mouths and see it live with our lives and be saved.

We want this building to go up soon with its incubator that enables us to plant churches and to have big neighborhood events here to share the gospel. We want this to be for Your glory. So, Lord, take our lives and take our money and use them for Your name.

We plead for mercy, Lord, that's all. And we say, if the Lord wills, we will build. If the Lord wills, we will pay.

That's our demeanor this morning, Lord. We are pleading mercy. We have no claim on You whatsoever that You should make this come to pass for our sakes.

It's for Your sake. It's for Christ's sake that You might be pleased to do it. And so, Lord, for those cards that are yet to be given and for those that have been given, I give You thanks.

Who am I and what is my people that we have been thus enabled to pledge like this? So now dismiss us with Your blessing. Be honest. Help us to be in prayer.

Help us to have a trusting demeanor. And all the people said, Amen. You're dismissed.

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