

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Theme: "The Testing of Your Faith"

Lesson: 30

Text: 4:13-17

Date: 10-22-23

Trinity Lutheran Church

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TEXT AND STUDY NOTES

(13) Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"—

(14) yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring.

What is your life?

For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

(15) Instead you ought to say, **"If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."**

(Job 7:7; Ps 39:5; 102:3; 144:4; Prov 27:1; Is 2:22;

Mt 6:10; Mk 3:35; Lk 12:18-20; 22:42;

Acts 18:21; 21:14; Rom 8:27; 2 Cor 8:5;

Eph 5:17; 6:6; Col 4:12; 1 Thess 4:3; 5:18;

Heb 10:36; 1 Pet 2:15; 4:2; 1 John 2:17; 5:14;15)

(16) As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

(17) So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

(Lk 12:47,48; Jn 9:41; 1 Cor 5:6; 2 Pet 2:21)

The First Ending: A Gentle Rebuke (4:13-17)

Vv. 13-17 constitute one of the milder rebukes in the epistle. The section is directed to those in the congregation, not necessarily the pastors, whose behavior was not as flagrantly repulsive as that of those who were conspiring with the enemies of the church against their fellow Christians. They were living their lives according to ordinary patterns of life and were not fully aware of its transitory nature. James reminds them that their lives are under divine control and could come to an end at any time. This is not the first time James has introduced the theme of life's transitory nature, as in 1:10-11 he compared the rich man to withering grass and flowers. Here the comparison is more pointed, as man's nature has no more lasting substance than a wisp of air.

James here zeroes in on the mercantile interests of these Christians. Matthew has a close parallel in Jesus' remarks about the Flood's coming in the days of Noah. Those people, too, were consumed with ordinary things, marrying and giving in marriage, and were not aware of the eschatological doom awaiting them in the impending Flood. The greater eschatological doom shall come in the judgment of Jesus (Matt. 24:37-39). “If the Lord wills,

we shall live and we shall do this or that” (James 4:15) places the entire Christian life under the will of Jesus. Here it is easiest to assume that the Lord (*ho kurios*) is a reference to Jesus, as this title is most appropriately applied to Him throughout the entire New Testament. James should not be seen as an exception.

“If the Lord wills” is more than a recognition of divine control over all of life; it is a confession that Jesus can appear at any time as God's appointed Judge and terminate the ordinary course of time.¹² The boasting condemned by James is that supreme confidence that a human being can direct his future affairs without fear of divine intervention. “All such boasting is evil (*ponēra*)” (4:16). “Evil” here has the same intent as it does in the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:13), an attitude inspired by the devil. Boasting about what a man is able to accomplish in the future is not only silly, because no man is totally in control of his destiny, but worse, the boasting man puts himself in the place of God the Creator. This is, of course, an affront against the First Commandment in not letting God have that honor which can only rightly belong to Him. This is the most satanic of all sins. For this reason James sees boasting about the future as evil from Satan. It is the opposite of faith which relies totally on God.

LIFE APPLICATION

What is your life?

For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, **"If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."**

How do you make this the reality of your daily life?