

“THE LORD WILLING.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Text: James 4:13-17

Introduction.

Let's see a quick show of hands. How many of you are planning on still being alive next week? How many of you who have jobs are planning on still having them next month? How many of you are counting on still having reasonably good health a year from now? How many of you have some plans for travel and vacations later this year?

We wake up every day in a world that lives this way. It may be one of the most common shared characteristics of each of us in this room. We all presume on the future.

This past week Phama and I made plane reservations for spring break to visit our son Reed who has a new job out on Catalina Island off the coast of LA. But there is a world of variables that could impact whether we actually go, variables involving any one of us and our health or life, variables of continued employment, variables of airlines or natural disasters.

Our text in James is meant to give us some wisdom about life and making plans and the will of God. Let's define the will of God first and look at different ways to respond to the will of God.

What is the will of God?

God's will is His eternal counsel by which He rules and overrules and governs all things according to His good pleasure. God's good and perfect will is that attribute He has by which He decides, approves, determines all things.

God's will is revealed in Scripture and knowable.

Acts 22:14 [Paul] said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth.

Colossians 1:9 we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding

God's will is understandable.

Ephesians 5:17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Seek God's will.

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Pray for God's will.

Start each day by praying the way Jesus taught us to pray. Father, your will be done, in all the earth just like it always is in heaven.

James tells us there are three ways we can respond to the will of God.

Ignoring God's Will, James 4:13-14, 16.

Who is James addressing here? He's writing to Christians. More specifically he is addressing Christians who say five things. What five things? The five things in verse 13.

They say they will go on a trip today or tomorrow.

They say they will go to a certain destination today or tomorrow.

They say they will spend a certain amount of time there, one year.

They say they will engage in a certain activity while they are there, a trade, a business pursuit.

Finally they say they will make a profit from this activity.

Is it wrong to make plans? Not necessarily. James is confronting a kind of pride that is presumptuous and ignores the sovereignty and providence of God.

Yes, make your plans. Yes, chart a course. But don't forget who you are and who God is. Don't forget your weakness and frailty.

James is challenging a certain attitude or mindset, "come you who say ..." as if there were no God and it doesn't matter in the heavens what we do and where we go.

Come now you who do all your talking and planning and deciding, come now you who say what you will do with no thought of God, and no thought of letting your knowledge of God inform your plans and decisions.

Proverbs 19:21 Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.

Proverbs 20:24 A man's steps are directed by the LORD. How then can anyone understand his own way?

Proverbs 27:1 Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.

Would you boast about your golf game to Tiger Woods or Rory McIlroy (mac'-il-roy)?
Would you boast about your bank accounts to Bill Gates or Warren Buffett?
Would you boast about how smart you are to Ken Jennings or Marilyn Vos Savant?
Would you boast about your milking operation to the owners of Fair Oaks Farm in Indiana that milks over 30,000?
Would I boast about my preaching to John Piper?

James is saying it is a form of boasting or bragging in front of God when we say we are going to do this and accomplish that with no thought of where God is in all of it.

Do we grow up, go to church, get married, get a job, pursue a career, have kids, buy and sell houses and cars, invest, prepare for retirement all without much thought of the will of God let alone praying and seeking and asking for the will of God?

Dr. Matthew Smith, Executive Director, Kidstown International wrote in a letter this week:
We live in an age of “we can do it”. Whatever we put our mind to, society says, we can achieve. There is no limit except what we place on ourselves. Unfortunately, this deception has also crept into the church, and we find ourselves (at least I do) focusing more on what I can do than looking to God to do the “doing” for me.

This is the sin of arrogant independence seen in the parable of the rich man.

Luke 12:16-21 And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, 17 and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ 18 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. 19 And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ 20 But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ 21 So is the one who lays up treasure for himself ***and is not rich toward God.***”

What’s wrong with this picture? What’s the sin?

Is it having money? Is it making lots of money?
Is it having a successful business or farm? Is it getting a promotion and a pay increase?
Is it having your investments really pay off? Is it being productive or fruitful or diligent?

No, our world needs successful businesses to provide goods and services and employ others. So what’s the problem? Why is he called a fool? Because of his presumption and arrogance.

Luke 12:19 And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”

He gives no indication of valuing God or godliness or storing up treasures in heaven. He is only storing up treasure on earth and only for himself. He was planning for the wrong future. He was too short sighted. He is not rich toward God.

He ignores the reality that life is fragile and short and is from God and should be lived for God.

Psalm 39:4-5 “O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am!

5 Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you.

Psalm 102:3 For my days pass away like smoke,

Psalm 102:11 My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass.

Psalm 90:10, 12 The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; ... they are soon gone, and we fly away.

12 So *teach us to number our days* that we may get a heart of wisdom.

Did you notice this morning’s mist and how quickly it burned off? Gain wisdom from that. We all are aware of how quickly life passes. At the end of the year we remark how the year has flown by. And who can believe it’s already the middle of February.

I annoy people sometime by saying right after Christmas, “It will be Christmas before you know it.” And it’s true isn’t it.

It is good and wise to live our days on earth with a clear sense of how fragile and short our lives are. None of us has a firm grasp on this life or on this planet. We are here for a very short time and then we will disappear and life on this planet will go on.

James is saying that it matters that you have this awareness and that it be part of our planning and doing. It is folly to ignore God and His will and to act as if we are masters of our fate and captains of our souls.

Disobeying God’s Will, James 4:17.

James 4:17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

II Peter 2:21 For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.

What James has said in these verses is not hard to understand, so he reminds us that it is sin to know them and fail to do them. Don’t be one who knows what God requires but doesn’t do it. God has revealed His will in the Bible that we might know it and do it.

The safest and most secure and best place on earth to be is right where God wants you to be. Don't step outside of that in disobedience or rebellion.

Humble yourselves and subject your wills and your desires to God.

Psalm 37:5 Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.

Obedying [submit to] God's Will, James 4:15.

James 4:15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

Instead of, "Come now you who say we will do this or that" James tells us to say, "If the Lord wills we will live and do this or that."

Two things. If the Lord wills we will *live* and if the Lord wills we will *do*. It matters that you have the right view of life and its vapor-like brevity, and the right view of God and His utter sovereignty over everything.

God governs the length of our days and God governs our accomplishments and successes.

This is why I repeatedly say to our sons after their successes, get on your knees and thank God because there are a lot of people smarter than you who have worked harder than you but have not had this success or blessings. It isn't because of you, it's because of God and His grace.

Brothers and sisters, it's arrogance on our part not to think in our hearts and confess with our lips the God is Lord over our lives and God is Lord over our achievements and activities and accomplishments. God is Lord of our families, of our livelihoods, of our fortunes and futures.

There is wisdom in saying often, "if the Lord wills." It reminds us continually of our finiteness before an infinite, sovereign God. It's good for our hearts and minds to be always conscious of who God is and who we are.

The Apostle Paul frequently spoke this way.

Acts 18:21 I will return to you again if God wills. (concerning returning to Ephesus)

Romans 1:10 asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

I Corinthians 4:19 I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills.

I Corinthians 16:7 I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits.

Philippians 2:19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon.

Christians through the ages have spoken this way. People used to write DV at the bottom of their letters. Deo Volente, God willing. God permitting. If God wills. If God grants it. If it pleases the Lord.

There are also expressions of intent in Scripture that are not accompanied by this phrase so it isn't a sin not to say it. But in such cases it ought to be at least a part of our thinking, implicit in our hearts at all times. Certainly if it becomes just words with no heart then we are no better for saying it.

Application and Conclusion.

Thinking and speaking this way does two things for us.

Thinking and talking this way keeps us *humble*, it reminds us to keep a sober sense about our finiteness and weakness before God.

But thinking and talking this way also gives us a *secure confidence* that our lives and what we do is all in the hands of a sovereign and good God and not up to chance or fate or luck.

With humility and bold confidence say “the Lord willing” when considering courses of action, planning trips, making business and career plans, considering a spouse, decisions concerning children, making education goals, or retirement plans.

When you are making a major decision or plan, or considering a major change, one good question to ask that shows you have taken James' admonition to heart is, “Given that my life is but a vapor and just a preparation for eternity, will this plan or opportunity be a good investment of my life to that greater end.”

What is God doing in your life? What is God saying to you? Has God set before you some task, some purpose? Is God calling you to make a change? Is God asking you to do something difficult, something hard, some big responsibility? Can you say, “I am willing, God willing.”

Let us do all things by His will and for His glory.

2 Corinthians 9:8 God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.

Philippians 4:19 My God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Have your way with us and do your will in us. Lord, you are in control of all of life and of all of us and of this flock. Let every changing circumstance be yet another opportunity for us to trust in you and glory in your power and wisdom. This is not our world, but our Father's world. Teach us to number our days and depend on you and to delight in you.