

WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Life Application Sunday School Class

Book of James - Session 14

April 28, 2002

READ James 4:13-17

13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. 17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

Thus far in James 4, we have considered several issues, including conflict, slander, and being judgmental. What is the root issue of the heart that all of these fleshly sins have in common? It is pride and selfishness. Today's passage is a description of another manifestation of a proud spirit that can be summarized as self sufficiency and boasting.

In these verses, what is James rebuking? Is it planning for the future, or setting goals, or working hard to earn money? No. The Word of God in other places commends diligence, hard work, planning, and good stewardship. Let's read four examples from Proverbs:

Proverbs 6:6-8 ⁶ *Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, ⁸ yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest*

Proverbs 20:4 *A sluggard does not plow in season; so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing.*

Proverbs 24:30-34 ³⁰ *I went past the field of the sluggard, past the vineyard of the man who lacks judgment; ³¹ thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins. ³² I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw: ³³ A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest— ³⁴ and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.*

Proverbs 19:15 ¹⁵ *Laziness brings on deep sleep, and the shiftless man goes hungry.*

From these passages, we understand clearly that laziness, lack of initiative, and lack of diligent hard work are all characterized as undesirable and ungodly traits. The Lord instructs us through Proverbs to consider the lesson taught by the ant, how during the good times, when provision is available and can be obtained by hard work, the ant works hard to gather and store for the fall and winter to have provision during the coming hard times. In contrast, Proverbs 20 speaks of the lazy indolent person that does not work when he is able, and then later is in poverty. In Proverbs 24:30-34, the author provides a lesson learned by observing the lawn and garden of a lazy person. It looks terrible. The wall is in disrepair, the weeds have taken over, and the display of poverty is a testimony to the laziness of the person on the inside of the house. A person who does not work comes to poverty as a result of his own actions – sleeping and resting instead of working.

So we see that carrying on business to earn a living, and even planning to do such is not being condemned.

It is a self-sufficient proud attitude toward life and God that is being rebuked. It is that God's will is not sought or considered in the planning and scheduling. It is a haughty, self-confident attitude that is being condemned by James. He says that this attitude manifests itself in boasting and bragging in verse 16. In modern terms, it is placing our confidence and trust in our own ability to make things happen, to meet our needs. It is a failure to realize that our life is very brief and feeble, like a mist that is here today and gone tomorrow. It is an independent attitude that believes that I have the innate ability to succeed and fulfill my own dreams and destiny, that if I want it bad enough, I can make it happen. It ignores the Sovereign Lord of heaven who alone has the power to cause us to succeed or fail.

Turn to Psalm 10, and let's read the entire Psalm.

Psalm 10

Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? ² In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises. ³ He boasts of the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD. ⁴ In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God. ⁵ His ways are always prosperous; he is haughty and your laws are far from him; he sneers at all his enemies. ⁶ He says to himself, "Nothing will shake me; I'll always be happy and never have trouble." ⁷ His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue. ⁸ He lies in wait near the villages; from ambush he murders the innocent, watching in secret for his victims. ⁹ He lies in wait like a lion in cover; he lies in wait to catch the helpless; he catches the helpless and drags them off in his net. ¹⁰ His victims are crushed, they collapse; they fall under his strength. ¹¹ He says to himself, "God has forgotten; he covers his face and never sees." ¹² Arise, LORD! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless. ¹³ Why does the wicked man revile God? Why does he say to himself, "He won't call me to account"?

¹⁴ But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless. ¹⁵ Break the arm of the wicked and evil man; call him to account for his wickedness that would not be found out. ¹⁶ The LORD is King for ever and ever; the nations will perish from his land. ¹⁷ You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, ¹⁸ defending the fatherless and the oppressed, in order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more.

The Psalmist is lamenting the injustice that he sees around him. He sees arrogant, bragging, proud men who scheme and take advantage of the weak. He sees how they revel in their abundance, and how they boast on how they are able through their crafty plans and schemes to fulfill their cravings and desires of their hearts. This sounds a lot like the first part of James 4. Verse 4 of Psalm 10 is a key verse. It says that in his pride, the wicked person does not seek God, and in all his thoughts there is no room for God. He has no fear of the Lord, of judgment, or of trouble. Basically, he ignores God as He lives and plans his life. He believes that through his own wisdom, craftiness, manipulation, and talent that he can insulate himself from difficulty, suffering, trial, or trouble. And to maintain this protected, superior position, he will do anything, including murder of the innocent and abusing the weak and defenseless. He reviles God by willfully ignoring His law

and fears no retribution. But there is a day coming, and it may come suddenly, when this man will be brought into account for his disregard for God and abuse of the weak and defenseless.

Listen to a New Testament version of the same principle: [Luke 12:13-21](#)

Luke 12: ¹³ *Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."* ¹⁴ *Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?"* ¹⁵ *Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."* ¹⁶ *And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop."* ¹⁷ *He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'* ¹⁸ *"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.'* ¹⁹ *And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."* ²⁰ *"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'"* ²¹ *"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."*

Was the rich man in the parable rebuked for being rich? Notice in verse 16 that the ground produced a good crop. We might even say that God blessed this person with a material abundance. The issue is what the rich man did with the abundance that God provided. This fellow chose to hoard it, store up enough for many years, and then put his trust in all that he had accumulated. His response to his stored abundance was self-satisfaction that resulted in the selfish pursuit of pleasure.

The point is this. If our material abundance becomes our treasure, the thing that we delight in, trust in, hope in, and depend on, then we are not rich toward God. You can't serve God and money. If we have more than what we need, and I am sure that we all do, then we need to be asking God what He wants us to do with it. We need to ask God why our ground has produced such a rich crop. We need to recognize that God is the one who causes prosperity to come in our lives, and the truth is it all belongs to Him, and we need to use it as He directs. We need to realize that there is no real security in material prosperity. We need to take heed to Proverbs 27:1 that says: *Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.* Our trust needs to be in God, who has promised to supply our daily needs as we seek first His kingdom.

We desperately need a change in perspective. We need to pray the prayer contained in [Psalm 39:4-6](#) ⁴ *"Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life."* ⁵ *You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath."* ⁶ *Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it.*

The word translated "bustle" in verse 6 literally means to murmur, growl, roar, cry aloud, mourn, rage, sound, make noise, tumult, be clamorous, be disquieted, be loud, be moved, be troubled, be in an uproar. We need to quit fretting and worrying about heaping up wealth that will likely be given to someone else anyway. We need to have our concerns on things that matter; kingdom matters; eternal matters. We need to ask God to help us to number our days, and ask Him on a daily basis, Lord, what would you have me do today? What is your heart and your priority for me today? Where would you have me go? Verse 17 in James 4 says that we need to be doing the good that we know we ought to do. We need to make it a priority to walk in the light that we have been given, instead of fretting and putting all of our thought and energy into the pursuit of material gain. In closing, here are some questions to stimulate class discussion and reflection.

1. What are some ways that we manifest a self-sufficient attitude? What are some practical steps we can take to repent of this attitude?

2. What are some practical ways that we can submit our plans, schedule, and budget to the Lord for His direction, approval, and will?

3. How does an attitude of thanksgiving and gratitude relate to this matter of self-sufficiency, pride and boasting?