

James 4:13-17 - God of my iPhone

Sign Title: God of my iPhone

September 25, 2011

Good morning Faith Church! We are back in the book of James, and this morning we finish the third section of the book. This section concerns the way Christ changes our speaking and thinking. For the last few weeks of this section, James is teaching us the importance of humility to experience God's grace in our lives. Last week, we saw how pride creeps into our speech when we slander and grumble. This week, we see how pride creeps into our thinking.

James 4:13-17

How many of you use iPhones, Blackberries or some other type of smartphone? Let's do a quick pole. If you have one, could you hold it up? The message today is about how to honor God with these electronic devices. Yes, we can bring glory to God through the iPhone or the Blackberry. This morning we will learn how to do just that. Let's dive in.

James begins by saying, "Come now...". If James preached like he wrote, we would all snap back in our seats for this text. The words in the Greek are the equivalent of saying, "Hey, listen up!" Then he says something that sounds very familiar to us.

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..." what does this sound like? It sounds like the business world of today, doesn't it? Go down to Pure Fishing or Rosenboom and you will hear these exact same words. I am on my way to Florida for a fishing convention. We are going to introduce our new bait. Then I

am off to Atlanta for a big presentation. This new bait will change the way bass are caught. James is talking to business people about business life.

Incidentally, the first century saw a huge explosion in business travel. The Romans brought a unified language to their empire, the Greek language. They also created a road system which facilitated travel in the ancient world. Traveling business men and women were a big part of the ancient world. We even see this in the Bible where Lydia was a wealthy dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, but she was in Philippi on business when she became a Christian (Acts 16:14). Socially, many Jews in the ancient world were involved in the kind of business that involved travel. This is something the Jewish Christians James wrote to can understand.

Incidentally, James is not condemning business travel. He is not condemning making a profit. Business is God's idea and the financial system is not evil. God is pro-business as long as we see our business as a means of glorifying God. What is James going after?

He is not talking about the action of business but the attitude with which we conduct our business.

Repent of pride in my plans for my life.

These people were self-managing their lives. Their plans were THEIR plans. Today OR tomorrow we will go to this OR that city. In other words, I will decide which day I will go where I want to go. I will decide which city I am going to and when I get there, I will decide how much time I will spend. Why am I doing

this? To make money, which I can produce all by myself. The goal of my life is to be rich.

What do you hear over and over? “I”. The self. Who is not being consulted in the plans of these Christians? Where is God found in the picture? What God desires or what he might want them to do or even a prayer for his guidance is conspicuously absent.

- They pick the time - today or tomorrow.
- They pick the place - this city or that.
- They pick the time spent - a year.
- They pick the activity - carry on business.
- They pick the result - financial profit.

They have all the plans and dreams of their future laid out. They are fully confident in their abilities to fulfill their plans. The future is mine. My life is mine. My life is about what I want to do and when I want to do it. I will fulfill my dreams for me, me, me.

When it comes to the way they run their life, they tell God their plans and expect him to bless them. They don't ask God what his plan is for their life and request God's help to follow it.

Did you ever think God's plans for your life and your plan for your life might be different? Our plans often involve wealth, comfort, success and public recognition. God's plans for us may involve a modest income, persecution, the perception of failure and little public recognition. God's plans for us are probably

a harder plan than our own, but whose plans are better, yours or God's? Who do you think has the right to determine the plan for your life?

James gets to the heart of the problem by pointing out how helpless and weak we are in life.

We have no sure knowledge of tomorrow.

Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring... James 4:14 (ESV)

We think we know what will happen a year from now, but in reality, we don't know what will happen tomorrow or even in the rest of this day. Do you know what will happen when you drive home today? Eat lunch today? No! We do not know anything with certainty.

As a pastor, I had a man who left the worship service I was preaching in and was hit by a truck as he rode his bicycle home from church. Even in this church, I shook the hands of a man on Sunday and was comforting his grieving widow on Tuesday. We have this moment from God, then it is gone. God graciously gives us another moment but we have no guarantee of another moment from God. Every time we see the sun rise we don't receive it by right but only by gift.

Yet, we make the plans in our smartphone with great personal confidence. We plan to go to a particular college. Get a particular degree. We plan on working in our field of choice. We plan on getting married and having two children. We plan on living in a house with a picket fence and a two car garage. We plan with certainty that we will live a good long life.

Then all of our plans are messed up. Our husband is diagnosed with cancer. Our wife leaves us and takes the kids. A car runs a red light and T-bones our daughter's car leaving her paralyzed for life. We could go on and on with all the potentialities of life. When these changes happen to our plan, let's face it, we get angry. This wasn't what I was planning for my life.

James says, "Stop it! Don't you get it?" The reasons your plans are changing is because you aren't in control of your life like you thought you were. God is in control of our future, we aren't.

Now lest you misunderstand, James isn't down on planning and being purposeful in life. Other passages of Scripture actually call for it. David, Solomon and Nehemiah were great planners. If planning isn't the problem, then what is?

The problem is planning our future thinking we are the ones who have the final say in determining it. God is in charge of the big calendar for our lives. We must willingly submit our calendars to his master plan. Are you OK with that?

We can carry our calendar and make appointments in Microsoft Outlook but we really don't know if we will fulfill them. Only God does. We have to make our plans contingent on what God might want us to do in our service for him and be OK when God takes our life in a direction we never anticipated.

For example, you are planning on getting home in time to see your son's soccer game but because a plane malfunctioned, your connecting flight was delayed. You miss your son's soccer game and spend the night in the airport. Are you okay with God changing your plans? Do you sit in the airport and stew

or can you humbly submit to God's change in your schedule and try to discover the way God wants you to serve overnight in the airport. Who might he want you to share the Gospel with? Who is he keeping you there for to be a listening ear?

You are saving for a special trip with your spouse for your 25th anniversary but the car breaks. The repairs are extensive. The seed money for your trip is spent. God changed your plans. Are you okay with that?

When I was a youth pastor, I would spend a lot of time talking with guys and girls about their relationship. The relationships would seem to work well and the guy would be thinking he should propose. When you talked to them a month later, they broke up. Are you okay when God changes your plans with whom you will spend your future? The truth is, when we refuse to submit our calendars to God's master calendar for our life, it is an issue of pride.

So do we plan? Yes! Do we work hard to achieve plans? Of course we do. But we are willing to allow God to change our plans at a moment's notice. Are you comfortable knowing God has a right to change your plans? Do you recognize God's right to give you a different way to serve him than you originally expected?

Secondly, when we make our plans, we do not make them and ask God to approve them. We ask God to direct our desires to be in line with how he wants us to serve him.

A few years ago, I did a small series on how to discover God's will for our life. There are many people struggling with that question. What does God want me to do? It is a really simple answer. Love God with all your heart. Keep your

finger in God's book so you are growing in knowing him. Keep your nose to the ground in prayer and then do what God is laying in your heart to do. God will give you the desires he wants for you life. When you are in step with God, he will give you the desires he wants for your life. You simply walk in the way God is directing your desires to go. Augustine said it this way, "Love God and do what you want." Unfortunately, many of us have this reversed. We do what we want and say we love God.

Repent of pride in my strength and ability.

...What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. James 4:14 (ESV)

James uses an illustration all of us can understand. He says our life is like a mist. The Greek word can mean vapor or even a puff of smoke. Our lives are like droplets of mist from a spray bottle. That is pretty small. This summer, David, my oldest son, worked concrete. He needed to be to work at 6:00 in the morning. Driving through the fields I would see thick mist covering the corn and soybeans. Only a few minutes later on the return trip after sun up, it was gone. Where did it go? I don't know. Would you even know it had been there? No. Our lives are like that. We are here for a brief moment, and then we are gone in a flash. What becomes of all of our plans and dreams? Do you see how delusional we are about the way we live? We need to think about our lives with vapor theology.

Just think about how quickly life goes. It doesn't seem that long ago we were kids in high school. I am still not over the shock that I am old enough to have a child who can drive. How can this be? I am not that old. Am I? Who are

these old people who have kids my son's age? This is the way our senior citizens feel. All of us are shocked by how old we are and how quickly this thing called life is slipping by. It is here, and it is gone. We tend to think we will be here forever but that is how everyone in the cemetery felt too. We need to approach life with humility. It doesn't just go on and on.

Just as God controls our future through his master calendar for our lives, he controls our strength and ability. He gives us the abilities we need to serve him in the way he is calling us. He gives us the strength we need to serve him in the capacity he desires.

It is easy to think we are more significant than we are. That is pride in our thinking. It reminds me of King Nebuchadnezzar from the book of Daniel.

All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, and the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws. Daniel 4:28–33 (ESV)

He thought his leadership abilities, his wealth and the nation of Babylon were all from of his abilities. God certainly straightened him out in a moment.

The success of your business or your farm is not because of you or because of your wisdom, it is only because of God and his grace. To think our abilities are because of us is pride in our thinking and it shuts off the grace of

God into our lives. If we don't get that straight, God, in his love, may choose to humble us.

Another thing that is very important to understand is that our strength, wisdom, athletic ability or business sense were not given to you by God to inflate your ego but to bring him glory. The Old Testament book of Esther is an excellent example of this. King Xerxes became displeased with his queen and deposed her. To find his next queen King Xerxes conduct an elaborate beauty pageant that took over a year for the preparations. The most stunning women in all of the kingdom were entered in the competition. A woman named Esther won the pageant. To win the Miss Universe pageant of that day, I am sure she was a stunningly beautiful and sophisticated woman.

Yet, why did she win the pageant? Was it so she could look in the mirror every morning and remind herself she was the foxiest lady in the kingdom? That would be pride in her thinking. That is what God stomped out of King Nebuchadnezzar. While I am sure Esther took care of herself and ate her veggies, it was God who made her beautiful so she would win the pageant. But God made her beautiful to do something more than inflate her ego?

If you know the story, God gave her that beauty so she would win the pageant, become the wife of the king so she could foil the plot of Haman, a man who was bent of the genocide of the Jewish nation. I love the way Mordecai, Esther's adoptive father challenged her in the book.

...And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Esther 4:14 (ESV)

In other words, maybe God let you win the beauty pageant to save the Jews from genocide.

As a society, we love our sports. I love wrestling. This fall, the football, cross country and volleyball teams are competing well. If you are a successful athlete, rather than letting it build your ego so you enjoy flexing in the mirror, ask God why he gave you the abilities he did. Did he give you the abilities to build your ego or to give you a platform to be a witness for him? If you have skills and abilities, they aren't there to lift yourself up but to lift Jesus up with your life.

We are nothing more than a morning mist. Soon our lives will be gone and then what will matter? As a teenager, I put this saying over my dresser.

Only one life will soon be past. Only what is done for Christ will last.

That is vapor theology in action. My life is a mist and only what is done for Jesus will matter. So how should we live?

Repent of pride in my choices.

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

James gives us a third way pride creeps into our thinking.

When I was a teenager, I was part of a counseling-in-training program for a summer at Deerfoot Lodge in Speculator, New York. The camp is a Christian boys camp in the Adirondack Mountains of New York. One of our first training exercises was to find a lost camper. He was described as 1.5 feet tall. He had a flat top and a round appearance. With that description, I immediately knew the camper was not human but was some kind of object. Our team split into smaller groups of two or three as we combed the mosquito infested woods. This was

intended to be an exercise that would last until nightfall. As my group began our search, we checked under an old wooden bridge just outside of camp which had ice-cold spring-fed water running underneath it. There was a large metal pot with a lid on it. It was 1.5 feet tall, round in shape and it had a flat lid on it. We pulled it from the creek to find it was filled with cans of soda that were nicely chilled by the spring water. Could it be that we found the missing camper? This doesn't happen to me. I never win anything. We carried it back to the cabin, laid on our bunks and enjoyed the protection of screens on the cabin to keep the blood-thirsty mosquitoes away. The rest of the group was still combing the mosquito infested woods having more blood drained from their body by mosquitoes than a Red Cross blood bank could take.

Why should I go back to the woods and tell them I found the lost camper? Who knows how long it would take to find everyone? I would have to cover 2 miles of woods. I could never find them. After all, when darkness eventually fell, they would be home. I took another sip of the ice cold soda and savored the moment of victory as I kicked off my hiking boots.

Things like this usually don't happen to me. I better savor the moment. I am not doing anything sinful... or am I?

I wasn't doing anything wrong, but was I failing to do what was right? According to James, that was sin. The reason I didn't do the right thing was ultimately rooted in my pride. Instead of having the humility to display compassion for everyone else I wanted what was best and most comfortable for me.

For most of us, failing to do the right thing doesn't involve moving through mosquito infested woods. Often times, it is much more subtle. The Holy Spirit prompts us, but we like to ignore him. We put it on a list but conveniently never get to it. For example, you know those times when the Holy Spirit prompts you to make a phone call to encourage somebody going through a hard time, but life is too busy. Someone goes in the hospital and you want to visit them but there is soccer practice, and everyone is running late. Is it wrong to ignore them? Is it sinful? Why are we ignoring a brother or sister in need of our love?

It is easy to blow those things off, but James says the reason we do it is our pride. It is our sin.

So how should we live?

Live today each day following the path set by God.

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

Let's go back to the top of James' list when it comes to planning. We have to make plans. We should use our abilities on the sports field and in the business world. There is nothing wrong with abilities and plans. It is just as Christian we make plans and use our abilities differently. There is a difference in our heart. We make our plans knowing God has the right to change them any moment. It is like Jesus taught us to pray.

...saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." Luke 22:42 (ESV)

God's plan might be much more difficult than I would have designed. It may involve being a witness for Christ as we suffer with cancer, like Job's life was a demonstration of loving God not just for what he does but who he is.

It may involve humbling ourselves like Esther. It is understanding that God gives us our abilities not to build our ego but to be a platform to shine God's glory.

It may involve humbling ourselves to pull others out of the mosquito infested swamp rather than sitting back in our living room with our feet on the Lazy Boy watching television till our brain turns to cauliflower.

Conclusion

This week, God is calling us to be humble in our thinking. Tell God you submit your schedule to him and he has a right to change it in any way. Submit your skills and abilities to him, they are only entrusted to us as a platform to proclaim Christ. God has a right to take them away in an instant. Submit your behavior to him. When we know the right thing to do and we choose not to do it, admit that is sin and repent of it.

Next week, we are going to look at a practical illustration of what it means to know the right thing to do in an area we often don't choose to do what is right, our money. See you then.



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