

**The World According to Jim  
Here Today...Gone Tomorrow  
James 4:13-17**

**Introduction**

- In 2006 the Houston Chronicle reported the results of a study done by the [American Management Association](#). The findings? You can work more, play more, and multitask your way to 31 hours of activity in a 24-hour day. The study concluded that multitasking enables a person to add almost 50 percent more activity to a typical day of 16 wakeful hours.<sup>1</sup> Just what we need, right?
- But more productivity comes at a price, doesn't it? In a separate study data was collected from 20,000 Christians in 139 countries. And more than 4 out of 10 Christians say they "often" or "always" rush from task to task. About 6 in 10 say that it's "often" or "always" true that "the busyness of life gets in the way of developing their relationship with God."<sup>2</sup>
- We don't need statistics to confirm this do we? How do you feel? How healthy is your soul? What are we teaching our kids? Is the Christian life you're modeling the one you want to bequeath to your children?
- The story is told of a photographer who was snapping pictures of first graders at an elementary school, making small talk to put his subjects at ease. "What are you going to be when you grow up?" he asked one little girl. "Tired," she said.<sup>3</sup>
- [Gordon MacDonald](#) whom I quoted last week says, "I'm of the opinion that busyness is a deeper threat to the soul than pornography ever was."

**Transition**

We are busy. We've got plans. Things to do. Places to go. People to see. Futures to make. Retirement to plan for. Businesses to run. Kids to take care of. Sporting events galore. Friendships to maintain. Ladders to climb. And in the World According to Jim...[Slide #1]

**Proposition**

- **It's possible to plan God right out of your life**
- It's possible to so fill life that God is squeezed out. Listen up. It's possible we're multitasking our productive little selves straight to hell. We have forgotten who we are.
- Author [Jean Bethke Elshtain](#) writes "Who, then, are we, we prideful...creatures? Lord knows, we no longer think of ourselves as belonging to anyone or anything. We do not belong—we own; we possess. And that, to say the least, is not the same thing. We plunge into self-aggrandizement convinced that the dazzling success of our projects will prove definitely who we are. But this fails to satisfy. Our triumphs ring hollow. Our victories so often turn to ashes in our mouths. But never mind. Tomorrow we will run faster, climb

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<sup>1</sup> Houston Chronicle (6-21-06)

<sup>2</sup> "Survey: Christians Worldwide Too Busy For God," [www.christianpost.com](http://www.christianpost.com)

<sup>3</sup> Submitted to [preachingtoday.com](http://preachingtoday.com) by J. R. Love, Rushton, Louisiana

higher, and one fine morning. Who are we? We are creatures who have forgotten what it means to be faithful to something other than ourselves.”<sup>4</sup>

- We have forgotten that we are the people of God. We belong to him. We are resident aliens. Strangers. Called to a life of holiness. Commanded to take up a cross. Commissioned for a mission. And the question for us this morning is how frequently does that cross bearing mission as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven intersect with our family calendars? Or have we planned God right out of the mix of our life? Through the prophet Jeremiah God chastised his people *Does a maiden forget her jewelry, a bride her wedding ornaments? Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number.*<sup>5</sup> Have you forgotten him?

### Transition

Look at James 4:13-17. Knowing that it’s human tendency to plan God right out of the mix James gives...[Slide #2]

### Organizational Sentence

- **Two cautions that help keep God at the center of everything**
- Do you know what a worldview is? A worldview is a cognitive framework for the meaningful organization of and interpretation of experience. I don’t remember where I got that but it’s stuck with me. Let me say it again. A worldview is a cognitive framework for the meaningful organization of and interpretation of experience. Everybody has one.
- A worldview is the collective of core beliefs a person holds. All of life is interpreted through the grid of those beliefs. And most of the time we call upon those beliefs to help us interpret and understand the world without even realizing what we are doing.
- This passage is a worldview passage. It’s meant to shape and form and give us a framework to organize and experience the world around us. And as we read through these verses ask yourself, “is James’s worldview about life and busyness and plans and the future my worldview?” Again, **two cautions that help keep God at the center of everything.**

### Transition

[Slide #3] Look at **verse 13** for the first tripping hazard, the **first caution**. Listen. *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.* [Slide #4] The caution? **Life is vaporous.**

### Main Points

- Failing to see life for what it is, brief, short, complex, vaporous we run the risk of planning God right out of it. That’s James’s caution in verses 13-14. Life is a vapor. A mist. A vanishing fog. And it’s complete hubris to live life and plan for life with no thought to God’s sovereign rule over everything—including our petty little plans.
- Look at **verse 13**. Apparently some of the Christians James wrote to, instead of subjecting their plans to God, made it their practice to boast and brag about their self-made plans. *You*

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<sup>4</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Who Are We? Critical Reflections and Hopeful Possibilities* (Eerdmans, 2000); submitted by Aaron Goerner, Utica, New York.

<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah 2:32

who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." You can almost hear them. "Yeah, I'm gonna do this. And then after this sells I'll buy that. And then after I complete this project I'm going to give my attention on that. I've got lots of irons in the fire." This is us. We talk like this all the time.

- As one commentator remarks, "To make plans without considering God's plan is the same thing as arrogantly claiming to be in full command of the future."<sup>6</sup> Which is completely ludicrous. James's answer to their confident boasts of being in command of their future? You chumps. You're full of hot air. [Verse 14](#). *Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.* Your plans? Plans? You're clueless. You have no idea what will even happen tomorrow. How can you confidently plan and chart your course? James says hear this, you deliberate and self-confident planners, you who think you decide where you go, when they go, and how long you'll stay.<sup>7</sup> *What is your life?* Your life is nothing. *You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.* James says our lives, all of us, we're like vapors. The word he uses is the word for steam that comes from a kettle or from smoke which is carried away by the wind.<sup>8</sup> Our lives are nothing. Vaporous. Poof. Gone.
- The playwright [Arthur Miller](#), most famous for the plays *Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible* died on February 10, 2005. He was once asked about composing his own epitaph, and he replied he had never given it any thought. He then added, "I expect to be here indefinitely."<sup>9</sup> As do most of us.
- This past Thursday marked the 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11. [[Slide #5](#)] And collectively, for a period of maybe three weeks, the entire world realized the uncertain, temporary, vaporous nature of life. To confidently and self-sufficiently go about our business with no thought to God or our future is complete hubris.
- Again, it's not just that life is vaporous. That's not completely James's point. Because anyone, even pagans, can come to realize life is vaporous, a mist. What James is driving at is this self-sufficiency and lack of dependence upon God that causes God to get planned right out of life. For most of us, the sovereign God and Lord isn't part our plan. Life runs just fine without him. There is only sovereign self.
- In the World According to Jim God asks us to number our days. Psalm 39:4-6. *"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.* But he also asks us to plan things with his rule over our lives in mind. That'll keep God at the center of everything. Anyone who plans for the future without taking God's sovereignty into account is a presumptuous fool.<sup>10</sup> Who are we to presume anything?
- So what would that look like? Because James isn't against planning. He's not saying you can't take out a life insurance policy or think about what your going to do in 2009 or what your business needs three years from now. What he is against is as [J.A Motyer](#) puts it, the "self-sufficient, self-important planning that keeps God for Sunday but looks on Monday to

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<sup>6</sup> Donald Burdick, *James*, Expositors Bible Commentary.

<sup>7</sup> Moo, p. 202.

<sup>8</sup> Reinecker, p. 738.

<sup>9</sup> CBS Evening News (2-11-2005); submitted to preachingtoday.com by Ted De Haas, Bedford, Iowa

<sup>10</sup> Baker and Ellsworth, p. 121.

Saturday as mine.”<sup>11</sup> What he is saying is that it is wrong for us to trust in our own ability to guide and plan and determine the future course of our lives.<sup>12</sup> That’s about the most pompous idiotic thing a Christian could do.

### Transition

James tells us what the proper Christian worldview is. Look at verse 15. This is both the second caution and the answer. *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.* [Slide #6] The caution? **Watch out for sins of omission.**

- As followers of Christ, it’s one thing to do the wrong thing. Doing the wrong thing, that’s a sin of commission. Throughout scripture there are vice lists, lists of things that the Christian should not do. But there are also sins of omission. James says knowing the good we ought to do and not doing, that’s wrong too. We end up planning God out of our lives when we know what we need to do, the right thing to do, and we fail to do it. **Watch out for sins of omission.**
- James says in [verse 15](#) that Christians are to be about one thing and one thing only. The Lord’s will. Not our will but his will. The modus operandi for the Christian is do nothing without the permission of God. If the Lord wills. Can you say that about your life? That you do nothing without the permission of God? It is this perspective, about everything, school, business, relationships, retirement, relationships, you name it, which James asks us to take about all of life. *"If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."*
- Which begs the question, what is the Lord’s will? We all want to know what God’s will is for our life. I know what God’s will is for your life. Seriously. I know what God’s will is for your life. Turn to Colossians 1:9-14.
- Follow along as I read and notice what Paul says about God’s will for our lives. Colossians 1:9-14. *For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. 10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*
- It’s because we fail to ask the question “what is the Lord’s will for me right now, today” that God gets planned right out of the mix. We plan him out of our family life because we do our will with our family’s time. We plan him out of our business because we do our will with the business. We plan him out of our school because we do our will. We plan him out of our retirement because we do our will with our time. What would your life look like if at every meal you prayed for the day and hours ahead, “Lord what is your will for my day today, maybe my last on this earth?”

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<sup>11</sup> Motyer, p. 161.

<sup>12</sup> Moo, p. 202-3.

- James cautions, to not do the Lord's will is sin. **Verse 17**. Look at the text. *Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins*. Or, in other words, anyone who knows what the Lord's will is and doesn't do it, sins. When you know what the Lord's will is and you don't do it you sin. **Watch out for sins of omission**.
- This is where I believe a lot of us are at right now. We are busy. We've got plans. Things to do. Places to go. People to see. Futures to make. Retirement to plan for. Businesses to run. Homework to do. Kids to take care of. Sporting events galore. Friendships to maintain. Ladders to climb. And we have no time left to do the good we ought to do. Intellectually we're Christians. We know the good. Practically speaking, we're atheists. We fail to do the good. *Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins*.

### Conclusion

- **It's possible to plan God right out of your life**. Either because of overconfidence you believe you really have more control over life than you really do or because you are so overloaded that you fail to do the good you ought to do. Either way God is left out.
- Do you remember using the centrifuge in chemistry? The test tubes are placed in the centrifuge and it spins faster and faster. Life is one big centrifuge, spinning all of us, spinning this church faster and faster and faster and away from the center, away from God. In the chemistry lab the centrifuge is a good thing. When it happens in life the result is disastrous. One of the hardest things in life is keeping the first things first.
- Pay close attention the cautionary words of James 4. Life is short. Really short. In light of its shortness some things we give a whole lot of time to really don't matter. Pare your life down. Free yourself and your schedule up so that you have the time and energy and the resources to do the good you know you need to do. Pray with me. Listen to the words of Jeremiah 3:21-22. *A cry is heard on the barren heights, the weeping and pleading of the people of Israel, because they have perverted their ways and have forgotten the LORD their God. 22 "Return, faithless people; I will cure you of backsliding."*