

“Am I living as if God doesn’t exist?”

James 4:13-17

December 17-18, 2016

Introduction:

Hello Summit Church, my name is Will Toburen and I’m one of your pastors. Pastor JD asked if I would speak this weekend and I’m really excited **in spite of the fact that he said last week we were officially ending our study through the whole Bible** and that **nothing really matters from here on out except Christmas at DPAC**, I began to see the **value (or should I say the lack thereof) he was placing** on this weekend...I gotta confess...it hurt a little...

In all seriousness I hope today will be like a good bonus track on your favorite CD. I also hope you are praying diligently about what’s going to transpire over those three days next week at the Durham Performing Arts Center. Our staff has been praying that God would radically save those who are far from God and do a mighty work in their lives. I hope you’re planning on **volunteering, attending, and bringing** with you someone who needs to hear the life changing message of Christ. **(maybe stop and pray here)**

- Pray for Pastor JD - Know small thing to preach six times during that time frame
- Pray for our musicians / technical teams / volunteer leaders

Over the last 12 months we’ve worked diligently through the messages taught on the weekends, our Bible reading plan, our small groups studies and other means to help you see how the Bible works together to tell God’s **beautiful plan for redemptive history**. We’ve sought to show, as Sally Lloyd Jones would say, **how every story whispers His name**.

And over the last couple of weeks, as we’ve spent some time in the book of Revelation, we’ve been reminded that there is coming a day when the dwelling place of God will be with man and **“He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”**¹, with God making all things new!

As we reflect on the truth that Jesus is coming again as judge and will establish the new heavens and earth it ought to cause me to **seriously examine our lives and ask ourselves, “What / Who am I really living for?”** That’s the question I want us to wrestle with this weekend, so if you have your Bible turn it on or turn with me to James 4 and we’re going to dive into vs. 13-17. Some of you might wonder why we’re going backwards? Well Pastor JD didn’t get a chance to teach on James, and since it’s so very practical for our lives I thought we turn there for a message.

As you’re turning there, let me share with you an overview of what I do this weekend:

¹ Revelation 21:3-5

- First, I want to give you **just a small bit of background** on James that hopefully will help us understand more clearly the big idea in vs. 13-17.
- Then I want us to look at the problem James identifies and the solution James provides.
- Lastly, I want to share with you some practical application.

Scripture Reading: James 4:13-17

“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”--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. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

Prayer of Illumination

Background:

- Author: James, the Lord’s brother - leader in the church of Jerusalem
- Recipients: Jewish Christians who had been scattered due to persecution
- Purpose: To remain faithful and show the radical life implications of faith.

When jumping into a passage like this...**in the middle of a chapter...in the middle of a letter**...it is easy to misunderstand and misapply because we don’t know who the audience is and why the letter is being written in the first place. So let me take just a moment to give us some critical background that will help us better interpret and apply the text.

- Author: James
 - Which one? There are four prominent James’ in the Scripture
 - James the Son of Zebedee - disciple / brother of John. He died in AD 44 and most scholars believe this letter was written much later, so it wasn’t him.
 - James the son of Alphaeus - also one of the 12
 - James the father of Judas (not Iscariot)
 - Neither of these two were very prominent and the letter implies that the author had a high level of influence.
 - Lead us to...
 - James the Lord’s brother - following his conversion became a leader in the Jerusalem church.
- Recipients: Jewish Christians who had been scattered due to persecution.
 - James describes them as²:
 - Poor and seen as outcasts in society

² Taken from Douglas Moo’s commentary on James (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) p. 32.

- Oppressed and taken advantage of (5:4-6)
- Taken to court by wealthy people (2:6)
- Scorned for their faith (2:7)
- So, James challenges them to be steadfast and endure till the end knowing that God will glorify Himself by conforming them into His image.
- But James is not just concerned that they remain faithful...he's equally concerned about the world's influence on the church.
 - He warns them by reminding them that '*friendship with the world is enmity with God.*' (4:4)
 - He boldly confronts them by showing how they have been:
 - catering to the rich and ignoring the poor (2:1-4)
 - Critical in their speech (3:1-12, 4:11-12)
 - Selfish in their ambitions which had produced disunity among them (3:13-4:3)

So, it's with this concern in mind that James addresses a very real problem facing the church.

PROBLEM: They were living their lives as if God doesn't exist.

Look at vs. 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"*

On the surface, we **might think this is an unwarranted rebuke from James**. They were just making plans, right?

- "At this time...in this city...we want to spend a year in business making some money!"

In fact, you might look at it and think "**Isn't there's a lot of wisdom in this?**" The problem is not, however, that they were making plans...in fact throughout the Scripture the Bible affirms the wisdom of thinking ahead / planning:

- Proverbs 20:18, "*Prepare plans by consultation...*"
- Proverbs 21:5, "*The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, but everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty.*"

Don't miss this: **The problem wasn't in their planning, the problem was in their posture.**

The problem wasn't that they wanted to do business in a particular city and the problem wasn't that they wanted to make a profit. The problem was that they failed, even for a moment, to consider God and what His will was.

The problem was that even though they had professed faith, they were still living multiple parts of their lives as if God didn't exist. Let me introduce you to a term I want you to wrestle with: practical atheism.

- Practical atheism is when you believe God but you've yet to connect that belief to certain behaviors and actions. That's what was happening to these Jewish Christians.

- The problem wasn't their faith, it was in connecting their faith to their view of the world that was the problem.

I'm going to suggest that the same thing has happened to many, if not most of us, and I'm going to show you where. **Many of us go about the day to day of our lives** living as if God doesn't exist. You might say, "Will, that's not true! I believe in God and have trusted in Him for salvation."

- Listen, I'm not asking you if you believe in God. **I'm asking you has your belief in God transformed the way you live?** Has your belief been connected to the rest of your life?

Listen, our **culture has placed such a high value on independence**, promoting the **lie that we are in control of our own destiny** often conveying the idea that **"if it's going to be, it's up to me."** So, although many Christians profess faith and go to church they rarely consider God's will when it comes to things like:

- Who I will marry...or whether I should live with this person...or sexual ethics
- What educational and career I choose...
- Where to live...
- How to invest my time, my gifts, my money...

I think about this sometimes just pertaining to our daily routines...

- Spend time with the Lord, but then you start working and you bust it all day getting through your 'to do' list...get home, take kids to ball practice, inhale dinner, help with homework, and before you know it, you're half asleep on the couch while trying to get through your favorite tv show without having thought about God since the early morning hour.

This is nothing more than practical atheism. Now, I want you to sit under the weight of this with me...**what James is bringing to light is much more than a problem...it is a sin...**and one of the most grievous magnitude.

- Vs. 16-17, **"As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So, whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."**
- Here's why this is so important: To work...and plan...and prepare...without considering God means **that you've forgotten him**. And if you've forgotten God it can only mean one thing: You have put yourself in the place of God.

Let me say it another way: **To not live in constant submission to God is to put yourself in the place of God.**

- Ultimately it means that you believe you know what's best and what the future holds...**you've assumed that you are all knowing** (omniscient).
 - I heard an interview on NPR not too long ago where they were interviewing a professor who was describing a drama performance her students were participating in.
 - The host asked her what lesson this particular play was teaching her students.

- Her response was: **“It’s teaching them that in this life you need to be fierce, know what you want, and go after it.”**
- On the surface we may not think that her comment is that big of a deal. In fact, it might sound an awful lot like what we say to ourselves and our kids (“*come on Johnny you can do whatever you put your mind to...you’re a snowflake*”). But what’s underlying her answer is the fundamental belief that you can know what’s best for your life apart from God.
- James bluntly points out just how ridiculous this thinking is!
 - Look at vs. 14, “--yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring.”
 - And when we assume that we do, even for a moment, it is, as James would say, **the height of arrogance!**
 - Isaiah 55:8-9, “*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*”
- Not only does it assume that you ‘know’ what the future holds, **but it assumes that you are actually in ‘control’ of your future!**
 - So, when you live as if you ‘know the future’ you assume God’s omniscience, but when you live as if you ‘control’ the future you assume you are all powerful (omnipotent).
 - James, helps us get a little perspective here of our lives in perspective of eternity: “*What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little time then vanishes.*”
 - In the context of all eternity our lives are like a blip on the screen. The older we get the more we realize that the people who told us life goes by in a blur were right.
 - I took this **picture** of Abby ‘yesterday’ (**show her as a little girl**)
 - One of my favorite pictures...sweet smile...beautiful blonde hair...cute little smirky smile...come on you gotta admit that’s a pretty cute kid.
 - I took this **picture** of Abby ‘today’ (**show her senior picture**)
 - Now she’s a senior in HS, driving all over the place, hanging out with friends, going to proms and on mission trips...
 - **Picture: (Show them side by side)** - The time between those events seems like an instant...here today and gone tomorrow.
 - We’ve gone from talking about barbies and princesses to college and career choices.
 - This doesn’t mean our lives don’t have meaning or that they don’t count for anything...but it means that we derive our meaning from His life and not our own!
 - We were reminded in the book of Revelation that “the former things shall be no more...”

- “Only one life to live will soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last.”³
 - Our lives matter...this brief moment matters...because we are created to worship and have been given the opportunity to proclaim the excellencies of him who has brought us out of darkness into His marvelous light, so that people far from God can be brought near and find the very relationship and purpose for which they were created!
 - James clearly shows us just how sinful it is to live as though God doesn’t exist, but let’s take just a moment to see what this produces in us.
 - WORRY: When things don’t go as we think they should it creates worry or anxiety:
 - Keller: “Worry is a frustrated aspiration to omniscience. Worry is saying “I know and I’m concerned God won’t get it right.”
 - We say to ourselves:
 - I know what I need for financial stability...
 - I know what educational pathway to pursue...
 - I know what I need for satisfying work...
 - I know what my kids need to thrive...
 - I know what I need for relational contentment...
 - We convince ourselves that we ‘know’ these things...**but we’re not convinced that God knows**...so what do we do? We worry...and as the psalmist would say, we go through life “***eating the bread of anxious toil.***”⁴
 - Worrying is practical atheism! It is putting yourself in God’s place.
 - Leads to all sorts of problems: heart problems, intestinal problems (**ends up being bad for everybody**) and even lack of sleep.
 - Which one of us hasn’t had a **sleepless night worried** about one of our kids, a problem at work, our finances, or something like this.
 - You **were not designed to bear the weight of the universe!**
 - Jesus is calling out to us, “Come unto to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest!”
 - PRIDE: When things do go as planned it produces pride (I “knew” and I “controlled”)
 - This pride in our lives results in a **false sense of security** that eventually, when it’s all said and done, will only lead us to despair:
 - Your pride will become despair when things stop going your way and you realize that the control you thought you had was really just an illusion.
 - Friend: “The more control I thought I had and tried to exert the more out of control my life became.”

³ C.T. Studd

⁴ Psalm 127:3

- Again, you can't bear the weight of the throne. You think you want it but you don't.
- Or, your pride will become despair when you come to the end of your life thinking you've lived the life you always wanted but realize it was all a vain pursuit and that there has to be more.

It's a massive problem when we live our lives as if God doesn't exist. So, what's the solution?

Solution: Remember that we are dependent on God for all things.

- If the problem is that they've 'forgotten' God then **the solution is to 'remember' him.**
- This is at the heart of what James is getting at in vs. 15.
- **Vs. 15, "Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."**
- I don't think that James is suggesting that we literally walk around saying "if the Lord wills" with every conversation. That would be a little weird, right?
 - Julie, I love you and want to spend the rest of my life with you...if the Lord wills.
 - Mr. Toburen, I've done hundreds of these heart surgeries...you shouldn't feel a thing...if the Lord wills.
 - Year end evaluations: Great year working with you and looking forward to your work in 2017...if the Lord wills.
 - "...so just count to 20, pull the ripcord, and the chute will open...if the Lord wills"

What James is encouraging is a heart posture that has God at the forefront of all that you do.

- Remember that He is the **King of Kings and Lord of Lords**...
- Remember that He is **sovereignly working** in your life and that there is **not one square inch in all of creation in which He doesn't declare, "It is mine"**...
- Remember that He was crucified, buried, and resurrected, and if he can be trusted with your eternal salvation then **He can be trusted** with your job, your kids, your finances, and whatever else causes you to fear and be anxious...

Puritans: Latin of "if the Lord wills" is "Deo Volente" - filled their speech and letters/writings (D.V.)

*"Deo Volente is to be the constant refrain of our hearts as we conduct the affairs of our lives. "If God wills" must be written over students' plans--the choice of a life partner, future education, all everyday activities. Older people need to say from the heart, "If God wills, I will spend my time...If God wills, my children will become...If God wills, I will take up this ministry...If God wills, I will wake up tomorrow."*⁵

Illustration:

Several years ago, my uncle was diagnosed with cancer. He was an extremely successful plumber, who deeply loved his wife and kids. While he was going through chemotherapy my aunt picked up a book by Dr. David Jeremiah, who's a well known pastor in California. Dr.

⁵ Hughes, p. 184.

Jeremiah had his own battle with cancer and had written a book entitled “A Bend In The Road”

During one of his treatments she read this from the book: **“The fact is that God is sufficient. Our God is in control. He holds the destiny of the galaxies in His hands, all the while knowing the precise number of hairs on your head. He has preserved His people time and again, performed miracles on battlefields and in cattle fields, among prophets and priests and plumbers. Above all else, He loves you and chose to measure that love out not in words, but in blood. He loves you enough to give you the greatest gift conceivable. ~~Would such a love allow you to suffer without a purpose? Would such a love neglect to have a wonderfully happy ending lying in wait for you? God has never run away from you, so you must never run away from Him. Run into His waiting arms, for that’s what He most desires. He is your refuge—your city wall, your cool and refreshing stream, and your impenetrable defense from the enemy. He is a very present help in times of trouble.”~~**”

Kim, blown away by the reference to ‘prophets, priests, and plumbers’ read and encouraged her husband with it. It wasn’t long before she heard that Dr. Jeremiah was going to be speaking at the church I served previously in Winston-Salem. She called me up and asked if I thought Dr. Jeremiah would be willing to sit down for a few minutes with her and Tim.

I was kinda doubtful, but thought “what the heck, all he can do is say no”, so we called his office and told him the story. Much to my surprise he agreed to meet them, but only wanted Tim, Kim, and I to be present...no one else.

I will never forget those few moments. I watched Dr. Jeremiah, lovingly and pastorally encourage my uncle. But what he said in those moments, I’ll never forget. He pulled his chair close to Tim and held out his hands. He said, “Right now you have a sickness that may lead to death, and you realize that Jesus is all that you have and He is all that you need. My prayer for you is that if God chooses to heal you that you’ll remember just how dependent upon Him you really are.”

The solution to our ‘forgetfulness’ is to ‘remember’.

- Yours is not a belief problem, you see. It’s CONNECTING what you believe about God to the situations you are going through.

I want to close by sharing with you four evidences of a life that is remembering Him with each being a declaration of our dependence upon Him.

1. **Scripture Intake**
 - a. I’ve heard it said, “Those people who hear God best know His word most!”
 - b. George Muller (spent his life sharing his faith and teaching and caring for orphans) said this about the importance of Bible intake: *“I saw more clearly than ever that the first great primary business to which I ought to attend every day*

was, to have my soul happy in the Lord...Now, I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God, and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reproved, instructed; and that thus, by means of the Word of God, whilst meditating on it, my heart might be brought into communion with the Lord.”⁶

- c. That’s why we want to encourage with Bible Reading Plans. That’s why our small groups aren’t classes on your best life now, but rather rooted and grounded on the word of God.

2. Prayer

- a. Samuel Chadwick (late 19th / early 20th century pastor): *“The one concern of the devil is to keep the saints from prayer. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray... Prayer turns ordinary mortals into men of power...It brings fire. It brings rain. It brings life. It brings God. There is no power like that of prevailing prayer.”⁷*
- b. When we pray we can’t lose sight that we are communing with the One true God!
- c. It’s impossible for me to forget God when I’m constantly talking to God!

3. Rest

- a. One of the most sure signs that you’re living as if God doesn’t exist is if you never rest. God calls us to Sabbath rest to remind us that we’re not God and that he’s set us free from being slaves to the things of this world.
- b. If you never rest, whatever you’re spending your time doing owns you...it has become your God and you’ve forgotten Him.
- c. **God has given us the Sabbath to slow us down and to remember!**

4. Community: We remember Him through our submission to other believers.

- a. We see other Christians as a means of grace in our lives.
- b. Proverbs 12:15, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.”
- c. Proverbs 15:22, “Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.”
- d. Bad news: We are blind to our sin...worse news: **we are blind to our blindness**...we need other people to see things in our lives that we just can’t see.
- e. That only happens when **we let people get close**.
 - i. They don’t get close when you just come to a service and leave.
 - ii. They get close when you commit to a small group and serving and you allow your lives to intersect in a way that they can begin to see you for who you really are.
- f. When they do, they’re able to speak truth and confront in such a way that it reminds you and points you to God.

⁶ George Muller, *The Life of Trust* Chapter XIII “May 7.”

⁷ Samuel Chadwick, *The Path of Prayer*

Each of these are a means of grace God has given us to ensure that we conform more into His image and don't go through life living as though God doesn't exist.

- The absence of these ought to be a red flag in your life. If these are absent you're safe to assume that you're forgetting God...and the key is to remember again!

Remember, the gospel...the good news that Jesus was crucified, buried, and resurrected...demands my all.

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My riches gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

So in this advent season let us come and adore Him...Christ the Lord...over every aspect of my life.

In just a few moments we are going to take the Lord's table together. This is a wonderful time for every follower of Jesus to hold in his / her hands the bread and cup and be mindful of the body that was broken and the blood that was shed on our behalf.