

James 4

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Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] Well good evening Welcome to the service this evening Good to have one or two visitors with us as well And you're specially welcome tonight The intimations you had this morning And there's still sheets at the door So please feel free to pick up one of these sheets I won't take time to go through the intimations just now Let's now worship God And sing to his praise We sing from Psalm 46 Psalm 46 And the last two verses The last two stanzas of the psalm in Gaelic Be still and know that I am God Among the heathen I will be exalted I on earth will be exalted high Our God who is the Lord of hosts is still upon our side The God of Jacob our refuge Forever will abide These two verses of Psalm 46

To God's praise will remain seated to sing What time is he and Doctor To God of grateful God for the sake of the month From moving cleanses because you can 20 years And the éo is called For the of his way When the Sinus bigoney will find them He says So we holdex Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[3 : 16] Thank you.

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[7 : 18] Thank you. Thank you.

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Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[11 : 02] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. to come here tonight and we pray on for Ian as he awaits a course of treatment over the next six months.

He's under the chair now so I'll stop talking. James chapter 4 and if you could turn also to Luke chapter 12 and we'll read a portion from there as well.

James chapter 4, just a short passage at the end of that chapter from verse 13 to 17. This is God's word.

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. Why you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.

What is your life? You're a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say if it is the Lord's will we will live and do this or that.

[12 : 26] As it is you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone then who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it since. And then if we turn to Luke chapter 12 and we'll read from we'll read from verse 16 of Luke chapter 12.

Luke chapter 12. Luke chapter 12.

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? This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.

Consider the ravens, they do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn, yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds. Who of you, by worrying, can add a single hour to

his life?

[14 : 16] Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? Consider how the lilies grow, they do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow, is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, oh, you of little faith? And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink, do not worry about it.

For the pagans seek, for the pagan world runs after all such things and your father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom and these things will be given to you as well.

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Amen. And may God bless that reading, or these readings, of his word to us.

[15 : 33] Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for these words that we've been singing and these passages that we've been reading. And we thank you that they are passages and words that lift us from the scene of time and set our feet in the perspective of eternity.

We are conscious, not as conscious as we'd like to be, but we are conscious that we live in a world that is transient and passing. We sometimes hold tight onto things which we know that ultimately we will have to let go of.

And we know that everything that we see around us and even these bodies that we, that our souls reside within, they are changing, they are fading, they are passing away.

But we thank you, Lord, that you are the God who is eternal. You do not pass away. Your word also will not pass away. And so we pray that we would take hold of your word this evening and your word would take hold of us, that we would receive it and we would respond to it in a way that pleases you and honours you.

We pray, Lord, that we would take hold of you, Lord Jesus, as we have been singing. everything else fades and passes but our relationship with you is eternal.

[17 : 10] And our relationship with each other when we are in you is eternal. And so we pray that we would invest our time and our talents and our energies into that relationship and into these these ventures that you call us to which will have eternal yield.

We confess that often we work hard for things that are passing and we pray that we would not become transfixed on these things but that we would fix our eyes upon Jesus.

And Lord, that we would be able to to say and know in our lives the reality of an ever closening walk with you. That we would be able to say with the Apostle Paul that there is no greater thing than knowing Jesus everything else that we once counted again we see as loss in comparison with the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus as our Saviour and our Lord.

And so we pray that in this evening as we meditate upon your word that we would come to know you better and that we would walk more closely with you as a result of that.

We do thank you for each person who's gathered here this evening. We thank you especially for those who've been away for a while and who are back for the first time tonight and we ask that you would bless them as we pray that you would bless us bless those who are visiting with us and we ask that your hand would be upon them and that you would lead them and guide them and that they would know your blessing your peace and your strength.

[18 : 53] We pray Lord that you would be with all those who meet as we do in different denominations in this place and in every place across this world.

We pray for the Youth Fellowship as they meet just after this and we ask that in their early years that they would remember you as their Creator and they would come to know you as their Lord and their Saviour and for all our fellowship and the remainder of this day the houses that we may visit the conversations that we would have we pray that we would know that you are with us and we pray that you would know your presence going with us into this week whatever that may bring whether or not we will see it.

Help us Lord we pray to live each day for your honour for your glory. Take away our sin and empty us of self fill us with the Holy Spirit we pray and we ask these things in Jesus' name and for his sake.

Amen. James chapter 4 and we are reading again and giving some thought to verses 13 to the end of the chapter and we'll read it just again just a short reading.

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. 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 instead you ought to say if it is the Lord's will we will live and do this or that as it is you boast and brag all such boasting is evil anyone who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it sins.

[20 : 47] The theme that we look at this evening is the theme of eternity I suppose that's the most succinct way of putting it we are those who are in time but the Lord has set eternity in our hearts and yet we live in a world where there's a constant pressure to bury the eternal and to focus on the passing if you read TV if you read newspaper articles or magazines or if you watch television you won't have to look too hard or wait too long to come across a program or an article that speaks about our desire to live longer here to have many years here on Thursday morning I was doing a bit of preparation for the sermon here and so I put the words longer life into

Google and clicked on the news section just to see what was topical if there was many hits in relation to the whole aspiration for us to have a longer life there was I think it was about 5.2 million hits just on that phrase in the news section and the most recent article that had been submitted had been just three or four hours previous that morning so I clicked on it just for interest to see what it said and the headline in the article was seven top tactics for living a longer healthy life so I just give them to you for interest number one focus on your mental well-being number two get moving be active number three increase your strength get down to the gym lift some weights build up your strength and your stamina number four get a hearing test

I'm not quite sure what the logic behind that was maybe if you can hear better you won't get hit by an oncoming tractor I didn't read it in detail number five take vitamin D number six look after your teeth and number seven was eat a Mediterranean diet which I think is fish and vegetables it's everything that Angus Alex eats in the opposite so these were seven top tactics the most recent article in Google News seven top tactics for living a longer healthy life but in scanning through it which is all really I did one gets a very real sense very early on that we are masters of our own destiny the whole premise of the article was if you hit these seven things consistently if you make a concerted effort to focus on your mental well-being and get moving increase your strength etc etc if you do these things we'll live on and on and on and on you know and that was just one of what was it 5.2 million there are many many schemes which are designed to get us to do things and buy things which will allegedly prolong our lives here or delay the aging process and that whole mindset which encourages us to live as if this was all there is that whole mindset that encourages us to believe that we are in total control of our lives that we are independent creatures that's not a new thing that's not something that we shake our head about and say well look at look at where we've got to today this is something that was prevalent in James' day

James was a minister and he was overseeing the Jewish Christians in particular and the Jews as we know were regarded as being great entrepreneurs and money makers one of the commentators William Barclay who I would say handled with care he writes this about the Jews he says the Jews were the great traders of the ancient world and in many ways the ancient world gave them every opportunity to practice their commercial abilities this was an age of the founding of cities and often when their founders were looking for citizens to occupy them citizenship was offered freely to the Jews for where the Jews came there came money and trade so that was the reputation and that was the reality they were good money makers they were wise astute business people so James is speaking to people who have great ability

James is speaking to people who had many opportunities at that time to make money we can imagine them that's certainly how I imagine them I imagine these people and they're gathered around a boardroom table and they're huddled around a map with all their business plans and their papers and they're saying to each other as they discuss things as board members well where are we going to decide to make our next million we've come this far we've surpassed all our expectations and our profit margins we're next for our empire the world is a roister and James as the spirit of God leads him speaks into that mind and he says to these people before you firm up your plans before you proceed at high speed in your business ventures here are some things

[27 : 02] I'd like you to consider so number one James says listen listen and then the second thing he says is question and the third thing he says is learn and the final thing in just a word is live so

that's our next 20 minutes listen question learn I live out so first of all listen verse 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 listen says James listen I'm trying to remember the word that's used in the av somebody got an av in the front here I think it says come now is it come now is the term verse 13 go to now the other translation is come now

I think the literal is come now listen there's an exclamation in this there's a sort of interruption a disruption in this James is saying to these people who are gathered with their plans and their confidence as they look into the future listen haven't you forgotten something says James isn't there something or someone that you haven't factored into these extensive plans that you're working out in details I wonder as James was writing this letter was he thinking about the words of Jesus you know what Jesus said we read in Luke's version of it and in Matthew's version of it Matthew 6 verse 33 Jesus says but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well therefore do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself listen set your plans aside for a second listen was Jesus anti-planning you might ask that question was Jesus against us having diaries and calendars on our phone was Jesus against us having appointments and a schedule for the next seven days well the answer to that really is no

Jesus was much more time aware than most people who ever walked on this earth John in his gospel makes it crystal clear to us that Jesus was very focused on time was following a very detailed structured schedule in terms of salvation in terms of every day remember when he met the woman at the well it was a very determined decision to go that particular way and be in that place at that particular time Jesus doesn't flow aimlessly from one day into another he made the most of every opportunity he made the most of every day so it isn't that Jesus is saying have no plans float along so was he anti-business was that the problem well the answer to that question is no he wasn't think about Lydia for example when she came to faith we can read about her in the book of Acts once she was converted when the Lord opened her heart she wasn't instructed to close down in business she persevered in her business but she was seeking first God's glory think about Paul the apostle he was a tent making the tent making business whilst he was ministering so it's not that Jesus is against business it's not that Jesus is against planning so what's the problem again I think of the men in the suits at the board and table looking up slightly impatient saying what's your problem James why have you interrupted this why is this meeting being broken up what's your issue with our planning meeting it's the problem with our plans and the problem was not so much with what was in the plan the problem was with who or what was missing from the plan and that was the

Lord in Christianity Explored which we're doing just now if I remember rightly he defines sin as living without reference to God we think about sin as things that we do that are bad sin at the heart is living a life which is without reference to God sin is living as if God didn't exist and that's the problem with these plans that's the problem with the way that they were living their lives in Proverbs chapter 3 which we often go to it says trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your path straight as far as I can see here in this passage these people who seem so confident and independent were not trusting the

[32 : 57] Lord they were not leaning upon him but they were leaning upon their own understanding their own skills their own business acumen these people were living as if they had some absolute assurance that they had tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow and many tomorrows these people are meeting with each other and they're consulting with each other as they threw up these proposals but they're not laying it out before the Lord as Hezekiah did I think and James says listen put your pens down listen before you pack your bags before you decide to go and set up a new office in some new city listen God has something to say to you and for you and

I whether it's our plans for career development whether it's our plans for education whether it's our plans for retirement or the rest of our retirement whether it's our plans in terms of marriage and children whether it's our plans in terms of church buildings and architecture and furnishings if we take our eye off the Lord and become transfixed on our own plans then the Lord through James interrupts our flow and he says listen up from your table put your papers away listen the second point here is question James continues by asking a question in verse 14 he says why you do not even know what will happen tomorrow he's saying to those who are assuming that tomorrow is going to come and business will be as usual and money will be forthcoming he says why you don't

even know what will happen tomorrow what is your life we were talking at Road to Recovery I think last Tuesday about the pace of life today how fast life seems to be pulling us along you know everything today seems to move at such a pace we have all these time saving devices we have cars and they save us time allegedly because all these hours that we used to spend walking from A to B I was speaking to someone just the other day who was telling me about when you used to walk from Grose Bay to Tarborough every morning for church what again I think that was and the hours that that took and now we've got cars we hop into them and we have 10 minutes we're here you know we have phones we have tablets we have a thousand apps that control our central heating and our dishwashers and we have things that help us to make dinner we have dishwashers that clean our dishes with hardly any of our involvement we have washing machines and in the past all these things had to be done manually it was labour intensive it took time all these tasks today are done almost automatically so one would assume today we just have so much time surely but the reality is we have less time than we ever did or so it seems and we run from this meeting to that one and we are halfway through a meeting and we can't help looking at our phones because we have six notifications on one thing and we have ten messages that have leaped in on another thing and they're all immediate they're all urgent we have to act on them all immediately another quote from Christianity

Explored I think it's Riqua Taisa again he said the urgent is often the enemy of the important the urgent as we get six urgent messages that are all trivial the urgent is the enemy of the important you know and that is so true today we are so busy responding to urgent trivial transient things and we have no time to ask the important questions and so James interrupts the planet meeting and he says listen I have something important that I need you to think about why you don't even know what will happen tomorrow to why you're responding to this thing that's so urgent that's not going to happen for another three months you don't even know what will happen tomorrow what is your life there's a question there's a question what is your life how would the people that know you and I best answer that question about us what is his life what is her life what is it that makes them tick these are questions that we need to keep at the front of our minds these are questions that we need to have weighing down on our hearts because these are the important questions they're perhaps not the questions that people are telling us are urgent but God's word tells us they're urgent and they're important and we need to answer them today why today because James has said to us why you don't even know what will happen tomorrow you don't even know if you have tomorrow so we need to regularly pause for reflection and for questions questions

I read an article this week it was written by the minister in Burghead Free Church Peter Turnbull it was one of these articles he submitted to the local paper and in the article he tells the story about when his wife was visiting Victoria Falls and they were surveying this amazing sight of these falls that were crashing and there was all the tourists there and they were all just amazed by the beauty of the thing but there was one European tourist who was fixated on his video camera and he was seen walking backwards towards the edge of the fall and what he didn't see was a chain that was just about that height his ankle height and just a few centimetres short of hitting the chain falling backwards and falling likely to his death somebody warned him and he stopped just before the drop and Turnbull here he makes the connection here with our lives so many people were fixated like the [41 : 11] European tourists with this video camera we're fixated with all the details of this short passing life and we're increasingly getting closer to the drop that takes us from time into eternity and we're failing to ask the big questions so James says here's some questions to ask listen what is your life what are you giving your heart what are you and I giving our time to and our money to and our energy to are we making investments in time that will be enjoyed eternally these are the questions that we need to be asking ourselves each day and these are questions that we should be asking in the world we need to be asking these questions to those around us sometimes the best evangelism we can do is not telling people what we think but just asking challenging questions just to provoke thought

I remember Peggy McKellar maybe about a year ago I think it was when she was involved with the Christian and sports thing and she was telling us about how they were going around the university campus and they were just asking questions what do you think happens when you die what do you think there is after and the whole drive of the questions were to get people to think about what's important because we're all approaching eternity at such a pace and life would have us respond constantly to the urgent and to overlook the important James I think would have approved of such

an exercise where we go and ask these questions Alistair Begg says until we find out how to die until we find out how to die we will never really find out how we should live and until we know how we should live we will never be ready to die

We did that again Begg says until we find out how to die we will never really find out how we should live and until we know how we should live we will never be ready to die.

Be ready to die. The gospel enables us to be ready to die. Jesus came from time, from eternity into time to make it possible for us to die knowing that we are going to a better place that we are going home that we are going to that place where there is no corrosion there is no theft but there is perfect peace there is things of eternal worth to listen says James question, ask questions third thing he says here and we are moving much more quickly here don't worry, is learn and James drives this point home both positively and negatively verse 14, halfway through he says you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes instead you ought to say if it is the Lord's will we will live and do this and that and this really is just a it's just a logical next step in terms of his argument he has already challenged us and shown us the fact that sinful planning is planning that leaves the Lord out and focuses all on me and my thoughts and my independence and my understanding and my plans and my tomorrows that's sinful planning says James sinful planning leaves the Lord out but sanctified planning takes the Lord in and yes we use our gifts and yes we use our common sense and yes we get our diaries out and yes we make appointments and yes we follow schedules but all the while we're making these plans we're telling the Lord about it and we're opening our Bibles and listening in case he's taking us off on a different track all the while in the plans that we make we're seeking first his kingdom we're seeking to glorify him in all this and as he opens some doors and as he closes others we submit to him and we say if it's the Lord's will we will live and we will do this and that so this is your life says James and so your attitude and your talking should be tempered by by such thinking but is it says James and the answer sadly is no verse 16 he says as it is you boast and brag all such boasting is evil

I remember the football coach in primary school I've got John listening for a wee second the football coach in primary school and we would play football in a game and at the end of the game we'd all have to go back and change rooms and he'd take us round and he would say listen guys this is how you play football there's a big square pitch there's lots of space go wide make some space so you can play and you can pick out passes he says that's how you should play but let me tell you that's not how you're playing this is how you're playing you're all jumping over each other in the middle of the park he says well you're not learn and James is employing the same method essentially he says your life is short you should know that you do know that and you should be living in accord with that but instead he says you're living and making plans as if you're going to be here forever boasting and bragging about your house and your car and your job and your children and your reputation and your church and all the things you're going to do in your tomorrows he says well you're not learning it's not how to live and you can imagine them penitently nodding yes James you're right we've drifted off course and at heart level we do the same thing week on week certainly as I come to to James week on week

[48 : 43] I feel the bite of the application of all this and so we nod along with James and we say yes we do tend to veer into this we do tend to get caught up in that whole stream that thinks we're going to live here tomorrow we do tend to think that our plans are set in stone and so James his final word is okay you've listened we've asked the questions taken the challenge and the questions we know that we have to learn from this he says right now before you walk out the door and as you walk out the door live it out live verse 17 anyone then who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it sins I've told you the truth says James and yes you were off track but I've reminded you says James of the good and the godly way that we're to live now go and live it and if you don't live it but determine that you're going to carry on making your plans without god and devoting your life to things that will pass away and neglecting the matters of eternity and fixating on time if that's the way you're going to persevere you sin and that's where James leaves it we're always told never never finish on a negative and yet so often we come to the end of these bible passages and we're left without resounding a word of warning listen question learn now go and live and if you don't live you choose sin so we finish with a warning and we pray that we will hear it and as we are shown our sin as we are god in love shows us our sin as we see it we day by day repent of it knowing that as we do so we receive forgiveness full forgiveness because of all that

Jesus has done for us that we're focusing on in the mornings in John's gospel we repent of sin we receive forgiveness and we re-plan our lives asking that the lord will guide and direct and that we will be enabled to live not for sin but for the son of god who loved us and who loves us and who gave himself for us and we'll pray help us father we pray as we go from here to go from here acknowledging you and asking that you will direct our path we are conscious lord that we are quick to rely upon ourselves we can be sinfully independent at times we confess it lord we pray that you would forgive us all of it and we pray that as we go from here if we are your people lord that we would receive forgiveness and that we would make our plans each day and week acknowledging you in every aspect of them and we pray that as we do so that you would help us to live for your glory and with your blessing so hear our prayers take away our sin and enable us to glorify you with the lives that you have given us help us to live in time always remembering that we are made for eternity and we ask it in jesus name amen