

### Lead-in

Most have heard the name Bernie Madoff. He is the jailed financier and Ponzi schemer who defrauded his clients out of \$65 billion over a period of 17 years. For all of his exploits, he was sentenced to 150 years in prison after he plead guilty to 11 federal offenses. This charlatan made a significant statement to the SEC (security-exchange-commission). Mr. Madoff commented, **“I wish they caught me six years ago, eight years ago.”** In essence he was saying, “I wish someone saw through the sham-act.” No one has it all together, and weeks like this week reveal that we are not in control. May these words ring in our ears and echo in our hearts today. Lord send your Spirit to reveal our schemes and catch us today so that we surrender to King Jesus!

### **My Schemes and divine submission - James 4:13-17**

James, the brother of Jesus is writing to the Christian Jewish community scattered in the diaspora. James is written to everyday life, street level faith. The Word of Christ has little toleration for those who claim the name of Jesus yet never see their belief impact their behavior. In the fourth chapter of this NT scripture we see dichotomy between the plans men and the purposes of a Holy God. I call my plans “schemes” and the ways of the Lord “submission.”

**Schemes start with you. Submission begins with God.** Now, the Word gives us a modern day, “aint nobody got time for that.” Come now you! The merchants are not named but it’s clear they are within the Christian community and are persons who plan their lives and their futures without thought of God and his plans. For these people, their future is so certain and their plans so full-proof that they only need God’s blessing after the ink dries. **In word they were Christ followers, in deed practical atheist.** Are you guilty? We have so calendared our life that we never asked God to set our agendas. Schemes start with you.

There is a better way. Instead, you should say, “if the Lord wills.” James is not urging his hearers to add “if the Lord wills” at the end of a prayer through ritual or formula. Submission is a total reorientation of my life that the risen Christ and my heavenly Father controls all of history. Are you letting Jesus set your agenda? Schemes start with you, submission begins with God. Did your day begin with Jesus, week, month? Will you let the Messiah reorient the rhythms of your life so that everything sings with confidence in the power of His resurrection? Oh Lord, may our lives every day begin with King Jesus.

**Schemes assumes we have time. Submission reminds of our frailty.** The Bible reminds us that iron clad plans without the Father are foolish from the start. Even the best planners don’t know what tomorrow will bring. The truth is that your life is more like mist than mountain. Vapor formed a natural analogy in the dry Palestinian climate where water droplets formed from condensation near the sea but quickly dissipated like a mirage. Your life is like a bubble, here one second, gone the next. Covid-19 is a reminder of the frailty of our organized institutions.

This is the urgency of the Gospel. I believe that the Spirit led you here today to listen to the good news that Jesus died on the cross to take your place, forgive your sin, and bring you into the Kingdom of you submit to him. But brother, God does not promise you tomorrow. Don’t you realize that today is a gift of mercy? Run to Jesus now, do not delay! **Ps 90:12** Teach us to number our days carefully so that we may develop wisdom in our hearts. **The less grip you have on your life, the more you experience the strength of Jesus, holding you.** Submission reminds me of our frailty.

**Schemes ignore limitations. Submission recognizes God has ZERO limitations.** Your best plans are but temporary. There is nothing that I can create/plan that will not rot, rust, or end in dust. James wants us to wake up to the temporal limited nature of our schemes.

According to legend, the poet **Robert Burns** was ploughing in the fields and accidentally destroyed a mouse's nest, which it needed to survive the winter. **"But Mouse, you are not alone, In proving foresight may be vain: The best laid schemes of mice and men Go often askew, And leave us nothing but grief and pain, For promised joy!"** The best laid plans of mice and men are limited... but God.

When you submit to King Jesus, there is the eternal realization that my Father has ZERO limitations. When I say, "If the Lord wills" I am saying, nothing **Matt. 19:26, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."** **Do you believe that?** Prayer is not a tag line or a hash tag, prayer is a verbal posture of surrender. Dear friend, your schemes are limited, but the plans of the Lord and His will for your life, have ZERO restrictions. So rest in the Prince of Peace.

**Schemes begin with a plan. Submission begin with His will.** James is writing to those who call themselves Christ followers. These are men and women who believe they know the will of the Lord. And because they "know" His will they go to work, but they forgot one crucial aspect, their plans they were man centered:

**We read everywhere in the Scriptures that the holy servants of God spoke unconditionally of future things, when yet they had it as a fixed principle in their minds that they could do nothing without the permission of God –John Calvin**

**How do we know God's will?** I will never forget our family wrestling with this very question 5 years ago. I was lead pastor at a church I loved and received a call from a person I did not know. Somehow a church in Moody received my name and wanted to know if I would pray about becoming lead pastor. I said, categorically NO at least three times and Casey and I decided to tell them no in person. **As we prayed, we wanted the right decision.** Lord tell us what church was good and what was bad! But, what if it was God-honoring to stay in either place? What if the will of the Lord for our family in that moment was not **good or bad but good/best?** After a season of prayer we choose that which was **most uncomfortable** for us. Through these prayers, that serach team has become some of my best friends and biggest encouragements: James, Bud, Stuart, Trent, David, Greg and Tiffany, Jenn. I get to serve with an amazing team. We have seen some incredible miracles and entire families saved, churches planted, and teams go throughout the world. **What is His will? The Lord reveals Himself to those who seek him and want to be used by Him.** God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. *Schemes begin with a plan, submission begins with His will!*

***Schemes make profit and pleasure the highest goal. Submission lives to make a difference (4:13).***

This passage is written to anyone who is a high achiever. To the one who wants to be part of the 1%. Listen to what James is not saying; he does not say that wealth is sinful. The eternal truth, and what the brother of Jesus rails against is a proud complacency and a blatant desire to be rich. **If your entire life's goal is to be rich, it will never be enough. There is never a # that makes you financially for eternity.** COVID-19 has shown us how quickly 20% of wealth can be lost over know. What is the chief end of man? To know God and make him known

The problem is not that we've tried faith and found it wanting, but that we've tried mammon and found it addictive, and as a result find following Christ inconvenient. – Arthur Simon president of Bread for the World.

**The better way**, the way of submission is the person, the wealthy person, who lives to make a difference, not make a dollar. Submission to God leads to submission and love for neighbor. It is the life that values eternal investment over earthly treasure, generosity > selfish-abundance. It is the heart that values and yearns jealousy for the things of the Lord. During this time of crisis, how will you make a difference? Choose steadfast faith over fear. **Choose serving others over self-preservation (TP).** Choose calm and prudence over panic. It is the renewal of your mind daily on the gospel. Submission lives to make a difference because submission to King Jesus makes a difference in your life.

***Schemes know what is good. Submission does what is good.***

The context is that of merchants whose business interests lead them to forget God and thus of Christian warnings against greed and hoarding.

We are prone to think of sin only as deliberate acts against the will of God. Yet, James remind us that we must reflect on sins of omission, where we know good and the will of Jesus and remain silently passive.

What good, what step is the Lord asking you to take today? Is God saying, come, now!

## Response

What happens when you realize you are not in control? We either have one of two responses. We tighten our grip or we loosen our control. **Only radical trust lets a man go to sleep in a boat that is about to capsize.**

#1 requested song at secular funerals, "I did it my way."

Today is your life marked more by your plans/schemes or submission to the King of Kings?

If you were to meet God face to face, why should he let you into heaven?

*Jesus today I **recognize** it is because of my (sin) bad actions that I need you.*

*I **believe** Christ came to live, die and was raised from the death—to rescue me from my sin.*

***Forgive** me. I turn from me and put my trust in You.*

*I know that Jesus is Lord and King of all and I will **follow** Him.*

It is not enough, James suggests, to recognize that one's own life is uncertain and transitory. Such recognition is not even specifically religious. What these merchants need is the reality that their lives are in the hands of God (Moo, 204).

## Notes

The section is not directly connected to 4:1-12, although the flow of thought moves smoothly enough. That James intends the two paragraphs to be read as a single unit is clear from the repeated age nun (4:13, 5:1) (NIGTC, 171).

**James 4:13** Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will travel to such and such a city and spend a year there and do business and make a profit."

## You

The merchants are not named but *oi legontes* means James sees them as within the community rather than as outsiders (NIGTC, 171).

Their plans are firm and expectations certain in their own eyes. What bothers James is simply the presumption that one could so determine his future and the fact that these plans move on an entirely worldly plane in which the chief value is financial profit (NITGC, 173).

Who are these people? They are the people who plan their lives, their futures, without thought of God and his plans or sovereignty (ECNT, 207).

## Today or Tomorrow

General statements reveal that James writes this about anyone who makes any plans separate from God (ECNT, 207).

What galls James is that such an attitude reflects a proud complacency that suggests a blatant desire to become rich (ECNT, 207).

**14** Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring—what your life will be! For you are like vapor that appears for a little while, then vanishes.

## Mist

Mist formed a natural analogy for the ephemeral (short time) in the dry Palestinian climate, in which water droplets in the air formed from condensation near the sea but then quickly disappeared (ECNT, 208).

**James 4:15** Instead, you should say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”

What ought to be said would recognize that God has full control over all life (NIGTC, 172).

### **If the Lord wills**

Not exclusively a Christian idea. Other pagan religions similarly had “if god wills” phraseology. However, for James and his Christian tradition it is the risen Christ and the one God who control all of history and who therefore must be taken into account, rather than simply the gods in general (NIGTC, 173).

Our story coming to Bethel

This is the verse that makes it readily apparent that these people are most likely Christians.

James is not urging his hearers to add “if the Lord wills” to the end of prayer – thus attempting to manipulate God or the gods through ritual or formula—and replaces God’s sovereignty with human presumption, precisely what these merchants are doing (ECNT, 212).

James wants us to adopt the attitude expressed by the words as a fixed perspective from which to view all of life (Moo, 206).

### **Instead**

Thus the proper attitude does not exclude plans but assumes planning is proper (NIGTC, 173).

It is not enough, James suggests, to recognize that one’s own life is uncertain and transitory. Such recognition is not even specifically religious. What these merchants need is the reality that their lives are in the hands of God (Moo, 204).

**16** But as it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

### **Arrogance/boast**

This attitude which plans and acts as if God did not exist and as if they instead of God controlled life is evil (NIGTC, 173).

These arrogant merchants have shut God out of their commercial lives, although they may be pious enough in church and at home (NIGTC, 173).

These traders are more concerned with physical wealth and their own plans than with humility before God (ECNT, 210).

**Boastings** (αλαζονεια). Only here and 1 John 2:16. The kindred word αλαζων *a boaster*, is derived from αλη, a *wandering or roaming*; hence, primarily, *a vagabond, a quack, a mountebank*. From the empty boasts of such concerning the cures and wonders they could perform, the word passed into the sense of *boaster*. One may boast *truthfully*; but αλαζονεια, is *false and swaggering* boasting. Rev. renders *vauntings*, and rightly, since *vaunt* is from the Latin *vanus*, *empty*, and therefore expresses *idle or vain* boasting. Can be translated the 'pride of life.'

### 17 So it is sin to know the good and yet not do it.

The context is that of merchants whose business interests lead them to forget God and thus of Christian warnings against greed and hoarding (Luke 12:13-21) (NIGTC, 174).

We are prone to think of sin only as deliberate acts against the will of God. Yet, James remind us that we must reflect on sins of omission, where we know good and the will of Jesus and remain silently passive.

### Illustrations

An affluent culture turns our hearts towards fleeting satisfactions and away from God while unprecedented prosperity has left our lives full but not necessarily fulfilled. – Arthur Simon president of Bread for the World.

The problem is not that we've tried faith and found it wanting, but that we've tried mammon and found it addictive, and as a result find following Christ inconvenient.

We read everywhere in the Scriptures that the holy servants of God spoke unconditionally of future things, when yet they had it as a fixed principle in their minds that they could do nothing without the permission of God. –John Calvin

"I wish they caught me six years ago, eight years ago."

—Bernie Madoff, jailed financier and Ponzi schemer, in an interview with representatives of the Securities and Exchange Commission. "On March 12, 2009, Madoff pleaded guilty to 11 federal offenses, including securities fraud, wire fraud, mail fraud, money laundering, making false statements, perjury, theft from an employee benefit plan, and making false filings with the SEC," according to Wikipedia. It is estimated that he defrauded his clients of some \$65 billion, over a period of approximately 17 years. He was sentenced to 150 years in prison

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