

James 4:13-17

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Verses 13-14: “Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” The brevity of life is a certainty of life. The UN-certainty of life is a certainty of life! That is, we can be certain that life is UN-certain!

The cemeteries are full of headstones of the deceased of various ages. It is probably true that a small majority of graves are of those who lived to be in their 70s, 80s, and even into their 90s and 100s, but there are also plenty of graves of those who only lived to much younger ages. Tragedies in this life abound. Many a life has been cut short by car accidents, accidental drownings, house fires, etc. Other lives have ended prematurely due to violence, or cancer, or lung disease, or heart attacks, etc. Cemeteries even contain the graves of little children, sometimes even infants. One simply cannot know exactly when he will meet his appointment with death (Heb. 9:27).

Thus, James tells us to take heed of the fact of life’s brevity, and not to count on the morrow, for there may be no tomorrow. This reminds me of what Jesus taught in Luke 12:16-21. There, a “certain rich man” pulled down his barns in order to build bigger barns. He surely had grandiose plans for his life. He had worked hard to plan for this moment. Verse 19 seems to indicate that he was ready to relax and retire, and yet that very night his soul was required of him (he died). All the treasures that he had worked so hard to accumulate would merely be passed down to relatives, or someone else, to take possession of them. Thus, he SHOULD have been laying up for himself treasure in heaven. How many people today are foolishly storing up treasures upon earth, treasures that they will never see again once they cross into eternity?

Verse 15: “For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.” Just as the Lord taught His disciples to pray that the Lord’s will be done (Mat. 6:10), so we must be willing to accept His will in regards to the longevity of our lives. None of us are guaranteed a certain amount of time. Time is certainly a great blessing. Are we taking advantage of it? Are we redeeming it (Eph. 5:16)? Or are we squandering it? “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest” (Ecc. 9:10).

Verse 16: “But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.” Those who boast about tomorrow are just like the “certain rich man” from Luke 12. They are FOOLISH. Their boasting/rejoicing is evil. Surely the Father in heaven looks upon them with much disdain.

Verse 17: “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” In this context, could it be that James is emphasizing that we must do good WITH OUR TIME? I think so! Most probably think of sin, first and foremost, with regard to its negative aspect:

doing something that God said NOT to do. But it is equally sinful to NEGLECT to do something that God said TO do! Will there be lost souls on the Day of Judgment because of the sin of NEGLIGENCE (omittance), rather than sins they have committed? We can be certain that it is so! What are some common sins of negligence? Neglecting Bible study (2 Tim. 2:15), neglecting fellowship (Heb. 10:24-25), neglecting church attendance (Heb. 10:25), neglecting evangelism (Mark 16:15), neglecting prayer (1 Thes. 5:17), neglecting the physical needs of others (Mat. 25:41-46), to name a few!