

What is your Life?

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- [0 : 00] Now if we could turn back to the chapter that we read together for a short time this evening, James chapter 4. And we can take with our text the words that we find in verses 13 and 14.
- I apologise, I've prepared from the authorised version, so I'll read my text. James chapter 4 and verses 13 and 14.
- Go to now ye that say, today or tomorrow 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.
- For what is your life? I'd like us for a short time this evening to think upon the words that we find in this verse, but particularly that question, what is your life?
- [1 : 16] Now although in the New Testament there are six different people by the name of James, it's widely accepted that the author of this book was indeed James, the brother of Jesus.
- He was the one who, along with his half-brothers, didn't actually believe in Christ during his earthly ministry. We read in John chapter 7, verse 15, that neither did his brethren believe in him.
- James grew up alongside Jesus. Yet as he did so, he didn't have a full appreciation of exactly who and what Jesus was.
- He would of course have loved his brother, but only as a brother and not as a saviour. However, James' relationship with Christ took a dramatic turn following Christ's resurrection, where Christ made a special appearance to James.
- And it wasn't until that point that James had a full and complete appreciation of exactly who it was he was growing up with all these years.
- [2 : 27] And following this we find in Acts chapter 1, verse 14, we find James praying with other believers. A clear indication that indeed he was now a follower of Christ.
- An interesting point to note is that nowhere in his letter does he highlight the fact that he was Christ's physical brother. He was now seeing, when he wrote this letter, Christ in a different light.
- He refers to himself as a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the purpose of James writing this book was in order to expose the myth that Christian living is not costly.
- And also at the same time, encouraging true believers to live in close fellowship with God. There have always been those who, if you like, wish to wear the crown but aren't so willing to bear the cross.
- Those who lay claim to heavenly benefits but aren't willing to carry that cross of self-denial and live solely for Christ and for his kingdom.
- [3 : 43] Instead choosing to live for the things of this world. Unfortunately, this type of false religion, if you like, is prevalent in our day with many stating that they are Christians with their mouths.

But their lives telling a completely different story. They are saying, actions speak louder than words. James here then in this book, he is commending a faith that is real.

A faith that daily manifests itself in our actions as Christians. And the theme of this book isn't merely faith and works. But rather a faith that works.

He is calling us to live out your faith. To be doers rather than just hearers of the word. A challenge I think for all of us here, including myself, who are children of God.

However, my desire for us tonight is not to challenge us against worldly living. That is perhaps a sermon for another time.

[4 : 51] What I'd like to do is to challenge any here amongst us who are still as of yet living a life without Christ.

I'd like us to look together at the words of James in chapter 4 verses 13 and 14. Words that I think can very much be applied to the lives of those who are yet to come.

And to taste and see that God is good. And go to now, let's say, today or tomorrow we will go into such a city and continue there a year.

And buy and sell and get gain. Whereas you know not what shall be on them all. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away.

We live, friends, in a world that loves to plan. And indeed there's nothing new under the sun. The words in these verses are a plea to those who are busy planning their lives.

[5 : 58] And I think most of us are pretty good at trying to ensure that our future will be comfortable. That we want absolutely nothing but the best for ourselves, for our loved ones, for our communities.

And we saw that even in the referendum earlier in the year where there were those who were so tirelessly campaigning for what they believed would make a better country.

Those who day after day made it their business to try and ensure that the result of that referendum would have a positive effect on their lives.

They made plans for the future. Those of us who are working or who have been working have no doubt been paying into or are paying into a pension scheme.

They were wanting a measure of financial security and comfort in our latter years. They were busy planning for the future. Now we all know that over the past winter we've had indeed some pretty horrendous conditions.

[7 : 11] And we've had many warnings as to the impending storms that were coming. Upon these warnings, upon watching weather forecasts, what did we do?

We planned. We planned to minimise damage around our houses and in our communities. We did all that we could to ensure that ourselves and our families would be safe.

And of course we have to plan. It's part of life. And in fact the word of God itself, it commends us to plan and to make physical provision for ourselves and for our families.

Solomon in Proverbs chapter 6, he commends us to learn of the ant when he states, Consider our ways and be wise. She provided her meat in the summer and gathereth her food in the harvest.

In Genesis, Joseph is commended for storing up food in the cities against the years of famine. There's absolutely nothing wrong with time to provide for our future.

[8 : 20] There's nothing wrong in desiring security for ourselves and for our families. However, along with such planning comes a word of caution.

And I think that is exactly what James is doing here in verses 13 and 14. You know, if we're being honest with ourselves, earthly plans and schemes have such a strange way of engrossing our hearts and our minds.

Taking up our time thinking about our jobs and our families, about our crops, about our communities, about our pastimes.

And we're constantly planning and looking ahead. And sometimes our heads are so full of visions of what we will do, what we will be, what we will enjoy in some future time.

Some time that may never even come. But where is God? In all your hopes and dreams and in all that you see your life to be in the future, where does God fit in?

[9 : 35] Are you so busy feeding yourself with the pleasure of your hopes that somehow you've left God out in the cold?

The rich fool in the Gospel of Luke, he could only think of self-improvement in terms of earthly possessions. And what he did was, he pulled down his barns and he built bigger barns.

He wasn't content with what he had. He had to have more and more and more. His contentment lay in temporal things. You see friends, carnal minds are only interested in carnal things.

And here in verse 13, James is warning against such worldly thinking. Can't you see how the folks spoken of in this verse, they're forecasting how to spend their days and months in buying and selling and getting gain.

We will go. We will continue. We will buy. We will sell. We will gain. A feeble man that's here so proudly ordering his own life and forgetting God, presuming that tomorrow is his to see.

[10 : 54] Is that you? Perhaps even if I stand here tonight, there is something in your mind, something you're scheming and plotting that you need to do when you get home after the service or even next week.

Maybe there's some project in your life at the minute that's taking over your thoughts, that's constantly on your mind. Something that you deem to be so important.

Something that you're looking forward to the fulfilment of because you know when this particular thing happens, your life will be better. Maybe it will.

Maybe it won't. But what then, friends? Will you then be content with your lot? Or will you have something else to occupy your thoughts?

Something else that you need to aim for? Another goal for you to meet in order for your life to be complete? We see in Scripture many examples of the emptiness and often the foolishness of men's plans.

[12 : 04] In Genesis chapter 11, we read of the descendants of Noah and how they had great plans in order to better themselves.

You remember that's the story of the town of Babel. In verse 4 of this chapter we read, Go to, let us build a city and make a tower whose top may reach unto heaven, and let us make us a name lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

It was, of course, the greatest of problems with these men's plans. All they had at the centre of their plans was self.

Let us build us a city whose top may reach unto heaven. Let us make us a name lest we may be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth.

You know, I'm sure most of you know I'm a primary school teacher for another week at least, and often I've shown the children the fact that the middle letter of the word sin is I.

[13 : 18] You see, at the centre of every thought and every sinful action, every sinful motive, at the centre of all these things is self.

Nowhere in these people's plans did God feature. In fact, their pride and their arrogance led them to believe that they could somehow be equal with God by building a pillar that would reach unto heaven.

Such foolishness. God will not be mocked. And, of course, you'll remember that their foolishness and their godlessness was punished accordingly.

They were scattered as a people and they were given different tongues so that they could no longer understand one another. We may be sitting here tonight and think, well, my plans are not as foolish as the Babylonians.

But I'll let it be to ask you, friends, are they as godless? Is everything in your life, if you're being honest with yourself, is everything in your life centred around yourself with very little room for God?

[14 : 35] In stark contrast to these godless plans, we read of another man in the Old Testament, a man who was the forefather of the Babylonians, but whose motives were entirely different.

He was, of course, Noah. You see, the centre of Noah's plans wasn't self, but God. He listened to the voice of God, which asked him to carry out plans that seemed ludicrous to men to build an ark that would save himself and his family.

He stood there year after year after year, being mocked and ridiculed. But, of course, these plans, they were made by God and for God.

And so they were bound to succeed. And as a result of Noah's obedience, we read in Genesis chapter 8, verse 1, And God remembered Noah.

And God remembered Noah. Friends, will he remember you? Will he remember you? Because at the centre of your lives, at the centre of all that you do, all that you are, is Christ.

[16 : 02] Allow me to ask you again, what is your life? What is it that motivates you each and every day to get up out of your bed and to face the world?

Is it a desire to fulfil your own, yes, legitimate plans, but selfish plans? Or is it a desire to bring glory and honour to the King of kings and the Lord of lords?

Do you face each day, friends, knowing the real meaning and purpose of life? You know, if you're here tonight, and God has no part of your plans, no part to play in your dreams and aspirations, then you're like a ship without a rudder.

You're floundering upon the sea of vanity, and you're destined for sure shipwreck. This is the truth, folks. It's here in front of us.

And you know, Christians often have the charge laid against them of being narrow-minded. And in many ways, that is true. It has to be true.

[17 : 15] We read in Matthew chapter 7, verses 13 and 14, Enter ye in at the straight gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat, because straight is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

The Christian path is, indeed, a narrow one, one where we must seek to do all in our lives to the glory of God, using his word as the only rule to direct us, not being swayed by the fleeting things of this world that seek us, seek to draw us off this path to the left and to the right.

Father, we friends, as children of God, if we're on this narrow path, we should be, desire us to daily bring glory, honour and praise to the one who died and gave himself for us.

I heard something this week that said, worldliness, talking about Christians, worldliness, worldliness, is when sinful things are made to look normal, and when righteous things are made to look strange.

That's a challenge for us, friends, tonight, when we don't really want to stand out from the crowd, we don't want to take this decision that might make us look a wee bit strange, because we want to be the same as the world.

[18 : 55] This is a narrow path for to remain focused on that end goal, not looking to the left nor to the right, but looking to Christ, the author and the finisher of our faith.

But I'd like to put to you that, and I mean no offence with this, but if you're here without Christ, in many ways, you may even be even more narrow-minded.

Is it so that you're unable to see past the here and now? That you're unable to see past the small things of this world that all that you can focus on is your next project, on what's going to happen in your life tomorrow, or what you need to buy or to sell or to get gain from?

Are you unable to broaden your mind to the things of God, to the things of eternity? Friends, are you ensnared?

Are you trapped by the here and now? Are you bound up in the shackles of sin, unable to make any real progress, because you're being controlled with that if you're being completely honest with yourself?

[20 : 19] You're being controlled by that which doesn't satisfy. Yes, you may be getting pockets of pleasure here and there from things which are in and of themselves quite legitimate, but you're not getting anything that gives you that true, lasting peace and satisfaction.

Are you trapped, friends, in a world that promises so, so much? We hear voices shouting at us daily through the media, promising this, promising that, but each and every time failing to deliver.

You know, we live in a world that with all its propoganda influences, seeking to bombard you and to dictate to you what your life should be like and the things that you apparently need for you to be happy.

Well, friends, it's all lies. I've been there myself. I know what it's like. It's all lies. Can't you see?

The evil one is manipulating you. He's tying his absolute utmost to make sure that you're so taken up by everything around you day by day that he squeezed out any room for you to think about the things of God.

[21 : 47] No thought for your never-dying soul and its eternal destination. You know, in many ways, without Christ, our lives are just like one big show.

We are, if you like, puppets and a string in the hands of the evil one who's controlling us so that we are lurching from one scene to the next to the next till eventually, friends, the curtain is going to come down upon the stage that is our life.

And what then? Where will all our plans and dreams and aspirations that we've made on earth be then? You know, our time here is so, so short.

In our own community of nets, this last few weeks alone, we've had another number of deaths. Once again, the voice of death echoing so loudly in our communities.

Yet, I fear that our hearts are as hard as ever. You know, when I was younger, I used to often stay in my grandparents' house.

[23 : 12] And back then, they had no sense of heating in any rooms. They only had a little stove in the kitchen, a raybar in the kitchen, and an open fire in the living room. What I distinctly remember was, when I woke up in the morning, seeing, the very first thing I would see would be my breath in the air, in all its fullness, very, very, very quickly, to disappear.

And you know, so it is with our lives, whether we are young, middle-aged, or old. That's what our verse is telling us here.

Our lives are nothing but a mist, a cloud, a flimsy breath, there in all its fullness, but very quickly gone.

When I used to walk over in Stornoway, and I would drive over the Barvis Moor, I would often see the times that we would get a beautiful sunny morning.

I would often see the sun rising in the sky, and the moorland blanketed with a fine mist. It was an absolutely beautiful landscape.

[24 : 29] It was coloured perfectly by the position of the sun in the sky, a picture that was worthy of being taken and framed. However, when I would return from work at the end of the day, at the very self-saint spot, I would find quite a different picture.

the mist would have vanished, the sun would be in a different position, quite likely with a cloud over it. And so it is with their lives, friends.

It is nothing but a vapour resting upon the landscape of time, appearing for a short while, and then vanishing away.

You know, without Christ, you don't truly know what it is to be alive. To be alive in the very real sense of the word, because to live, friends, to live is Christ.

To live is to know the fullness of the atoning power, of the shed blood of Christ. And if you don't know this for yourselves tonight, you may be alive physically, you may have a flimsy breath, but spiritually you are dead.

[25 : 49] You're a slave to the world, to the flesh, and to the devil. You're blinded by sin, and you're teetering on the brink of an eternity of anguish, of pain, an eternity of regret, of missed opportunities.

Friends, if you're without Christ tonight, you're teetering on the edge of the very pit of hell itself. This is an urgent message.

It's the most important message that you'll ever hear. What is your life? It is but a vapour here today. But who knows?

Who knows? It could be gone tomorrow. In Job chapter 6 we read, My days are swifter than a wee worse shudder.

And so it is. And the great question I have for you, friends, is, in all of your plans, are you planning for that great eternity?

[26 : 58] Now, I stand here tonight not to depress you or to discourage you, but I stand here, friends, out of love to warn you.

You see, if you were to see one of your loved ones heading straight towards the edge of the cliff, heading straight towards sure and instant death, surely you would do all in your power to stop them.

You would shout loudly so that they would hear your voice, that they would turn on their path, and that they would turn from that path that leads to death and devastation.

If you didn't do so, if you didn't warn them, you wouldn't love them, you wouldn't care. love them, if I stood here tonight and I didn't warn you, I wouldn't love you, I wouldn't care.

Friends, I urge you to take heed, take heed of this solemn warning. It's given to you out of love, because you know, if you've not been born again, you are on that self-same path.

[28 : 21] this is not some kind of failing story, this is the truth. You know, tonight, there is a heaven to be gained, and a hell to be shunned.

There is absolutely nothing more that I would like than for you to come and taste and see that God is good.

That you would know that sweetness of knowing Christ as your own personal saviour, the things of this world leave nothing but a bitter taste.

But Christ, he is sweet. That you would be able to say, rather than looking to the future, looking to a time in your life that may never come, that you would be able to say, this is the day that the Lord has made.

We will rejoice. We will be glad in it. That is one of the things I noticed when I was converted myself. I wasn't living in a future time that may never come, but rather I actually started enjoying today for today, because tomorrow isn't promised.

[29 : 43] But you know, I can't convert you. You can't even convert yourselves. The gospel, the gospel is a message of hope, and in it God makes promises.

And unlike the broken promises of this world, God, he's a covenant keeping God, he promises that those who seek will find.

Those who knock on the door will have it opened up to them. Are you seeking? Are you knocking?

seeking? You know, if we are truly seeking after something, we will do all in our power until we find it.

We won't stop and we won't rest. We will make it our business to find that thing. And you know, those of us who are truly seeking the Lord, we will not rest until we find Christ as our savior.

[30 : 56] we should, friends, take an example from Jacob of old who he wrestled with God at Penuel and he refused to let go until God would bless him.

Are you daily wrestling with God in his word at a throne of grace? Are you in the means of grace every given opportunity that is yours?

Friends, do not let the fear of man hold you back. It is the greatest snare, I believe, in our communities, those who desire to be at that prayer meeting but are stopped by that fear of what people will say.

Well, let me tell you, friends, people will not save you. Take that step. Seek him with every fibre of your being.

Don't let the things of this world prevent you from knowing and experiencing that peace of that passive understanding.

[32 : 09] I mentioned, with this I finished earlier, that Christ's life is like that of a rudderless ship floundering in the sea of vanity.

You know, as I said earlier, and please let me reiterate this, the gospel message is a message of hope. And tonight, tonight there's another ship that you can board.

There's an old simple hymn, a hymn that is so profound that gives the invitation, come join our happy crew, we're bound for Canaan's shore.

The captain says, there's room for you, and room for millions more. Friends, do not rest until you have Christ as the captain of your soul, until you too can say, yes, I am bound for Canaan's shore, because I can guarantee you, yes, the Christian life is not a life without difficulties and trials and temptations, but I can guarantee you that when you know Christ for yourselves, your life has just begun.

Friends, what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

[33 : 56] Plan and prepare, make provision for that great eternity, friends, for who knows, this night my soul may be required of you.

Amen. We pray the Lord will bless us and let us pray. God, loving, heavenly Father, hallowed be thy name, thy name that is above all other names, the name of the one before whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, oh, that that name would be part of the experience of our friends gathered in here tonight.

And, oh, Lord, we pray that as the seed of the gospel has been sown in the hearts of those here, that thou wouldst be pleased to give the increase, that if there are any here haltering between two opinions, that they would make it their business with every fibre of their being to call upon the Lord, for those who do so, they will be saved.

Bless us, now we pray, and forgive us for Christ's sake. Amen. we can conclude the worship of this time by singing from Psalm 63.

Psalm 63, reading at the beginning of the psalm.

[36 : 01] Lord, be my God, my early Zeek, my soul does thirst for thee, for thee, my flesh longs in a dry parched land, wherein no water spade, that I thy power may behold and brightness of thy face, as I have seen thee here to pour within thy holy place.

Since better is thy love than life, my lips thee praise shall give, I in thy name will lift my hands and bless thee while I live.

Even as with malwa and with fat, my soul shall fill it be, then shallow my mouth with joyful lips, sing praises unto thee.

We can sing these verses to God's praise, Lord thee, my God, I early seek, my soul doth thirst for thee. Lord thee, my God, I early seek, my soul doth thirst for thee, my flesh longs end, but thy parched land, where hith no water sheen, that I, thy power may be hold, and righteousness of thy face, and thy hath to call within thy holy place, so better will you

My lips be paid on Him. I am my name, will lift my heart.

[38 : 42] And rest upon my lips. He walks with blood, O hungry, but my soul shall bear me.

Then shall my heart with joy calleth. Say praises unto Thee.

Amen. Lord our God, we pray now that Thy Spirit would accompany all that has been done in this place. And that indeed Thy known name would be high and lifted up.

And that in all things in our life, that Thou wouldst have the pre-eminence. Go before us now in the coming week. Guide us and keep us and forgive us.

For Christ's sake. Amen.