

## **Here Today Gone Tomorrow** **James 4: 13-16**

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On Thursday evening, March 26, at 1:28 am, the unthinkable happened. A huge cargo ship slammed into the Francis Scott Key Bridge in the Baltimore Harbor. In a matter of seconds, the bridge collapsed and six workers on that bridge lost their lives. Fortunately, word of the impending disaster had been received in time to close the bridge to vehicular traffic; otherwise, the loss of life could have been much worse. This tragedy, which will take months, if not years to rectify, is a poignant reminder that what seems rock solid today can disappear all too quickly. In other words, "here today and gone tomorrow."

James was well aware of this truth and that's why he wrote the passage of Scripture which was read this morning. But why did he feel compelled to bring this word of warning? The answer is rooted in a common business practice which was taking place throughout the Roman Empire during that time. New cities were being established. A savvy business man could move to one of these boom towns and make a fortune buying up cheap land or starting lucrative businesses. It was like those by gone days of the Wild West here in America. Not only was there a lot of money to be made, but an opportunity to claim a lot of bragging rights. A successful businessman could say, "Look at me. I've done quite well for myself. You ought to see what I am planning for the future." Evidently, some of James' fellow believers had gotten caught up in these enticing business ventures, some of which, quite frankly, were a bit risky. Not only that, these entrepreneurs had begun to think of themselves as being almost invincible. In their own eyes they had become the gurus of real estate investment.

In response, James decided to take a little wind out of these men's sails of self-assurance. So he wrote to them saying, "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" (James 4:13-14). Once again, why did James throw cold

water on their dreams and aspirations? There are two reasons, two reasons that are just as true today as they were back then.

Here's the first one. Tomorrow is uncertain. The book of Proverbs reminds us, "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1). Or how about this old folk saying, "Don't count your chickens before they hatch." Or the lines of the Scottish poet, Robert Burns, which reads, "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men, gang aft agley an' lea'e us naught but grief an' pain for promised joy." Take for example, the location of my first fulltime pastorate. It was located in a place known as Hamptonville. In the 1800's a man by the name of Colonel Hampton had laid out the streets and avenues for a beautiful town that would be named in his honor. Everything had gone quite well until the state of North Carolina decided to move the main highway a few miles to the east. Hamptonville was cut off from the major thoroughfare. It remained a small, unincorporated village. Or consider for a moment the story that Jesus told about the foolish farmer. He had prospered so greatly that he decided to build bigger barns to house his abundance, instead of sharing his wealth with those in need. On the very night that he bragged about all of his accomplishments, his life would be taken and he would have to stand before his Creator in heaven. "Who then," Jesus surmised, "would receive all that the foolish farmer had stored up for himself?" Then he added a James like warning, "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God" ((Luke 12:13-21). Yes, have no doubt about this truth, tomorrow is uncertain. None of us knows what the next day may bring.

Here's the second reason why our lives are like the mists of the morning. The flesh is frail. Years ago, Peter Marshall, a well-known Presbyterian pastor preached a sermon to the graduating class of midshipmen at the Naval Academy. His message was taken from this same passage of Scripture in the book of James. He had chosen another topic for his sermon, but at the last moment, led by the Spirit of God, felt compelled to instead bring a message that reminded the graduates that they were like the morning mist which vanishes away. That sermon probably seemed a little out of place and a bit forlorn for those young men in the strength and vitality of their youth. Nevertheless, it was prophetic. Little did they or even Peter Marshall realize that in a few months those sailors' dreams of serving in a peacetime Navy would be shattered by a call to arms in the Pacific, a war

from which some of them would never return. In Psalm 103, verses 15 and 16 we find these words, "As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more." Yes the flesh is frail. We are given no promises about tomorrow.

In light of all of this, then, what should we do? James provides us with an answer. Instead of relying upon our own dreams, hopes and aspirations for the future, we should simply say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will do this or that" (James 4:15). He then goes on to declare in the next verse that boasting about anything else is evil and sinful, especially if it is directed at accomplishing something which is hurtful or harmful to others. In other words, instead of always pursuing our own desires, a better approach is simply this. Trust in the Lord. Seek His wisdom and guidance instead of just relying upon your own plans and preferences. Take, for example, these statements from the life of Saint Paul. In 1 Corinthians 4:19 he says to the church in Corinth, "But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing." And again at the end of this letter, he declares, "I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits" (1Corinthians 16:7). Paul knew that if we are sensitive to the Lord's guidance, He can redirect our lives in ways that are beneficial to us and others as well as to the work of His kingdom. You will perhaps remember this story from the book of Acts. Paul and his companions wanted to go to an area that we would call today northern Turkey to preach the gospel. However, the Lord directed them to Macedonia instead (Acts 16:6-10). As the story of the early church continues in the book of Acts, that decision turned out to be a very fruitful one for the growth of Christianity as it moved triumphantly westward.

So what does all of this have to say to us this morning? When we make our plans, especially important ones that will have a direct bearing upon the future course of our lives, it's always wise to call upon a Spiritual Adviser from on high. By the power of His Holy Spirit, God can give us a gentle nudge as to whether to proceed or perhaps hold back and move in another direction. With that in mind we should always remember that tomorrow is uncertain and the flesh is frail. Therefore, a little extra guidance regarding the future and our place within that future is always welcome, especially from someone who truly loves us and cares about us.

Two little girls had enjoyed each other's company playing with one another all day long. Having grown up in Christian homes, they ended their day of play with this prayer, "We've had a good day today Lord. What's Your plan for tomorrow?" Years ago, people sometimes concluded their letters with two letters, "D V." They stood for the Latin phrase "Deo Volente" which being translated means, "If God allows," or "God willing." Whether we should conclude our correspondence with those same two letters or simply inscribe them upon our hearts, they are good ones to live by—"Deo Volente, if the Lord allows."