

Living in Wisdom

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[0 : 00] Okay, so James chapter 4, we're going to start at verse 13 and we'll go through to chapter 5, verse 6. Come now, you who say, today or tomorrow, we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit.

Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a time, a little time, and then vanishes.

Instead, you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that. As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. Come now, you rich. Weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.

Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire.

[1 : 09] You've laid up treasure in the last days. Behold, the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you.

And the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You've lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You've fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.

You've condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you. Well, let's pray and spend some time in God's Word. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, thank you that you speak to us loudly and clearly in your Word.

And please help us this morning not to be just hearers of your Word, but doers of your Word and that your Word might work in our lives to transform us to grow more and more like our Saviour Jesus.

We ask it in his name. Amen. Well, I know something that happened this week for each and every one of you. And I haven't been stalking you.

[2 : 18] I haven't been looking at Facebook and seeing what you've been up to. I just know. And this is what I know. I know that your week didn't turn out to be the week you thought it would be.

Right? See, nobody here had the week that they thought it would be. It didn't turn out exactly like you planned. Plans were thwarted.

Surprise happened. People disappointed you. Some of you didn't plan on coming here this morning, but you're here.

And some of you planned to be here this morning and I'm speaking to them and they're not here because they didn't make it. Now, I didn't have the week I thought I'd have either.

And none of us are in total control about what happens to us or around about us. Nobody here had the week they thought they were going to have.

[3 : 19] So, James has a word to say this morning as we live in this world. And as always, there are always two groups of people being addressed in any church.

There are those who are followers of Jesus and there are those who are listening in and considering what Christians believe and what it would mean to be one. Now, the big thing, right, that James is saying here in these verses is this.

Life is a mist. So, have God shape and determine our lives. Life is a vapour.

So, have God shape and determine our plans. Life is short. So, have God shape and determine our plans.

Now, you could be forgiven for thinking that James has been listening to his big brother, Jesus.

[4 : 35] And you can see that there are two clear headings in this passage. You see them there, don't you? There in verse 13 and chapter 5 verse 1. Come now, you who say, or today or tomorrow, we'll do this.

And chapter 5 verse 1. Come now, you rich. So, let's have a look at this passage of verse 13 to start with.

Come now, you who say, today or tomorrow, we'll go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit. So, they have plans to go to a town at a time of their choosing. And they, in that town of their choosing, at the time of their choosing, they will live there for a time of their choosing. And they will do what they choose to do when they get there.

They will do business according to their choosing. To make a profit, not a loss. And notice that there's no mention of God in the plans.

[5 : 37] There's no mention of prayer. And there's no mention of why they would like to make a profit. Now, you have to be rich to travel from town to town at a time of your choosing.

And you have to be sort of with means, rich at one level, to make plans and have any hope that they might come about as you would have them happen.

Let me give you the Roy Davidson translation of verse 13. Come now, you who say, today or tomorrow, we will study at university.

And during the holidays, we will do some travel. Maybe go to the Daintree. Maybe the Barrier Reef. Maybe overseas. Maybe Canada.

And then when we finish uni, we'll get a good job. Climb the corporate ladder. Become a partner. And when I've established my career and have children, I'll get someone else.

[6 : 39] And they will grow up. and they will actually raise my children for me and then I'll go back to my important job, purchase a house and then work at my property portfolio until it's self-funding and then I'll retire early, around 50 years old and I'll spend the rest of my time enjoying the good things that I've stored up for myself while I tick off the bucket list until the unmentionable happens that happens to everybody else but not me so what happened to me happens.

Now we are a group of people who are the richest the world's ever known. By nature people like us tend to think that we are the boss and we think we're in charge and things will happen according to my plans.

We pay our money, we get the ticket, we go on the plan in total ignorance of reality. But here's the wake-up call for all who think they are in charge of what tomorrow will bring.

We have no idea what tomorrow will bring, let alone the next hour.

We make our plans but they only come about as God determines. God says, wake up, steady on now, come now, you don't know what tomorrow will bring.

[8 : 19] It's absolutely presumptuous to think that we know what will happen tomorrow. It's the height of arrogance.

To make plans without reference to reality, well that's just absolute foolishness. And the reality is this, life is a mist.

It's a vapour. It's short and it will be forgotten. What's your life? Verse 14.

In the scheme of things we need to get it right. No matter how rich, no matter how powerful, no matter how important, how much influence we have at work, we think we might have or might be, right, in the scheme of things we are a mist, we are a vapour, we are smoke.

Like fog. That's around early in the morning, you've seen it, haven't you? Right? The sun comes out and then it's gone and it's a beautiful clear blue sky day.

[9 : 28] Right? Or the vapour that comes out of the steam of the kettle. Right? And then disappears. Or the vape smoke that comes out of someone's lungs, killing them and then disappears.

Gone. Brothers and sisters, life is short. Right? But not only short, here is the truly humbling thing. We won't be remembered long. Does anyone here know who Chris Watson was? Or who he was? No? No, I didn't either. He was Australia's third Prime Minister. A pretty important person in the scheme of things in Australia. You think you're something?

Think again. Who knows Mr Pitt? No, no, no, no, no. Not Mr David Pitt, Chief Executive Evangelistic Officer of City Bible Forum.

[10 : 30] Right? No. Actually, Mr W Pitt. There were two of them, junior and senior. Right? Both were Prime Ministers of England.

Right? Mr Pitt, the junior, the younger, was Prime Minister during the time of the White Settlement of Australia and under his leadership, a Christian chaplain came out to Australia.

And Pitt Street in Sydney is named after him. Now, as significant as that event was, very few of us, very few of us indeed, have ever heard of him.

Now, I have heard of him, but I've forgotten all about him. No one is going to name a street after me. And I don't think anyone's going to name a street after you in a major city of the world.

I don't expect to be remembered long. God says we are little more than a mist, a vapour.

[11:51] On the scale of infinity, our lives on this planet are infinitesimally small, short, and we need to get a right perspective of ourselves.

I am not God and neither are you. We are mortal, we're not infinite, we are finite, we're limited, we are transient.

I heard this on the radio a few years ago and it shocked me and you've probably heard it, you may have heard me say it before, but you and I will probably live about a thousand months.

Yeah? And half of that time will probably be asleep, that means you have five hundred months of consciousness, right?

And eleven of those months have already gone this year. We need to see ourselves rightly, don't we?

[12:51] Really. Ultimately, I'll be forgotten in a few years time after I die and not many people are going to ever know that I existed, let alone care.

And sorry to break the news to you, I don't want to burst your bubble, right? But that's what minority views do, right? Ultimately, you will be forgotten too in this world.

So, verse 15 and 16, we ought to say, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that. Now, it doesn't mean just mouth a few words, right?

To add to religious pomposity of our language, of our vocabulary. It needs to be a conscious construct of our lives, a decided pattern of living, right?

We need to frame our lives knowing that God is the one who's in control and that it's only as the Lord wills that we will live or do this or do that.

[14:00] In his generosity that will happen. We don't need to use that word at the end of every sentence, but it's important that the principle saturates our lives.

And yes, let's by all means have the words and the reality flow out of our hearts. Boasting about our plans without including God is nothing but arrogance and it's arrogance which we can all fall into all too easily.

This kind of boasting, James says, is evil for it's the very essence of sin leaving out God, denying that he even exists, seeking to live independently of the one who made us.

I mean, who of us knows what might happen in the next hour, in the next minute? The only person who knows is God.

God might cause the sun, right, here we go, to have a small burp, right, and eject a gazillion tons of cosmic matter out of its core, like it did the other week, by the way, but it might do a bit bigger and all communication might be gone on the planet, satellites might stop working, right, GPS systems will stop sending out their locations and all kinds of flow-ons will happen and public transport will have hiccups and aeroplanes will behave badly and power will fail to run around the country as it should and weather events like we recently had in other parts of Australia like the southern aurora or the aurora boros would actually be shining all over the planet, we've got to learn our place, we are not in control and everything that happens in the world happens because

[16:06] God commands it according to the foreknowledge of God and it's not fatalism, right, we're not into fatalism, it isn't that we do nothing, we don't do any planning, instead we come to verse 17 to do the right thing, have a look at verse 17, so whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it for him, it is sin, okay, over to you, what's the right thing?

What is the right thing to be doing? Think about it with the person next to you, what's the right thing to be doing? in the context of the verse we've been just looking at?

Therefore, whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it's sin. What's the right thing? What's the right thing? Well, I suspect, all you avid Bible readers are very good at reading the Bible, I know, in verses 13 to 16 the right thing to do is simply this, in the context of the passage the right thing to do is to see ourselves as the creature and God as the creator, recognise that God is God, we are not and to humbly submit ourselves to the one who makes the plans and trust him for the outcome as we go about our business.

That's to be the underlining thing and give ourselves to the business that makes a worthwhile profit, give ourselves to a business that makes a worthwhile profit and so since our life is short and we are so forgettable then I put it to you that it would be appropriate to give ourselves the things that are of eternal significance and not the pursuit of things of this world only.

It seems that the only thing that matters in our world for most of the world is trading and making a financial profit.

[18 : 30] market. There's always the financial report on the news isn't there? Always. And the success or the failure of our country is always tied up with our financial standing.

The value of our dollar, it's gone up against America or it's gone down. The state of the stock market, it's finished in the green or the red. The inflation rate, is it running at around about 3% or is it heading higher or lower?

What are we going to do? Money is seen as the ultimate measure of success. Having money equates with having power and having authority.

And when you hear of those admired in the world, it doesn't take long before we hear of their net worth.

Their age and their net worth. That's what we hear. Or then we Google it. Find out their net worth. But here's the sobering thing, right?

[19 : 33] Here is the sobering thing. There is a bleak, bleak, catastrophic future for those who are rich without Christ.

Riches matter little when the Lord Jesus returns. Here we go. Have a look at chapter 5, verse 1. Come now. There's calamity coming, verses 1 to 3.

Come now you rich and weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Calamity is coming upon them. What we have here is a picture of the tables being turned on those who made it rich in the world without God.

That's what's going on here. James is speaking about the situation that is already as good as come upon them. Right? James is speaking about the situation that has come upon them in the present tense.

This is not so much a warning about their current situation. there's no call for repentance going on here. There's no hope of repentance for them.

[20 : 42] There's no lasting satisfaction from their wealth. Their ill-gotten wealth condemns them before God. And there's an eternal future of misery waiting.

Life might be great in this world but given the shortness of life and the insignificance of their status in it, it really was futile. Look at verse 3.

Your gold and silver have corroded and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire.

You have laid up treasure in the last days. They laboured up, storing up or better hoarded up treasure in the last days.

Now Calvin says this. Calvin is a great reformer who was around the 16th century and he wrote lots of good stuff and this is what he wrote about this passage here.

[21 : 41] James is not addressing them in order to invite them to repentance. On the contrary, he is concerned for the faithful, that is you and I, so that they, hearing of the miserable and the rich, might not envy their fortune and also knowing that God would be the avenger of the wrongs they suffered, they might bear them with a calm and resigned mind.

I'll read it again. James has not dressed them in order to invite them to repentance, that is the rich, right? On the contrary, he is concerned for the faithful, that is you and I, so that they, hearing of the miserable and the rich, might not envy their fortune and also, knowing that God will be the avenger of the wrongs that they, the faithful, have suffered, they might bear them with calm and resigned mind.

So here's the thing, here's the thing, the unbelieving, unrighteous rich went about filling up their barns with money and like building a sand castle on the beach, a wonderful big sand castle with open and closing folding doors and great designer features without recognising the tide was coming in and that the tide would ultimately just wash it away, oblivious to God who would hold them accountable for their godlessness, oblivious that God was God, he would come one day and judge. The last days, here we go, the last days are the days that you and I are living in right now between the death and resurrection of Jesus and his return.

These are the last days, we are in them now, right? And that is the time when we are expecting the Lord Jesus to return at any time, suddenly, without warning.

[23 : 57] Life is short, a vapour. I can't help but think of Luke chapter 12 and the rich fool, can you remember that parable of Jesus, who stores up wealth for himself in the biggest barns he built for himself, before he knocks those down and builds bigger ones and stores up more grain in the barns and kicks back and says he'll relax and he will eat and drink and be merry and, but Jesus says of him, fool, this very night your soul will be required of you and the things that you've stored up, whose will they be?

And these unbelieving righteous rich will be held accountable for their wickedness. Their gold and their silver is worthless, their exquisite expensive clothing is rotten and moth-eaten, their hoarded up treasure is useless, their fraud, their riches condemns them, cries out against them, proving them guilty.

See verse 4, behold the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields which you kept back by fraud are crying out against you and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

Instead of paying the labourers who mowed their fields, the labourers who produced their food that they eat, they withheld their daily pay and so cause them to go hungry and not able to meet the expenses and basic living requirements.

It's total disobedience to Deuteronomy chapter 24, listen to Deuteronomy chapter 24 verse 14, you shall not oppress a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brothers or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns.

[25 : 42] You shall give him his wages on the same day before the sun sets for he is poor and counts on it, lest he cry against you to the Lord and you be guilty of sin.

The unrighteous wealthy rich have the unpaid wages crying out against them just like the blood of Abel cried out to God against the guilt of Cain who murdered him.

You can read about that in Genesis chapter 4 verse 10. The unpaid wages cry out and the Lord of hosts is aware of the sin of these rich people and that pleads of mercy come to his ears.

And so the Lord of hosts here, who is the Lord of hosts? Well, he's the King of Glory, Psalm 24 says, the Lord of hosts, he's the King of Glory. The Lord of hosts though, well it's a way of speaking, the prophets speak, Isaiah and Jeremiah and they speak of God over and over again like as the Lord of hosts.

Let me tell you one reading from Isaiah chapter 2 verse 12, you can read lots of them out in Isaiah and Jeremiah. For the Lord of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up and it shall be brought low.

[27 : 13] He is the Lord who commands his heavenly army in mighty battle and he's mighty to judge. Now the godless rich eat and fatten themselves living in luxurious ease and self indulgence there in verse 5 while the poor man goes about without and dies.

You've lived on earth, verse 5, in luxury and self indulgence. You've fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You can't help but think of the rich man Lazarus in Luke 16 can you?

It's a massive contrast between the pleasures of the rich and the poverty of the poor and the torment that comes upon the rich. The word translated, hear this loud and clear, the word translated self-indulgence means to indulge oneself beyond the bounds of propriety, to live luxuriously, to live voluptuously.

That's the definitions of the word. It's only mentioned in two other places in the Bible. In 1 Timothy chapter 5 verse 6 where it's a person who is dead even while they live, they're given self-indulgence.

And in Ezekiel chapter 16 verse 49 in reference to Sodom and Gomorrah, you'll know the wicked cities that came under the judgment of God. The rich, unrighteous person has fattened themselves in the day of slaughter.

[28 : 43] A clear reference to the coming judgment of God. Isaiah chapter 30 verse 25 what happens on a day of judgment is that cities are destroyed and people are slaughtered.

That's what happens and they're like cattle being fattened for the kill. Unscrupulous businessmen will not prosper in the end, God will hold them accountable.

So don't envy them and certainly don't emulate them. They have murdered the righteous person in verse 6. The class of people, the wicked, rich persecute, the poor, the needy who trust in God for

the deliverance.

The righteous, non-resisting person has turned the other cheek. The righteous, non-resisting person does not exact justice. The righteous, non-resisting person entrusts themselves to God knowing he is the one who will judge justly and the tables are turned.

As the humble are exalted and the proud, unrighteous rich are humiliated for all eternity.

[30 : 03] the future for the unrighteous rich is bleak. Don't think for a second that trading places with them is worth it.

They might live and have a trillion dollars to their name but without God they are nothing and have nothing to look forward to.

they are too merely human, their life just a mist. And here's the warning for those here who might be considering Christianity and think that you'd be better off going after wealth instead.

Don't do it. The future for the rich who pursue riches without Christ is catastrophic. Repent now while there's the chance.

Well I want to talk about living in wisdom now. So let's just pull it together. How do we go about living wisely as God's people in this world?

[31 : 07] Well verse 7 tells us be patient therefore until the coming of the Lord. Be patient.

The judge is coming who will sort things out. And while we wait for the Lord Jesus to return we need to have a long term reality check not a short term course correction.

That's what we need a long term reality check not just short term course corrections because you could be course correcting all the way the wrong direction.

So what is my life? What is your life? we need to understand it rightly it was just a mist just a vapour here today gone tomorrow short and soon we've forgotten.

So we need to orient our lives according to God's word God. And remember the Lord Yahweh capital L capital O capital R capital D is Lord Master Boss.

[32 : 19] We recognise that the Lord God of hosts is the one who is in charge and our plans are ultimately provisional upon his will. I think we can look back on COVID with some thanks can't we?

Really? We can look back on COVID with some thanks. A time when we're really given a reality check of how most of the world lives knowing that in no uncertain terms that we have no control over the future tomorrow let alone next year with the years to come.

So we'll make our plans under the Lord under God living knowing that he is and only he is the Lord and that only things will happen if he wills it. Which then brings us to the work of the Lord.

knowing the reality that life is short and we are most likely going to be forgotten in this world. What plans will we make?

What will we give ourselves to? And how will we go about making those plans? And what will we do with our riches? What things can we give ourselves that will count for the kingdom for all eternity?

[33 : 29] Which will be joyful and great forever? What can we give ourselves to? May it never be that we aspire to be the godless rich who live their lives in luxury and self-indulgence.

Please don't speak to me loudly and clearly. Bash me around the head if that's what I end up doing. Life is short. It won't be long before we have forgotten this world.

So let's make sure we don't leave God out of it. Let's give ourselves to the work of the Lord. Now, I must say, I must say that knowing the calamity coming for those who do not honour Jesus Lord, who do not know the reality of the judgment that lies ahead, the very least, the very, very least we can do is make plans to see some people coming to a saving faith in the Lord Jesus.

That's the very least we can be doing and praying for. That is the work of the Lord. That is the work that will last beyond the grave, beyond the fire, beyond the judgment.

As we labour at becoming disciples of Jesus, we'll labour at making an ever-increasing number of disciples of Jesus. And let me tell you a couple of plans for next year, just by way of conclusion that we're hoping to come off.

[34 : 57] Just one plan is we're hoping for growth groups to sort of morph a bit next year and my prayer is that we'll transition our growth groups to be mixed growth groups with as many as possible meeting on Wednesday night here at Ironside.

Mixed as male and female, there's an idea to move to change, but mixed as being young and old as well, there you go, joining in with members of Uni Church in here, so we've got a room full of people with young and old, men and women, meeting together.

That's what I dream us having. It's a big change I know, right, but it'll be one that breathes life into our church, I'm sure. It's an opportunity to change and I understand that it might not work for everyone, but if it's at all possible for you, could you give it a go for the first six months? We'll try and work out negotiating how to make it work better, but can I encourage you to give it a go for at least for the first six months? I think it'll be worth it.

I think it'll be worth it. And second, here we go, second, I want to put a big stake in the ground next year in our Knowing God course, right?

[36 : 09] We're praying that God would save many, many, lots and lots of family, friends and colleagues and people here in St. Lucia. That's what we be giving ourselves to praying for.

And our Knowing God course on Friday nights is a key part of that, which will start after Easter next year, right? And to help us get us going for that day, help us get us going to that course, right?

We're building a night called Hope Beyond Cure. You'll hear more about it in the weeks ahead. It's going to be on a Friday night, 27th of March, when it's going to be on, right? And it's a night to invite people to come along who've had a brush with cancer.

I think you need to put in a diarist today for that night, right? For people who have had a brush with cancer. And so come face to face with the fragility of life, right?

Dave MacDonald, we are speaker on that night. Now Dave used to be the national director of FIEC. He got diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer about 14 years ago. He's supposed to have been dead six months later, but somehow or other, God was kind to him.

[37 : 15] He's outlived everybody else who got the same diagnosis as him and he's still going now. In the early days when he got the diagnosis, he wrote a book called Hope Beyond Cure.

I give the books out like chocolate biscuits, right? I do. And every one of us knows someone who's had a brush with cancer or has a brush with cancer themselves, right? I would love to see this room filled with your friends and mine, people from the solution, people from the school, hearing about Hope Beyond Cure on the 27th of March and then from that there's Easter Day comes, on the Sunday comes, Easter Friday, Good Friday, Easter comes and then starting on the first week back in school term after Easter we'll have the Knowing God course.

Wouldn't it be lovely to have 50 or 60 people who don't know about Jesus looking for hope beyond this world come along and find out about Jesus? Would that be good?

Yeah? Yes? Yes! Alright, well let's give ourselves to pray and that would come off, eh? We've got the resources to do it, we just need to find a venue on Friday night big enough I think, that's what we need to do.

So let's give ourselves to that, so let's give ourselves to living wisely, recognising that life is short and have God shape and determine our plans. Let's pray.

[38 : 37] our Father in Heaven, please help us to recognise and hear your word and so live to please you, to have a minority voice in this world, to recognise who we truly are in your sight and to give you the glory, we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.