

Session 6

October 9, 2022

FAITH ON DISPLAY IN YOUR PRIORITIES

James 4:13-17; 5:7-11

If there is one universal rule of behavior, it is this: “When all is said and done, people do what they *want* to do.”

Life is filled with choices, and we make dozens every day. Some are minor and have little effect. Others are major and have life-changing consequences. We’d like to think that we are always driven by godly discernment, prayerful consideration, sound judgment, and selfless commitment to the will of God. But if we are honest, we’d have to admit...we most often do what we *want* to do.

This week’s lesson looks at setting godly priorities; not so much in regard to *what* believers should do, but *how they should do it*. There are three things to keep in mind.

Keep in mind the will of God (4:13-17). Here, James points out first, their *arrogance*. “Come now, you who say...” is both pointed and painful. The interjection not only grabs the attention, but assumes such people exist in the church. As such, it is not a statement of possibility, but rather fact. The arrogance (see v. 16) is based on the presumption that there is a profit to be made and that their cunning business skills will guarantee success (v. 13). Along with their arrogance, James pointed out their *ignorance*. Life is not only short (v. 14), but the future is unknown. If one cannot even predict the events of tomorrow, how can they set out the course of their lives? (v. 14). Verse 15 suggests the humble, faithful way: rather, “you should say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’” This attitude not only prioritizes the will of God but humbles the believer as he submits to it. For reflection: *Verse 17 is often quoted as the prooftext for the “sins of omission.” Is this a valid generalization to make? How might verse 17 fit into the closer context of the argument James is making?*

Keep in mind the return of Christ (5:7-9). Buddhism is based on the sad idea that all life is suffering. Born again believers know better, but we sometimes act like Buddhists anyway! Here, James returns to the theme he introduced at the beginning of the book: encouragement in times of suffering (see James 1: 2-4). Fortunately, God’s solution to all this is not to *stop feeling* (as it is in Buddhism), but rather to *start looking*, “because the Lord’s coming is near” (v. 8). It’s been said that one in every 25 verses in the New Testament refers to Christ’s return. Three of those instances are right here! Three times James says *be patient*; and three times he says *the Lord’s return is near*. This is not simply a promise made to make believers feel better about their suffering. Rather, it’s an encouragement to stay the course, because soon, it will be worth it all (see Rom. 8:18). For reflection: *How does keeping the Lord’s return in the forefront of our minds help us keep our priorities straight? How much do you think the promise of His return really affects the average church member?*

Keep in mind the example of the saints (vv. 10-11). Hebrews 12:1 reminds us that we are surrounded by “a great cloud of witnesses.” This doesn’t mean that their souls hover around us literally. Rather, it means that our knowledge is filled with the impressive stories of the faithful men and women of old, who, even when persecuted and killed remained fully committed to God.

According to Hebrews 11:13, they all “died in faith without having received the promises, but they saw them from a distance, greeted them, and confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth.” In other words, they survived their temporary earthly sojourn (even without seeing their prophecies fulfilled) by looking forward to a better place: heaven (Heb. 11:16). For reflection: *Think about those dear saints who have been so influential in your own church and your own life. How does their example help you set the right priorities?*