

## **“What About Our Future?”**

Series: It's Somewhere: Looking for Answers

Revelation 3:14-20

April 30, 2017

Well, folks, it's been a wonderful day together. It's nice to have folks from both services together. Now, we usually have a potluck after we have a joint service, but we're not today, and it's my fault. I didn't even think about it. It was just been so busy before Easter, and it's been the same since Easter. So, I'm sorry about that. But let me suggest something. Instead of staying together here after worship, you might go with your Sunday School class or others here in worship today and eat out together. Have a good time; be a witness for Christ. And when it comes time to tip, write on the receipt, "God loves you. Have a blessed day. Germantown UM Church" And of course, leave a tip. I once heard a waitress say that the worse crowds were the people coming from church. Don't let that be you today. Share Jesus' love with people outside the church today.

Last week, we began our series, "It's Somewhere: Looking for Answers." As we move through life, from place to place, we all have experiences that are wonderful and memorable. We place those memories in boxes in the mind, like keepsakes, where we can pull them out whenever we want to smile, laugh, reflect, and feel better.

Unfortunately, we all know that as we travel through this life, we experience difficult or life altering times. Sometimes they are sudden; other times, they come upon us gradually. Sometimes they are completely devastating; others times, while difficult at the moment, life goes on.

And often, we ask ourselves, "Why?" And we start looking through the boxes of life where we have stored ideas, experiences, that we hope will help us through.

In this series, we will explore the Bible to find the answers to some of the most difficult issues of life. Last week, we dealt with "Why Do Bad Things Happen?" Today, we are going to deal with the difficult question "What About Our Future?"

Depending upon your stage of life, there are times when you don't worry about the future. You're a child or teen and someone else is making those decisions. But other times – graduation from high school or college, seeing that you need to make a change, going through a divorce or the loss of a spouse – the future becomes a pretty big question mark in your life, and it sure would help to have some answers.

Maybe it's because you're losing your job. I saw this a few months ago on Facebook and thought it was hilarious. It's about a guy that works at Walmart whose future employment just might change.

1. Shane, stop implying Walmart keeps the "Good Stuff" in the back. Management.
2. Shane, quit offering extended warranties on the fried chicken. Management.
3. Shane, when a customer asks where to find a product, give them an aisle number, not directions to Albertsons. Management.
4. Shane, stop asking, "Is that your final answer?" and offering to let them phone a friend after each order. Management.
5. Shane, quit putting price tags on Deli equipment and try to sell them to customers. Management.

6. Shane, stop putting on multiple nametags and pretending to have a personality disorder. Management.
7. Shane, the Deli is not an appropriate setting to practice your ventriloquism, please stop making puppets out of paper bags. Management.
8. Shane, stop putting out samples labeled as “Mystery Meats.” Management.
9. Shane, stop putting “Some assembly required” stickers on the 8-piece chickens.
10. Shane, any free samples you offer must come from the Deli department, not electronics. Management.

I’m not sure Shane is going to be keeping his job. He’s going to be wondering about his future. So if Shane is looking for help with his future... or anyone else in the room today, which box would he find some answers. Or maybe it’s in a bag.

Ok, today we’re going to look at James 4:13-17 and see what James tells us about the future. Turn to page 6 in your bulletin and follow along.

*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. Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.<sup>1</sup>*

As Americans, we are all concerned about the future. We ask, “What will gas prices be next week?” “What is going on with Iran and North Korea?” “Will I have enough money for my retirement?” And the list goes on and on. We ask question after question about the future. James talks about the how to handle the future. He tells us that there are three common mistakes people make when it comes to facing the future.

He starts in verse 13 by 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.”<sup>2</sup>*

Verse 13 starts out as a normal conversation – it’s something you may hear in a business office every day. Two fellows are talking and they say, “Let’s make plans about our economic security – about our future. Today or tomorrow – let’s go to say – Germantown. There we’ll start a new business – we’ll spend a year or two there – getting the business established before we move on the next city. We’ll make money. We’ll make a profit. We’ll build a company. We’ll build an empire.”

This sounds like good planning, doesn’t it? Sure it does! But here we find the first mistake:

### **Mistake One: Planning Without GOD**

Did you notice that in the verse we read that there was no mention of God? The business men knew what they wanted. They wanted to make a profit – they wanted to make money. They knew how to get there – they had a plan. They knew what they needed to do. But they left God out of the planning. They had an attitude of self-sufficiency.

Now, the Bible encourages good planning. In fact, Jesus said:

*If you want to build a tower, you first sit down and decide how much it will cost, to see if you have enough money to finish the job. If you don’t, you might lay the*

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<sup>1</sup> James 4:13-17 (NIV)

<sup>2</sup> James 4:13 (NIV)

foundation, but you would not be able to finish. Then all who would see it would make fun of you, saying, 'This person began to build but was not able to finish.'"<sup>3</sup>

Jesus is telling us that planning is a good thing. In fact if you don't plan well – you will be considered foolish. I used to have an executive of Lenscrafters tell me, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." The book Proverbs agrees and says:

*Careful planning puts you ahead in the long run; hurry and scurry puts you further behind.*<sup>4</sup>

But the Bible also tells us that God needs to be in the center of our plans. Proverbs 16 says:

*Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established... The human mind plans the way, but the LORD directs the steps.*<sup>5</sup>

James brings us to the same conclusion when he says in verse 15:

*Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."*<sup>6</sup>

God needs to be the center of our planning. Go ahead and circle the word "if" in verse 15. Murphy's Law says: "If things can go wrong – they will." Life is just one big if. Life is pretty if-fy. If you spell life out: "L – I – F – E" – what letters do you have right in the middle of the word? "I – F" – and that spells "if". I don't know what will happen tomorrow – neither do you. We are not the ones who know what the future holds. God is the One who knows what is around each bend. We must rely upon Him.

There are three ways I can respond to God's will in my life:

- A. I can show **indifference** to it,
- B. I can make **reference** to it – only talking about it now and then – or,
- C. I can give **preference** to it.

More than anything else, I want to give God my preference. I want to do what God wants me to do with my life. I hope you do too. Proverbs 16:1 in the Message Bible says:

*Mortals make elaborate plans, but GOD has the last word.*<sup>7</sup>

Planning without God is the first mistake. The second mistake is:

### **Taking Tomorrow For Granted**

Look at what James tells us in verse 14:

*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.*<sup>8</sup>

When we are young, we don't seem to be very concerned about old age or retirement. We say, "I've got the rest of my life to worry about that." We go around with the attitude that tomorrow will take care of itself and that we have all the time in the world. There are two false assumptions with this type of thinking. The first false assumption is:

### **Life is always predictable.**

Go ahead and in verse 14 circle the phrase, "You do not even know what will happen tomorrow." None of us knows what is going to happen tomorrow, let alone what

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 14:28-30 (NCV)

<sup>4</sup> Proverbs 21:5 (MSG)

<sup>5</sup> Proverbs 16:3,9 (NRSV)

<sup>6</sup> James 4:15 (NIV)

<sup>7</sup> Proverbs 16:1 (MSG)

<sup>8</sup> James 4:14 (NIV)

could take place a year from now. All we can do is guess and speculate about the future. Life is unpredictable. How many of us predicted the events of 9-11? A few years ago, who would have thought that gas prices would ever reach almost \$4 a gallon or that our kids would carry a cellphone in their pockets? No, we don't know that much about the future. That brings us to the second false assumption:

Life on earth will last **forever**.

Circle the word "mist" in verse 14.

Let me tell you: life is brief. The older I get, the shorter it seems. The Greek word for "mist" is "atmos". It is from this word that we get the word "atmosphere". It can also mean fog or vapor. Your life is like a fog; it rolls in in the morning and by noon it is gone. How long are you going to live? How many days will you live on this earth? No one knows. I have conducted funerals for a person who was 103 and for newborns. Whatever the age, life seems short. Proverbs 27:1 tells us:

*Never boast about tomorrow. You don't know what will happen between now and then.*<sup>9</sup>

You see, life is short.

The third mistake that people make is:

**Delaying doing good.**

Look at what James tells us in verse 17:

*Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*<sup>10</sup>

James is talking about procrastination. It's putting off till tomorrow what you should be doing today. I heard a little poem that goes like this:

Procrastination is my sin,  
It always causes me sorrow.  
I know I ought to change my way,  
In fact I think I will – tomorrow!

Have you ever heard, "Don't put off till tomorrow what you can do today." The procrastinator's motto is: "Why do today what you can put off till tomorrow."

We love to put things off. James tells us that this is a trap. To know the right thing to do is good. But unless you do it, it is useless. In fact, James says it's a sin if you don't do it.

Let me ask you: if you were asked to tell me some sins, what would you say? Murder, adultery, cheating, lying, stealing. All of those are sins of commission. People are actively involved in those acts. In fact, many times they have to go out of the way to commit those sins. The sin of omission is different. With the sin of omission, it's what you don't do that is the sin. That's what James is talking about in verse 17. Let's read it again:

*Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*<sup>11</sup>

This is the sin of omission. Procrastination is a subtle trap. We think we will get around to doing something, and we never do. We say, "Tomorrow I'll..." or "One of these days..." or "Someday I'll..." and it never gets done. The solution to this is: Do it NOW!

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<sup>9</sup> Proverbs 27:1 (GN)

<sup>10</sup> James 4:17 (NIV)

<sup>11</sup> James 4:17 (NIV)

Don't put off till tomorrow the good that you could be doing today. Proverbs 3 says:

*Never walk away from someone who deserves help; your hand is God's hand for that person. Don't tell your neighbor, "Maybe some other time," or, "Try me tomorrow," when the money's right there in your pocket.<sup>12</sup>*

Do you remember the story that Jesus told about the three fellows and the talents? The master had given 1 talent to one man, to another he gave 2 and to another he had given 5. After a while, the master returned to see how things had been going. Two of the men, the one with 5 and 2 talents, both of them had doubled their coins. The one who received 1 talent had taken it and buried it in the ground. The master spoke with favor of the two men who doubled their money. But do you remember what he said to the man who buried the talent. He said, "At least you could have put the money in a bank account and gained interest. You wicked servant! You sat around and did nothing. You should have at least done something with the talent I gave you." There are times when doing nothing is not the right thing to do. There are times when doing nothing is a sin.

Jim Elliot said: "He is no fool who gives up that which he cannot keep for that which he cannot lose." It is always the right time to invest in God's kingdom.

Did you know that right now, God is ready to invest in you? Listen to what Jesus has to say to you today:

*Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.<sup>13</sup>*

For some of you, today is your day to make a change in your life. Not tomorrow, not next week, but today. God is concerned about your future. He is concerned about where you will spend eternity. Do you know what the future holds for you? Do you know if you are right with God? Do you know where you are going after you leave this world? Do you know where you are going to spend eternity? God offers you a great Eternity Plan. Trust in Him – believe in Him – put your faith in Him. Don't put off till tomorrow what needs to be done today. Invite Jesus into your heart. Invite Jesus into your life – today.

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<sup>12</sup> Proverbs 3:27-28 (MSG)

<sup>13</sup> Revelation 3:20 (NLT)