

James 4:13-5:6 A loving Rebuke

The phrase "come now" is an ancient semitic form of a serious rebuke. James as pastor is lovingly seeking to wake his community up to the worldly patterns that are utterly destructive to them and their world.

Read James 4:13-18

1. James here is addressing our planning for the future. I have this place in mind, this timeline I am working within, this goal I am aiming toward. From the passage what reasons does James give for calling this kind of planning boastful and arrogant?
 - i. *We don't even know what tomorrow will bring – so what makes us think that we can hold all the future possibilities of our life in hand such that we can be assured of a particular outcome.*
 - ii. *Our life is mist that appears for a time and then vanishes. When we plan believing we are in control it does not take into account that we are mortal, that we are fragile – instead we plan believing we have all knowledge, all wisdom, that we are omniscient, that we are God.*
2. What are the dangers to us and to our world that are inherent in planning believing we are in control?

In the sermon Tim mentioned three different impacts.

- i. *We are despairing and bitter because at some point in our lives we said I am going to do this thing by this time in my life. And our timeline is up and we didn't get that thing. Other people around us have it but we don't. Our planning believing we are in control has left us bitter and despairing.*
- ii. *We are anxious and worrying about our lives because we said I am going to do this thing by this time of my life and we are trying to control all of the little details of life to get us there because our sense of worth of value of joy is wrapped up in that outcome. We are worrying we are anxious because we are planning believing we are in control.*
- iii. *We are unforgiving and can't take the disappointments of life in stride because at some point in our lives we said I am going to do this thing by this time of my life and we believe that person, that situation derailed us. We are unforgiving and are having difficulty moving beyond that suffering because we planned believing we are in control.*

There could be other dangers but these will I think provide some good places to begin your discussion.

3. How does James invite us to plan for the future and how might this be accomplished?

If the Lord wills. This will spark a conversation on how we discern God's will. Very often we as followers of Jesus want to know God's specific will. Who should I marry? What should I do for my career? Where should we live? Etc.

We want specific guidance but such queries of God are better answered when we consider those questions in light of God's character, in light of God's word, in light of God's purposes for us in Jesus, in light of God's future.

Read James 5:1-5

James is seeking to wake his community up to the destructive pattern that is present in a love of money. The bible is not against wealth but the love of it is destructive and James here summarizes the teaching of the bible.

4. If we place our sense of value, worth, joy, self in things that fade, corrode, rot what will be the impact on us?

There are no right or wrong answers here just a question to spark some honest self reflection on the reality that if we locate our joy, worth, value in things that change there is always the reality that their change will impact our sense of self, worth value joy. The question sets up a yearning to locate our joy in what doesn't change – that is God's love for us in Jesus.

5. The love of money will turn our hearts away from the cries of the poor. What are the economic injustices of our day that we in the west benefit from and how do we in our consumption patterns contribute to them?

You may want to remind the group of the specific economic injustice that James is speaking into. The merchants were beginning to buy up small farms from people who were negatively impacted by famine and creating large estates. They were then hiring the farmers whose land they had bought up as day laborers who lived hand to mouth and not paying their wages.

In the sermon Tim gave some examples of the economic injustices of our world.

- We buy up food items from countries halfway across the world grown on a nation's most fertile ground while the people go malnourished.*
- We must have that new electronic device often made with conflict minerals mined by children in horrific conditions. Profits go to armed groups that destabilize whole regions.*
- Our insatiable appetite for meat that contributes to deforestation fueling climate change and severe weather events that impact the poor the hardest.*

Other economic injustices abound and this question invites us to become aware of them in our consumption patterns.

6. The love of money will either lead us to keep more for ourselves than we need of to live a life of luxury or self indulgence. The bible commends saving but condemns hoarding, it celebrates enjoying the bounty of the earth but crushes self indulgence so where is balance to be found? In the sermon Tim reference the preacher who posed the question – is my standard of living going up as fast as my income? – for the follower of Jesus the answer should always be no. The more we have the greater the distance should be between how I could live and how I do live. The invitation is to live beneath my means so that I can give. Discuss together how balance can be achieved.

This question is simply meant to spark discussion. Keep it tangible as the Lord by his Spirit is desiring not a change to our thinking as much as a change in our being, our doing.

Read James 5:6

7. James wants our last thoughts to be of Jesus (the one who willingly let himself be condemned and murdered for our sake). How can our relationship with our money be transformed when we see that Jesus laid down everything for us on the cross?

Encountering the one who lays down everything for us shapes and transforms the heart to lay down all for him. Although James uses the reality of judgement, opening our eyes to the cries of the poor, the one unique motivation of the follower of Jesus is the transforming work of God in Jesus.