

Place: Lurgan Baptist 28:11:2004

Reading: James 4:13-17

## **PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY**

### **28. LIFE WITH GOD LEFT OUT**

His name was Brandon Lee. He was the son of the famous martial arts expert and movie star Bruce Lee. Growing up with that background, Brandon said that all he ever wanted to be was become a martial arts expert and be a successful movie star. His career did not go very far early on. But then he had the opportunity to star in a major film called “ *The Crow*.” During the making of that film Brandon displayed a fairly decent acting ability and began receiving other offers to make films. His career was as if it was heading on the fast track upwards. During one interview he discussed he was planning on making other films, after he was finished with “ *The Crow*.” He disclosed how excited he was about the prospects for his career. He even talked about how he admired the invincible nature of the character he portrayed. The next day on the set, a fellow actor was mistakenly handed a prop gun with a metal fragment in the barrel.

During the scene when the gun was fired at Brandon Lee he was shot and killed. He never got to make the films he had planned. He never got to see his career take off, like he was looking forward to. He not even get to finish the film he was working on. He unlike his character was not invincible and it is unlikely that he had made any plans that mattered, that is plans for his soul. My .... in Hollywood and in real life, this story is played out time after time, yet so many of us continue to believe we are in control and have the right to plan out the future without any consideration of who is really in charge.

***Life with God left out.*** Does that not describe most of the people living in our country today ? Does that describe you ? These people to whom James was writing were Christian Jews living outside the land of Palestine.

( 1:1-2 ) Many of them were probably engaged in the lucrative traffic in ivory and ebony, purple dyes, wines cedar- wood, gold, pearls emeralds, silk and embroidery. James will speak to them very strongly in ( Ch 5 ) but first he has something to say to the business men there and here. Can you see the picture that he is painting ? Its that of a strategy meeting with a group of business men putting their heads together. They throw a map on the table and say, “ *Here is a new city, where there are great business opportunities, we’ll go in there, we’ll trade for a year or so and*

*we'll make money and come back rich."*

There is nothing wrong with making plans for the future, the problem comes when you leave God out of the reckoning. Here were people who had got so caught in their business that they had no time for God. For as we look at this passage the first thing we need to note is:

### **(1) AN ARROGANCE WE NEED TO ERADICATE**

The Amplified Bible puts ( 4:13 ) like this “ *Come now you who say .... and get gain.* ” Now the Jewish liking for business is known the world over, and James has business men in mind here but not all business men. He is not condemning industry and commerce out of hand. The Bible never condemns out of hand honest initiative, hard work or the accumulation of wealth. James has only certain business men in mind and he isolates them with the phrase “ *ye that say.* ” These words were outward signs of their whole attitude to life and their attitude was one of total arrogance. They strutted around as if they owned the place. The idea of failure, the thought that their plans might come unstuck, never entered into their heads. They had everything figured out well, almost everything. They talked about **When:** “ *today or tomorrow,* ” **Where:** “ *a city,* ” **How:** “ *continue there a year,* ” **What:** “ *to do business,* ” **Why:** “ *to make money.* ” You see, in their arrogance they spoke about:

#### **(a) THE WHEN, THE DURATION:**

“ *Today or to morrow,* ” In arrogance people can make the foolish presumption that time will not run out. Men and women at staff meetings discuss timetables. They plan to “ *clean up,* ” in a year, forgetting that God’s timing may be different. Here were business folk who must have experienced failure, frustration, and disappointment at times, yet they went on planning their future without thought that their plans might not materialise. Business people do well to look into the future. The problem is that they don’t look far enough into the future. So many make presumptions about the duration of life on earth, but God says, “ *Boast not thyself of tomorrow for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.* ” ( Prov 27:1 ) Notice they also spoke about:

#### **(b) THE WHERE, THE LOCATION:**

“ *We will go into such a city,* ” ( 4:13 ) Can you see them with their maps stretched out on the conference table in the board room ? Can you hear them as they talk

about density of population, trade routes and other relevant factors before choosing a city for their next business venture. I was reading the other morning about Jonah. Do you recall he made some foolish presumptions regarding the where, the location. ( Jonah 1:3 ) God's will for Jonah was Nineveh. But he thought it best to go in the opposite direction to Tarshish. My .... he thought that he had it all figured out. But Jonah's foolish presumption caused him to fall. He went down to Joppa. He went down into the ship. He went down into the sea. He went down into the fish's belly. Do you know something ? If you live your life on the basis of foolish presumptions you'll ultimately be dragged down. Have you taken the first step on the pathway of disobedience to God ? *Have you discovered that the road is spiralling downward ?* My .... no-one goes up when he lives in rebellion against God. We don't fall up we fall down. Jonah's fall was costly and sometimes the most expensive thing a person ever does is run from the will of God. Here were folk who were talking about (a) (b)

**(c) THE WHAT, THE VOCATION:**

In effect they were saying, "*we will have the money to buy, the goods to sell, and the customers to charge.*" Now are you beginning to see these business people ? They were saying, "*Everything is going to be fine, just leave it all to us.*" You see, not only did they leave God out but they brought self in. "*We will go, we will continue, we will buy and sell.*" Do you know something ? When we push the Lord to the circumference of our lives, we bring self to the centre of our lives. To put it another way, when God is dethroned, self is enthroned. Do you recall John the Baptists desire ? "*He must increase, but I must decrease.*" ( Jn 3:30 ) Is that your desire ? Do you pray daily ? "*May this poor self .....*" They spoke about *the When, the Duration, the Where, the Location, the What, the Vocation* and then they spoke about:

**(d) THE WHY, THE MOTIVATION:**

"*And get gain, or and make money.*" ( 4:13 ) Tell me, what motivates you ? Now there's nothing wrong with being motivated to make a profit. Christ spoke about the parable of the talents. ( Matt 25:14 ) But the motive of Christian business men should be to glorify the Lord in the process of making a profit. The heart of our motivation ought to be how can we use our income to further God's kingdom. Now the word "*gain,*" is interesting. It includes a passion for making money. It was not just a question of making prudent business arrangements, the Bible never condemns that.

( Col 3:23 Rom 12:11 ) *This was simply a passion for making money.* Here were

folk always at the stretch for every penny of profit that could be made. Not only was God left out but self was brought in until it filled the whole picture. My .... is James not so true to life ? *Life with God left out*. Is that you unsaved .... ? Are you living a life with the Lord left out ? James sums it up in ( 4:16 ) “ *But as it is, you boast falsely in your presumption and self-conceit. All such boasting is wrong.* ”

Now these business folk may have moral, hardworking, honest, but they were self-conceited, self-centred, and self-concerned. They left God out of the reckoning. Christian .... is that you ? There is a classic warning of this in the Old Testament, a word spoken by the Lord through Moses to the people of Israel. God reminds them of His manifold blessing upon them and then He says, “ *Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God .... and thou say in thine heart, my power and the mine of my hand hath gotten me this wealth.* ” ( Deut 8:11-17 ) My .... are things going well for you materially, financially, domestically ? Well, you watch out lest you forget the Lord. (1)

## (2) AN ANALYSIS WE NEED TO REITERATE

You see, over against their arrogance, James brings a Biblical analysis of life. They said, “ *we will,* ” God said, “ *ye know not.* ” They planned for a year. God said they were not even certain of to-morrow. They thought they were independent, God said they were ignorant. “ *Ye know not.* ” My .... for so many of us, even believers, proper views of life and death are forgotten perspectives.

We live as though this life were all there is. We seek to camouflage the ageing process and pretend its not happening. We act as if we have ninety nine year leases on our body with options to renew. James’s words startle us. “ *Come now, you who are making these grandiose plans with no reference to God. What is your life ? Have you ever stopped to think that you might be cut off in the middle of all your plans ? It is not only evil, it is downright foolish to make these plans with no reference to God whatsoever.* ” Do you see here James’s analysis of life ? He talks about:

### (a) *THE UNCERTAINTY OF LIFE:*

“ *Ye know not what shall be on the morrow ?* ” ( 4:14 )

“ *Boast not thyself of tomorrow ....,* ” ( Prov 27:1 ) Too many of us are counting on tomorrow. Many are saying,

“ *Tomorrow, we shall be saved, tomorrow we shall serve the lord, tomorrow we shall reach the lost.* ” But tomorrow never comes. Tomorrow, Raphael would finish

his picture, but the picture half-finished was carried in his funeral procession. Tomorrow Franz Schubert would finish his symphony. But Schubert's tomorrow never came, and he left undone his unfinished symphony. "*Tomorrow we shall,*" wrote Walter Scott in his diary. But this last sentence of one of Scotland's greatest writers was never completed. And lovers of literature still wonder what Scott intended to do on the morrow. My .... do you realise that tomorrow is the most uncertain, undependable, unpredictable friend we have ? The rich farmer counted on many tomorrows but God said, "*Thou fool this night thy soul shall be required of thee.*" ( Lk 12:50 ) My unsaved .... are you counting on tomorrow to get right with God ? Then, think about the uncertainty of life and James also talks about:

### **(b) THE BREVITY OF LIFE:**

" *For what is your life ? It is even a vapour .... away.* "

The Greek word for "*vapour,*" or "*mist,*" appears only two times in the New Testament. It is translated

" *smoke,*" in ( Acts 2:19 ) Vapour is here one moment and gone the next. Its like the steam coming out of the kettle. Job says, "*My days are swifter than a weavers shuttle,*" "*Our days upon earth are a shadow.*"

( Job 7:6 8:9 ) My .... we count our years at each birthday but God tells us to number our days.

( Ps 90:12 ) After all, we live a day at a time and those days rush by quickly the older we grow. Corrie Ten Boom said, "***It is not the duration of life that is important but the donation of life.***" How are you spending your life ? Are you wasting it or investing it ?

Are you so busy trying to make a living that you've forgotten to make a life ? Are you that life of yours for God, heaven, holiness, souls ? Are you "*seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness ?*"

( Matt 6:33 ) There is (1) ***An Arrogance we need to Eradicate:*** (2) ***An Analysis we need to Reiterate,*** and there is:

### **(3) AN ATTITUDE WE NEED TO CULTIVATE**

The story is told of a man who was riding his motorbike along a country road. He stooped to talk to a preacher in a churchyard. The man indicated that he was going to sell his motorbike. The preacher said to him, "*You ought to say, I'm riding into town to sell my motorbike if the Lord will.*" Well, the man thought the old preacher was crazy and went down the road laughing. Late that day the preacher was sitting on his front porch before the sun went down. He looked down the road and saw a

man staggering one side of the road to the other. It was his motorbike friend. The knees of his trousers were torn. His arm was in a makeshift sling. His shirt was torn off his back. His elbows and arms were covered with blood and little pieces of gravel. “ *What*

*happened, ?*” said the preacher. “ *Well,*” said the man

*“ after I left you, on my way to town a storm came up and as I was going around a corner I hit some loose gravel and the motorbike left me. The motorbike was ruined, but I managed to stagger to a nearby farmhouse. As I walked up to the door, a fearful woman pointed a shotgun in my direction. I started running and she started shooting. I ran through the bushes and got cut. Finally, I found a tree to shield me from the rain, but as I stood there picking the gunshot from my back, lightning struck the tree and knocked me out. I came to and in a daze simply started walking down this road.”* The preacher asked, “ *Where are you going now ?*” The man replied, “ *I’m going home.*” And then he added, “ *if it be the Lord’s will.*”

Is this not the attitude we ought to cultivate ? Is this not we ought to write across our proposed engagements ?

Deo Volente which is Latin for “ God willing.” You see the attitude we need to cultivate must take into account:

### **(a) GOD’S WILL:**

Look if you will at ( 4:15 ) James was not condemning their business but their boasting, not their industry, but their interdependence, not their acumen but their arrogance. Do you know how Paul discussed his plans ?

“ *I will return again unto you,*” he tells the believers at Ephesus “ *if God will.*” ( Acts 18:21 ) To the Christians at Corinth he writes, “ *I will come to you shortly if the Lord will.*” ( 1 Cor 4:19 ) And again, “ *I trust to tarry a while with you if the Lord permit.*”

( 1 Cor 16:7 Rom 1:10 ) This dynamic man recognised that all of his plans, hopes and aspirations were to be stamped “ *D.V.*” “ *if the Lord will.*” My .... do you bring the Lord into your plans ? Your business plans ?

Your educational plans ? Your domestic plans ? Your relationship plans ? How much prayer has gone into opening that new business, buying that new house, starting that new job, choosing that new university, forming that new relationship ? Do you totally ignore His will as you make your daily plans and decisions ?

We need to cultivate an attitude that takes into account God’s will and that takes into account:

**(b) GOD'S WAY:**

*“ Therefore to him .... to him it is sin.”* What does that mean ? If you know that a thing is right, but you do not do it, then for you that is sin, the sin of omitting to do right. But I think there is more here. Do you see that word, *“ Therefore.”* Someone said, *“ whenever you see the word therefore in the Bible, ask yourself what it is there for.”* I think this word establishes a connection with what has gone before. We could read it like this,

*“ Therefore he, the business man knowing to do good and doeth it not to him it is sin.”* In other words, here were business men, professing Christians who were getting so caught up in their work, that they were leaving God right out on the circumference of their lives. They knew that they ought to bring God into the centre of their planning but it seems they didn't. Perhaps the words,

*“ knowing to do good,”* have a horizontal sense. Do you recall what was said of Christ ? *“ He went about doing good.”* ( Acts 10:38 ) Now contrast that with these business men. What was their priority ? To *“ buy and sell and get gain.”* You see, as God blessed them in their business ventures, they knew from the example of Christ, and from the teaching of Scripture that the right thing for them to do was to help those in need, to share with others, to be generous. But they refused to do so.

They hoarded up their wealth for themselves. That was their sin and why they were condemned. The Bible exhorts us, *“ As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”* ( Gal 6:10 Heb 13:16 ) My .... for us to know that something is good and right to do, and fail to do it, is to us sin. Do you recall James's point about the brevity of life ? Does that not add an urgency to everything we have been saying ? If you are among those who think that there will always be adequate time to get right with God remember that you do not know when your heart is going to stop. *“ Today if ye will hear His voice harden not your hearts.”* ( Heb 3:15 ) My .... Christian .... will you be urgent in your response to God's revealed will for your life ? For *“ to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not to him it is sin.”*