

What if tomorrow never comes? (David Yeh, 13 Nov 2016)

James 4:13-17

On September 1–2, 1859, one of the largest recorded geomagnetic solar storms occurred. Powerful energy flared out from the sun. Auroras were seen around the world, including those in the northern hemisphere as far south as the Caribbean and those over the Rocky Mountains in the U.S. The auroras were so bright that their glow woke up gold miners, who began preparing breakfast because they thought it was morning. Telegraph systems all over Europe and North America failed, in some cases giving telegraph operators electric shocks.

Another geomagnetic solar storm (or coronal mass ejection, CME) that occurred on July 23 of 2012 was also unusually large and strong. It missed the Earth with a margin of approximately nine days.

Had the CME hit the Earth, it would have likely inflicted serious damage to electronic systems on a global scale. All electronics would have been destroyed, computers would have burned up. Anything that relied on computers would have stopped working. Cars, aircrafts, lighting, communications would all come to a stop. Bank accounts would become zero. There would be major national security problems.

A 2013 study estimated that the economic cost to the United States would have been between \$0.6 - 2.6 trillion USD. Ying D. Liu, professor at China's State Key Laboratory of Space Weather, estimated that the recovery time from such a disaster would have been about four to ten years.

We don't really know what tomorrow holds. We don't really know what will happen to our life. We want to think we can control our life, we want to plan for a better future but we don't really know what will happen the next minute of our life.

1. Don't live for this world v13, v16

When we read this passage in James, we might misinterpret it to mean we should not plan for the future. But we should make plans for the future because in the Bible there are many verses that give examples of how we should make plans, like Joseph who planned for the 7 years of famine. James is not saying planning is wrong because in v 15 he uses the word "instead". This word shows there is the better way, and the emphasis of verse 15 is "If it is the Lord's will."

a) Life not directed by God

So what is the problem of verse 13? Making plans without God. V16 says "All such boasting is evil." Our plan is nothing compared to God's plan.

Even what we think is a good plan, if it is not God's will, often we will face many difficulties, and many things will come to nothing and become worthless before God.

b) Self-centredness

When people make plans without God, they often become self-centred. Our plans become purposeless. When we live for this world we will be self-centred, because we feel we need to enjoy life while we can, otherwise we might not have another opportunity.

The problem of many people is that, the centre of their life is themselves – what I want to do, what will satisfy me, what pleases me, what will bring me pleasure without any regard for other people's needs or God's will.

I am not saying we are not to enjoy life. We should enjoy what God has given to us but, **people will say**, "This is my money. I can buy what I want to satisfy my lust, everything needs to be the best."

God is dealing with our lustful desires. Everything on earth is limited, all the resources are limited. Through these limitations, our unlimited lust is being dealt with so that we can learn that only God can fill that emptiness.

Some people will say, "This is my time, I can use it the way I want. I will just go to church on Sunday once a week, the rest of time is mine to use. Don't ask me to do anything else. This is my life - I can do what I want to do.

Remember you are only a steward of what God gives you (money, time, talents). We don't own these. We must not waste what God gives us.

The time you have is not yours. It is God who allows you to live on earth. It is God who gives you the time on earth. Life is not yours either because you are redeemed by God through the blood of the Lamb. "It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me"

This passage of book of James reminds me of the story Jesus told about the rich fool, making a bigger barn to hold more stuff, but God said, "You fool, this night I will require your life."

This rich man was boasting of his ability and living for the present life. He was not going to be able to enjoy everything he had planned for because his time on earth was not up to him but up to God. Pray that we will learn from the story and not live for ourselves but for God.

Augustine said "Love God, and do as you please," but it seems people in this verse are saying "Do as you please, and say that you love God!" When we love God, we will want to do what is right and we will have God's blessings. However, we cannot expect God to bless us when we make our own plans, do what we please and then ask God to bless our plans or ask Him to fix the mess we have made.

Illustration 1

At the age of 9, the architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, was walking in the snow with his uncle. As they reached the far end of the field, his uncle stopped him. He pointed to his own tracks in the snow, which were straight; and, then he showed Frank his steps, which were meandering all over the field.

His uncle said, "Notice how your tracks wander aimlessly from the fence to the cattle, and the woods again. My tracks, however, are constantly going toward my goal." Frank Lloyd Wright said that that day, he learned a lesson that he never forgot. He would never again wander through life with no purpose. Focus on Jesus and we will not walk on a wayward path.

Some Christians are afraid of giving their life to God, they fear that God will take their time, their plans and their pleasure away from them, but what God wants is to bless us. When we allow God to direct our life, we will see doors open for us, what we hoped for will come true. Pray that we will have God in our life, in every part of our life and we will see blessings from it.

2. Our life is too short v14

At the beginning of verse 14 we see the word "Why", it is explaining what James said in v 13 that we should not go and make our own plans to do this and that. The answer is that our life on earth is too short to put all the effort and time into. Our life is like a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

Have you seen mist? We can see it and yet it's not tangible. It's light, easily blown away, it comes and goes. Our life is like that, we are here now, gone the next minute, intangible as a dream. So is our life, here for 70~80 years, if God blesses us we might live to the 90s.

Illustration 2

A few years ago when I was 40 years old a thought suddenly dawned on me. I used to think I might only live up to 60 years old so I only have the chance to say "Happy New Year!" 20 more times and then I will go into eternity. I would not be able to take with me anything that I have accumulated nor would I be remembered for anything I have done.

Now I think I might live longer than 60 years. Maybe I can reach my 70th year. Even so, I would only have 23 more times to say "Happy New Year". Some of us may only have a few more "Happy New Years".

But do you realise we are closer to eternity than what we think? Eternity is not something that will happen in the distant future, when we turn 70, 80 or 90 years old. How about those who were on the Malaysian airline

flights that crashed? (You might say airplanes are dangerous) How about the 4 poor people who died at the Australia's Dream World Theme Park recently? They were there just to have a good time. (So you might say it is too dangerous to go outside, let's stay at home.) How about the Chinese lady in west Auckland who was killed in her house last year? She was our sister in Christ, mother of a deacon in our sister church where I used to serve. We don't know when we will leave this world.

We are only a line away from eternity. Eternity is parallel with our life. We could easily cross over to eternity at any time.

Those who die before the Lord's return will have to face God's judgement just like those who are living when He returns will have to face judgement. We never know when that day might be but like the Bible says in Hebrews 9:27, "...people are destined to die once and after that to face judgement..." The day will come when we will all be standing before Jesus.

Our question is no longer just asking, "Are you ready for when Jesus returns?" because people will look around and see that the world around us doesn't seem to indicate that. But our question now is "Are you ready if you meet your Maker today?"

All you have pursued, all the many unfinished plans and dreams – you can't take any of it with you. If tomorrow doesn't come, are you ready? If you are prepared then your answer will be different to those who are not prepared.

3. Live for eternity v15,v17

If tomorrow doesn't come, we are not concerned because we will enter into eternity. The questions are: "Are you ready for eternity? What have you accumulated for eternity?" Because God is just, there will be rewards in heaven.

In heaven not all will be equal but all will be fair. What you have done for God here will be remembered by God. This temporary life on earth will determine your life in eternity.

Matthew 6:1-4 ¹"Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. ...

³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." There will be reward in heaven.

When I say we are to serve God, I don't mean just serving in church. Remember what Jesus said to the disciples in Matthew 25:31-46? If someone went to see a person in prison, he has gone to see Jesus. If someone gave a cup of water to the thirsty, he has given it to Jesus...

If your life has been directed by God and lived according to his plan then that is what will last. It could be what you choose to study, your job, your marriage partner, how to live your life. When you live according to God's will, how you spend your time and money will be different to living according to your own plans.

You will realise there is meaning to life. You will know who you live for and for what purpose. **You live for God and for eternity!**

Because we are living for eternity, the questions like "*what we wear?*", can become "*Who can I help?*", "*what house should we have?*" can become "*Who can I host in my house?*" "*What car we drive?*" can become "*Who can I take to church?*"

What God wants us to have is eternal values, eternal rewards. Because you are made for eternity! What does God want us to do that will have eternal values? It is doing what God wants us to do that will last forever. Being

a Christian we can be reminded about this, it is such a blessing. God wants us to be rich in heaven. He wants us to swap what is temporary with what is eternal, what is poor and broken stuff for great glory.

V17 What is James talking about? What is the phrase “knows the good he ought to do” pointing to?

Knowing that we should not live for ourselves, accumulating for self; instead, we help someone with physical or financial needs, give money to a mission group, give our tithes, help to pay off our church building loan, serve in the church, etc. Take that challenge, because excuses will stop us from obtaining eternal blessings.

Col. 3:17 “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

Pray that we will put into practice what we have heard today, don’t live for this life, because our life on earth is so short but live for eternity. Do the things that God wants you to do. Use your time for God, use your money for God and there will be great rewards waiting for us in heaven.

E.g. of a missionary

After forty years of faithful service to the Lord as a missionary to Africa, Henry Morrison and his wife were returning to New York. As the ship neared the dock, Henry said to his wife, “Look at that crowd. They haven't forgotten about us”. However, unknown to Henry, the ship also carried President Teddy Roosevelt, returning from a big game hunting trip in Africa. Roosevelt stepped from the boat, with great fanfare, as people were cheering, flags were waving, bands were playing, and reporters waiting for his comment, Henry and his wife slowly walked away unnoticed. They hailed a cab, which took them to the one bedroom apartment which had been provided by the mission board.

Over the next few weeks, Henry tried, but failed to put the incident behind him. He was sinking deeper into depression when one evening, he said to his wife, “This is all wrong. This man comes back from a hunting trip and everybody throws a big party. We give our lives in faithful service to God for all these many years, but no one seems to care.”

His wife cautioned him that he should not feel this way. Henry replied “I know you're right, but I just can't help it. It just isn't right.”

His wife then said, “Henry, you know God doesn't mind if we honestly question Him. You need to tell this to the Lord and get this settled now. You'll be useless in His ministry until you do.”

Henry Morrison then went to his bedroom, got down on his knees and, began pouring out his heart to the Lord. “Lord, you know our situation and what's troubling me. We gladly served you faithfully for years without complaining. But now God, I just can't get this incident out of my mind...”

After about ten minutes of fervent prayer, Henry returned to the living room with a peaceful look on his face. His wife said “It looks like you've resolved the matter. What happened?”

Henry replied, “The Lord settled it for me. I told Him how bitter I was that the President received this tremendous homecoming, but no one even met us as we returned home. When I finished, it seemed as though the Lord put His hand on my shoulder and simply said, 'But Henry, you are not home yet!’”

We are not home yet, what we have given up for God is not forgotten but on that day God will reward us publicly with thousands of angels cheering for us. So DON’T LIVE FOR THIS WORLD, because OUR LIFE IS TOO SHORT, all the fame, all the material goods we have gained we will not be able to take them to eternity, but LIVE FOR ETERNITY, serve God, give to God and others, and be faithful, all these will be remembered in eternity.

Those who don’t have faith live for today, those who have faith live for eternity.