

Faith that Perseveres

Lesson for Sunday, December 31, 2023

INTRODUCTION:

- ⇒ Most would agree that we are living in times that are experiencing greater hostility toward Christianity. What qualities should every Christian strive to develop that will help them survive our current culture? *Allow for discussion...*
- ⇒ We are entering the final portion of James. Throughout the book, James has been emphasizing a practical faith. Remember the context: James was writing to Christians in the first wave of Christianity. They needed practical instruction in their new faith.
- ⇒ Many of the Christians in those early days were facing persecution. No doubt they were facing the temptation to abandon their newfound faith and return to their old ways.
- ⇒ In the final portion of this brief book, James provides a number of characteristics that are essential for a faith that perseveres. What was true over 2000 years ago is still true today.

BIBLE STUDY:

1. A Constant Awareness of God's Sovereignty (James 4:13)
 - a. The passage begins with a rebuke to those who confidently plan their future without taking into consideration God's sovereignty.
 - b. What is the sovereignty of God?
 - i. The sovereignty of God refers to the fact that God is the Supreme Authority and Ruler over all creation. God is in control.
 - ii. The issue lies in the fact that we often go through our days believing and acting as if we are the ones who are sovereign.
 - iii. We make our plans based on what we want to do, never considering what God may want us to do, or the fact that events may change that drastically impact what we have scheduled.
 - c. Question: How often do we take God into consideration when making our plans?
 - i. Example: How about when we consider our faithfulness to church?
 - ii. Many people go to church simply because "that is just what we do."
 - iii. But what happens when we are tired, or have the opportunity to stretch out the weekend somewhere else? Do we ever consider that God may want us in church more than where we want to be?
 - d. If our faith will persevere, we must live with a constant awareness of the sovereignty of God.
2. A Constant Awareness of the Uncertainty of Life (James 4:14)
 - a. James reminds us what we know to be true: Life is short and often uncertain.
 - b. James uses the metaphor of life as a mist to emphasize its transient nature.
 - c. His point is that the brevity and uncertainty of life should humble individuals and lead them to acknowledge their dependence on God.
 - d. Here's the issue: We know life is short, but how often do we reflect on this truth?
 - e. ILL: Let's rewind the clock to December 1. What if God appeared to you and told you that you would die on December 31 at 11:59 PM. You will never live to see 2024.
 - i. How would that knowledge have impacted your Christmas?
 - ii. Would you have done anything any different this last week if you knew this was the last time you would spend Christmas in this world?
 - iii. James is confronting us with an uncomfortable truth: This very well may have been your last Christmas on earth.
 - iv. How differently would we live if we had a constant awareness of the uncertainty of life?
 - f. If our faith will persevere, we must live with a constant awareness of the uncertainty of life.

3. A Constant Submission to God's Will (James 4:15)
 - a. James now suggests a proper attitude toward planning and living that includes acknowledging and submitting to God's will for your life.
 - b. The phrase "If the Lord wills" reflects an understanding that our plans are subject to God's overarching purpose, and we should seek His guidance in everything we do.
 - c. In our Spanish ministry, we use a saying when saying goodbye to people at the end of services, etc.
 - i. As people are leaving, someone will often say, "I hope to see you next Sunday!"
 - ii. Many times, the response is "*Si Dios lo permite.*" It simply means, "If it is God's will." A spoken reminder of a spiritual truth!
 - d. There's no safer place to be than the will of God.
4. A Constant Avoidance of Arrogance and Boasting (James 4:16)
 - a. James condemns the arrogance and boasting associated with self-assured planning without considering God.
 - b. James is strong in labeling such boasting as evil. He is highlighting the serious nature of neglecting God's role in our lives and plans.
 - c. Jesus told a parable that parallels this teaching nicely. You can refer to Luke 12:13-21.
 - i. Jesus teaches us something important in this parable.
 - ii. The heart of this man's problem was his heart of covetousness.
 - iii. The man reminds us that we are not defined by what we have, but by Who we have! Let us be like Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:31.
5. A Consistent Acceptance of Responsibility and Accountability (James 4:17)
 - a. James concludes by asserting that knowing the right thing to do and failing to do it is sin.
 - b. This emphasizes the responsibility believers have to align their actions with God's will and the accountability they bear for their choices.
 - c. Remember the context: James is writing to encourage these young Christians to persevere in their faith. He reminds us that as Christians we have a moral responsibility to do what is right and to align our actions with God's principles.
 - d. This is a wonderful counterbalance to the previous verses. When we read of submitting to God's sovereignty and His will for our lives, we can be tempted to believe that we should just sit and allow life to happen – that we have no personal responsibility.
 - e. James corrects that idea by reminding us of our moral responsibility to do what is right at the moment we are called to do it.
 - f. Our faith is a moment by moment submission to God's will which is often clearly articulated on the pages of His Word. This is our challenge: Be faithful where God has us.

APPLICATION/DISCUSSION:

- ⇒ One of the themes from this passage is humility. We must learn to live with the recognition that we have human limitations – physically, in our knowledge, and in our actual control over circumstances. How do we work to create a humble mindset?
- ⇒ Another theme is our moment by moment dependence on God. He is in control; we are not. He knows all; we don't. We know this intellectually, but how do we apply this to our daily lives to the point that it impacts how we actually live?