

## IS YOUR TOMORROW GOD'S WILL?

**Today's Text:** James 4:1-17

**Extracts:**

*Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin [James 4: 13-17].*

*On October 1, 2017, Dylan McKney, 22, and Telemachus Orfanos, 27, were at a country music concert at the Thousand Oaks in Las Vegas, Nevada, USA.<sup>1</sup> A gun man attacked and killed 58 people. Dylan and Telemachus escaped unhurt. On November 8, 2018, both of them were at the A Thousand Oaks concert in California. Again, a gun man attacked and killed 12 people. Telemachus was one of the victims but Dylan again survived. Was Dylan just lucky to escape twice? In an interview with CNN's Ana Cabrera, he said, "I will always have faith because I have God on my side."*

*If tomorrow (or the future) is so uncertain, why do we spend so much time worrying about it? If tomorrow is so important to us, how should we plan for it for best results? Is your tomorrow indeed God's will for you? In today's study, James has given us the best attitude to benefit from tomorrow. Let us find out.*

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<sup>1</sup> Story is based on the following sources: Jose A. Del Real, Jennifer Medina and Tim Arango, "California Shooting Kills 12 at Country Music Bar, a Year After Las Vegas," <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/08/us/shooting-california-thousand-oaks.html> and "Thousand Oaks:" Las Vegas shooting survivor among dead," 9 November 2018; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-46150847>

## 1. Background: Your plan or His path?

“See you tomorrow” is a common expression that we use at the close of the day. We say it to family, friends, neighbours, colleagues or visitors. That suggests that both parties have assumed that they are likely to still be alive tomorrow. But what is the basis of that hope? Is it your age or the state of your health? Is it mere optimism or strong faith?

Most of us are familiar with the parable of the rich fool. He had a very rich harvest. But he planned to pull down his barn and build a bigger one to store his wealth for many years hence. Then he would relax, “eat, drink and make merry.” But God told him, “Fool! This night, your soul will be required of you” [Lk 12:16-20]. He had no tomorrow.

A few recent examples may bring this more vividly to our attention. On October 2, 2018, Jamal Khashoggi,<sup>59</sup> a Saudi citizen and United States resident who was a columnist for *Washington Post*, went into the Saudi Arabian consulate in Turkey to obtain a document for his wedding. He never came out alive.<sup>2</sup> On 26 October 2018, a gun man invaded a synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, during worship and killed eleven people.<sup>3</sup> On 8 November 2018, Will Byler and his newly wedded wife, Ballie Ackerman Byler, were departing their wedding venue in a helicopter and it crashed 24 kilometres after take-off.<sup>4</sup> For all such people, “see you soon” became “see you no more.” Therefore, tomorrow is not as sure as we think.

***What should tomorrow mean to us? How should we plan for and benefit from it?*** James has addressed these issues in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of his epistle. We should pay attention to the following:

a) *What future do you have in mind?*

James writes [Jam. 4: 13-14]:

*Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow.*

Right from childhood, most of us are already working on their ambitions. The pressure can come from parents and peers, among others. We worry about what to eat or drink, even when they are wants, not needs. We want to live long, even when we do not know God. After all, long life is a blessing from God [Ps. 91:16]! We impose time deadlines on ourselves and when they look difficult or impossible, we cut corners through greed

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jamal\\_Khashoggi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jamal_Khashoggi)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/27/us/active-shooter-pittsburgh-synagogue-shooting.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/05/us/texas-newlyweds-helicopter-crash/index.html>

or immoral conduct. In the end, we find that we cannot have peace of mind. That is why in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own thing” [Matt. 6: 34].

b) *How did you determine what to do?*

In planning for tomorrow, James teaches, “Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.’ But now you boast in your arrogance. All such things are evil” [Jam. 4: 15].

According to a Chinese proverb, the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. The problem, however, is that you cannot take that first step unless and until you choose direction. In like manner, your tomorrow can be a mirage without letting God choose or direct it. In the words of the Preacher, “The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of skill. But *time and chance happen to them all*” [Eccl. 9:11]. Time and chance come from God because “There are many plans in a man’s heart; nevertheless the LORD’s counsel—that will stand” [Prov. 19: 21]. Therefore, only the Lord’s will for your tomorrow will stand, that is, make your tomorrow meaningful and successful.

c) *What outcomes have you experienced?*

James writes, “But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil” [Jam. 4: 16]. In other words, when we plan for tomorrow on our terms without God, it is arrogance and it can only produce evil. Some of us have subjected our future plans to the most scientific analysis possible and in the end produced huge failures.

Speaking to the rebellious children of Israel, God said, “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength. But you would not. And you said, ‘No, we will flee on horses.’ Therefore you shall flee! And ‘We will flee on swift horses’ - Therefore those who pursue you shall be [swifter]” [Is. 30: 15-16].

From the foregoing, it is clear that we can make our tomorrow elusive or enriching, depending on how we view and frame it. However, James has advised us to put it in God’s hands, to let it be in His will. How can we let God choose and direct our future? Let us find out in the next section.

## 2. But let God choose and direct your future!

Speaking through the prophet Jeremiah to the children of Israel in exile in Babylon, God said, “I know the thoughts that I think toward you, ...,

thoughts of peace and not of evil, *to give you a future and a hope*” [Jer. 29: 11]. God knows our DNA in full because before we were formed in our mothers’ wombs, He knew us [Ps. 139: 13-16; Jer. 1: 5]. It follows that He alone knows everything about us and our future. So, why don’t you allow Him to choose and direct your future? The following guidelines may be helpful:

a) *First, ask for His will on the matter*

James writes, “You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss that you may spend it on your pleasures” [Jam. 4:2-3]. That suggests that the very first step to take in thinking of the future is to ask for God’s will on the matter. You may have attractive desires and talents for a specific course of action but is that what God wants for you?

Take the case of David when he was running away from King Saul for protection in the wilderness. The people of Keilah were attacked by the Philistines and they needed David’s help. David inquired of the LORD, “Shall I go and attack these Philistines?” God replied, “Go and attack the Philistines and save Keilah.” When David told his men, they were scared to go. David put the matter again to the LORD who assured David that He would deliver the Philistines into his hands. David did and won. Then people went to tell King Saul that David had shut himself up in the walled city of Keilah, and thus, an easy target. When David knew that Saul was sending a massive troop to attack him, he went back to the LORD for guidance. God told him to run! So, he escaped [1 Sam. 23: 1-13].

Therefore, always ask God first the direction you should choose and take. It may not look attractive today. People may discourage you or laugh at you. But always remember, no one knows tomorrow except God.

b) *Put your plans before Him for guidance*

That you know where you are going does not mean that you know how to get there. That one route has been good in the past does not mean that it will still be good tomorrow. That is why you need to put your plans before God for guidance *on a continuing basis*.

Take the example of the children of Israel on their way to the Promised Land from Egypt. To capture the impregnable city of Jericho, all they did was in accordance with the word of God. They marched around the city everyday for seven days. On the seventh day, they marched around it seven times and shouted. The walls collapsed and fell down flat. The children of Israel simply “walked” in from all directions [Josh. 6: 1-20].

The next place to attack was a small city called Ai. Without asking God first, Joshua sent spies to check it out and they came back with the report that they needed much fewer troops to take it. He sent three thousand troops to Ai but they were thoroughly defeated by the men of Ai. As Joshua cried to the LORD, He told him that Israel had sinned and told Joshua what to do to appease Him [**Josh. 7: 1-26**]. Thereafter, God showed them what to do. They did as commanded. They chose thirty thousand mighty men of valour and burned Ai and made it a heap forever [**Josh. 8: 1-29**].

How do you know that God is speaking to you? You have to be attentive! Take the case of Paul when he was being taken as a prisoner to Rome. He told the professional people in charge of the ship, “Men, I *perceive* that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives.” They ignored him and set sail and ran into a tempest. After fourteen days of hunger and distress, Paul said to them, “Men, you should have listened to me... and now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For *there stood by me this night an angel of the God* to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.’” It was so [**Acts 27: 9-41**]. In this example, God spoke to Paul by perception and vision. He speaks to us also by dreams and prophecy, among other methods [**Num. 12: 6-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-11**]. What matters is for you to be attentive all the time.

c) *Thank Him every step of the way*

Writing to the Thessalonians, Paul says, “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” [**1 Thes. 5: 18**]. Surprisingly, most of us do not know how to be grateful, especially to God. When there is an achievement, we say, “I made it!” When a student gets an ‘F’ grade, s(he) says, “They gave me!” Jesus healed ten lepers and only one, the stranger, came back to thank Him [**Lk 17: 17**].

As you wake up each morning, “Thank You, Lord” should be the first words out of your mouth. Each day, as you encounter delays, disappointments and good results, learn to say, “Thank You, Lord.” After all, that thing that looks like failure today may be postponed success for tomorrow.

Speaking to us through the prophet Jeremiah, God said, “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. Let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and

righteousness in the earth, for in these I delight” [Jer. 9: 23-24]. *When you understand and know God, your tomorrow is safely in His hands.*

### 3. Conclusion: Make your tomorrow God’s will!

Yesterday, today, tomorrow. Of those three, only today is visible. Past, present, future. Of those three, only the present is visible. Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Of those three, only the Son, Jesus Christ, is visible. He is the light of the world [Jn 8: 12] who is with us always- even to the end of the age [Matt. 28: 20]. Our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await Jesus to take us there [Phil. 3: 20]. We are mere sojourners and pilgrims here on earth [1 Pet. 2: 11]. Therefore, *if we can always look up to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, we are in God’s will.* We can say with full confidence, “See you tomorrow.”

Make your tomorrow God’s will.