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James / James 4:13–17

We live in a society that often values doing things are own way. In fact, do you know what the number one song choice for a funeral is? The song My Way by Frank Sinatra. It goes like this:

And now the end is near
So I face the final curtain
My friend, I'll say it clear
I'll state my case of which I'm certain

I've lived a life that's full
I've traveled each and every highway
And more, much more than this
I did it my way

Regrets, I've had a few
But then again, too few to mention
I did what I had to do
And saw it through without exception

I planned each charted course
Each careful step along the byway
And more, much more than this
I did it my way

Yes, there were times, I'm sure you know

That I bit off more than I could chew
But through it all when there was doubt
I ate it up and spit it out
I faced it all and I stood tall
And did it my way

I've loved, I've laughed and cried
I've had my fill, my share of losing
And now as tears subside
I find it all so amusing
To think I did all that
And may I say, not in a shy way
Oh, no, no not me
I did it my way

For what is a man, what has he got
If not himself, then he has not
To say the words he truly feels
And not the words of one who kneels
The record shows I took the blows
And did it my way

This epitomizes a lot of what we see in our Western culture. An individual who is glorying in their self-sufficient accomplishments - they have laughed and cried, loved and lost, doubts and regrets, but also done it their way. The irony of this at a funeral is what James is trying to make a point about. James 4:14 “Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while

and then vanishes.”

Let’s go back to the Old Testament: the story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. The Israelites were facing a seemingly impossible situation. The Philistine army had come against them, and standing before them was Goliath, a giant of a man who challenged the Israelites to send someone out to fight him. Day after day, Goliath came forward, taunting the Israelite army, and day after day, the soldiers were filled with fear. Along comes David, who wasn't even a soldier but a young shepherd boy who had been sent by his father to bring food to his brothers who were serving in the army. When David heard Goliath's challenge, he couldn't understand why everyone was so afraid. Wasn't this the army of the living God? Why were they allowing this Philistine to defy God? When David offered to fight Goliath, King Saul tried to discourage him. After all, David was young and inexperienced. Saul even tried to dress David in his own armour, but David knew it wasn't going to work. Instead, he went with what he knew: his sling, a few stones, and most importantly, his trust in God. Listen to what David says to Goliath in 1 Samuel 17:45–47:

"You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty... It is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's." David wasn't saying,

"Look how good I am with a sling. Look how brave I am. Look what I can accomplish." He wasn't relying on his own strength or abilities. In fact, when Saul questioned whether he could do it, David explained how God had helped him protect his father's sheep from lions and bears. He had experienced God's faithfulness before, and he trusted that God would be with him again. David still had to step forward. He still had to pick up the stones, face Goliath, and take action. His dependence on God didn't mean he did nothing. It meant he recognized that the outcome wasn't ultimately in his hands. And I think that is an important distinction for us to understand when we read what James is saying.

James isn't telling us to stop making plans, stop working hard, or stop using the gifts and abilities God has given us. He's reminding us not to become so confident in ourselves that we forget who our lives depend on. There is a difference between saying, "Look what I can accomplish because of my own abilities," and saying, "Look what God can accomplish through the abilities He has given me." David knew the difference. He wasn't glorying in what he could do; he was trusting in what God could do. And that's the posture of heart James is calling us to have. A heart that says, "I will do my part, I will make plans, I will use the gifts God has given me, but ultimately, my life and my future are in God's hands."

King Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20 was facing a situation that was completely overwhelming. A massive army made up of several nations was coming against Judah. The threat was real, and the people were afraid. Jehoshaphat knew that his army was no match for the forces coming against them. He couldn't come up with a clever strategy or a plan that would guarantee their victory. So what did he do? He turned to God. In his prayer, recorded in 2 Chronicles 20:12, Jehoshaphat says these words: "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you." An amazing prayer. Think about what he is saying. He isn't pretending to have all the answers. He isn't trying to convince everyone that he has everything under control. He openly admits that he doesn't know what to do. But he knows where to turn. He acknowledges his limitations and places his confidence in God. And God responds. Through a message given by the Spirit of the Lord, the people are told not to be afraid because the battle belongs to God. They are instructed to take their positions, stand firm, and watch what the Lord will do. In the end, the opposing armies turn against one another, and Judah doesn't even have to fight the battle.

Now, the lesson here is not that whenever we face something difficult, God will take care of it without us having to do anything. That's not a promise that every situation will unfold the way we hope. But it does remind us that we don't have to pretend we have

everything figured out. Sometimes faith looks like David stepping forward with a sling and five stones. Other times, faith looks like Jehoshaphat standing before an impossible situation and praying, "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you." Both understood something important: their confidence wasn't in their own abilities or their ability to control the outcome. Their confidence was in God.

And perhaps that is the prayer we need to carry with us as we make our plans, face our challenges, and look toward the future: "Lord, I don't know everything tomorrow will bring. I don't have all the answers, and I can't control every outcome. But my eyes are on You."

In this passage, James is warning people who are making plans for their businesses and financial success as though they have complete control over what happens in the future. They confidently say things like, “We will go to this city, stay for a year, do business, and make money.” They have carefully planned everything, assuming their plans will work out exactly as expected. The problem is that they have left God completely out of their plans. They are acting as though their success depends entirely on their own abilities, decisions, and confidence, forgetting that they do not control the future. There is nothing wrong with making plans or working toward success. The problem is making plans as though we are in charge of our own lives and don't

need God. We need to recognize that our future is in God's hands and include Him in our decisions.

Jesus tells a story in Luke 12:13–21, in the parable of the rich fool, a man who had accumulated great wealth. His harvest was so plentiful that he didn't have enough room to store everything, so he decided to tear down his barns and build bigger ones. He had plans for the future. He was going to store up his wealth, relax, eat, drink, and enjoy life. He seemed to have everything figured out. But God called him a fool because that very night his life would be taken from him. All those plans, all that wealth, all those possessions he had worked so hard to accumulate...what good would they be? The problem wasn't that he had been successful or that he had made plans. The problem was that he had lived as though his future was guaranteed and his life was all about himself. He had forgotten what truly mattered. And I think this is an important reminder for us, especially as we gather on the Sunday before Remembrance Day.

When we remember those who have served and those who have died in war, we are reminded that life can change in an instant. There are people who left home thinking they would return in a few months, only to never make it home. There were families who said goodbye, believing they would see their loved ones again, but that goodbye became their last. And

there are families who, through no choice of their own, find themselves living in the midst of war, facing uncertainty, fear, and the possibility of losing those they love. There are young men and women who never had the opportunity to grow old, raise families, pursue their dreams, or experience all the things that many of us take for granted today. And there are those who came home but were never the same. Remembrance Day reminds us not to take the time we have been given for granted. But there is another important piece to this.

Remembering those who sacrificed their lives should also cause us to think about how we are living ours. What are we doing with the time we have been given? Are we simply filling our days with our own plans, our own ambitions, our own comforts, and our own concerns? Or are we using the time we have to care for others, to stand alongside those who are suffering, and to work toward a world where people can live in peace and dignity, to fight for justice? Because while we remember the wars of the past, we cannot ignore the suffering happening in our world today.

There are people living through war and violence. There are families forced to leave their homes because of persecution, oppression, and conflict. There are children growing up in places where fear, hunger, and uncertainty are part of everyday life. There are

people experiencing oppression in ways that don't always make the headlines, but whose lives are deeply affected by injustice, discrimination, and violence. And as followers of Jesus, we cannot simply say, "Well, that's unfortunate," and carry on with our lives as though it has nothing to do with us.

We may not be able to stop every war. We may not be able to solve every injustice. We may not have the power to change the circumstances of everyone who is suffering. But we do have the opportunity to do something, and as we know, James calls us to be doers. We can pray. We can listen to people's stories. We can speak up when we see injustice. We can support organizations helping those who are displaced, vulnerable, and oppressed. We can welcome those who have been forced to leave their homes. We can choose compassion over indifference and love over hatred.

I remember one time one of my kids came home from school and told us of a new student that had arrived from Ukraine. Their family had fleed from the war and were trying to make a new life here in Canada. I want you to imagine how difficult that would be? Arriving in a country, that you know very little about, with only the clothes on your back as you've lost everything you worked hard in life to attain. Hopefully your immediate family is with you, but chances are you've left cousins, grandparents, and friends back in your home country.

You don’t know the language well, if at all. You rely on everyone else around you to get your life started again. My kid spoke of the trauma that that kid had gone through and how certain noises within the school would trigger a reponse as if the sound of guns was going off. They, of course, were having a very difficult time readjusting to life here in Canada after living in a war-torn country for so long. And so we talked about what this child would have gone through. The horrors they probably had lived through and were still experiencing, even while sitting in the classroom.

I was reminded of a conversation I had with a woman I met at ADC. She was sharing about the women who would come into the church in her home country in Africa. These weren't necessarily women who had simply come looking for a Sunday morning worship service. They were women who were carrying deep wounds, women who had experienced abuse, violence, and oppression in their homes and communities. Women who lived in a society where violence against them was, in many ways, part of the reality of everyday life. Imagine what it must be like to live in a place where the people who are supposed to love and protect you may be the very ones causing you harm, and where speaking up or seeking help may not even feel like an option. And yet, these women would come to the church. Perhaps they came looking for somewhere they could feel safe. Somewhere they

could be heard. Somewhere they could experience kindness, compassion, and love. Somewhere they could be reminded that they mattered, that they had value, and that they were not forgotten by God. And I think this is an important part of what it means to be the church. We aren't just here for people who have everything together. We aren't just here for people whose lives are comfortable and uncomplicated. We are called to be a place where people who are hurting can find compassion, where those who have been silenced can find a voice, where those who have experienced violence can find support, and where people can experience the love of Christ. Sometimes we think about oppression and violence as things that happen somewhere else, in another country, in another part of the world. But suffering isn't limited by geography. There are people in our own communities who are experiencing abuse, fear, discrimination, and injustice. We may not be able to change every circumstance, but we can choose how we respond. Because reflecting the love of Christ means more than simply saying that we love people. It means showing them through our actions that they are seen, valued, and loved.

We cannot control how much time we have in this world, but we can make choices about how we use the time we have. And perhaps that is part of what James is reminding us. Don't spend your life assuming you have unlimited time. Don't put off loving someone, helping

someone, standing up for someone, or making a difference until tomorrow. Tomorrow isn't guaranteed.

Be thankful for the time you have been given. Use it wisely. Invest in things that have eternal value. And place your future in God's hands. Remembrance is important because we should never forget the sacrifices that have been made, the lives that have been lost, or the freedoms that so many have fought to protect. Remembrance should also move us toward action. We cannot change the past, but we can influence the present.

As Christians, we are called to be people who work for peace, in Romans 12:18 “If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” To stand alongside the vulnerable, Isaiah 1:17 “learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.” To speak for those whose voices are not being heard, Proverbs 31:8–9 “Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.” And to reflect the love of Christ in a world that desperately needs it, John 13:34–35 “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”” As Jesus said in Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are

the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

Notice that Jesus didn't simply say blessed are those who wish for peace. He said peacemakers. People who actively work toward peace. Perhaps as we remember those who have gone before us, we should also ask ourselves what kind of world we are helping to create for those who come after us. We don't know what tomorrow holds. But we know who holds tomorrow. Make today an opportunity to love, serve, care, and make a difference.