

Copyright © Two Journeys Ministry  
Andrew M. Davis  
Sermon Notes

[www.twojourneys.org](http://www.twojourneys.org)

Please use in accordance with the copyright policy found at [twojourneys.org](http://twojourneys.org)

## **If the Lord Wills, You Will Live**

**James 4:13-17**

In April of 1734, in a small hamlet in western Massachusetts called Northampton, one of the greatest revivals of Christianity in the history of the church began in a church pastored by Jonathan Edwards. It started with a shocking event...

Edwards: “There happened a very sudden and awful death of a young man in the bloom of his youth; who being violently seized with a pleurisy and taken immediately very delirious, died in about two days; which, (together with what was preached publicly on that occasion) much affected many young people.”

George Marsden writes “Edwards’ whole life had prepared him to seize this moment. Having been twice on the verge of death, he had spent much of his own youth reflecting on the folly of loving earthly pleasure when on the brink of eternity.”

Edwards preached a funeral sermon on Psalm 90:5-6 **“In the morning, they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning, it flourisheth and groweth up. In the evening, it is cut down and withereth.”**

- a. His poignant sermon brought many of the friends of the dead young man to tears... Edwards went on at length with the experiences many of them have had walking through fields of wild flowers which look beautiful but which soon wither and die
- b. He then turned from this image to warn the youth of Northampton against squandering their lives in the pursuit of worthless things

“Consider. If you should die in youth how shocking would the thought of your having spent your youth in such a manner be to them that see it. When other stand by your bedside and see you gasping and breathing your last or come afterward and see you laid out dead by the wall and see you put into the coffin and behold the awful visage which death has given you, how shocking will it be to them to think this is the person that used to be so vain and frothy in conversation. This is he that was so lewd a companion. This is he that used to spend of his time in his leisure hours so much in frolicking.”

He then concluded sweetly:

“If you have an interest in Christ your body shall flourish again in a glorious manner. If you should die in the flower of your days when the body is most attractive and beautiful, it will rise again a thousand times more attractive and beautiful.” Their happiness would be far greater than that of simply being fondly remembered for a time. Their glory will last.”

2. Edwards used this foothold in the lives and hearts of the youth to minister the gospel deeply and widely to them over the next few weeks, and many of them were savingly converted
3. The awakening transformed the youth culture in the town... and the awakening soon was spreading to many others as well

This morning's text tells us that our lives are a mist that appears for a moment, and then vanishes... the wisest thing we can do is be saved through faith in Christ

### I. Salvation: Rescued from Being the Master of Your Fate

In 1894, William Ernest Henley (1849-1903) lost his precious six-year-old daughter Margaret. In his grief and anger, he wrote a poem he called “Invictus” which means “I have not been conquered”:

OUT of the night that covers me,  
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate:

I am the captain of my soul.

The essence of the rebellion of the human race against Almighty God is AUTONOMY... literally "self-rule"; that as the Masters of our own fates and the captain of our own souls, we can determine what we will be, what we will do, where we will go. There is an essential arrogance and defiance about it. And one of the key ingredients to this human self-rule, autonomy, is PRESUMING upon tomorrow... assuming that we will be alive tomorrow and even a year from now. And that, assuming we'll be alive tomorrow, and even a year from now, we get to choose what we will do with our time and our energy and our opportunities.

When our Lord Jesus Christ saves a sinner, he does so by corralling our wills, our autonomy, and putting our stiff necks under the yoke of his kingly rule:

***Mark 1:15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"***

***Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."***

The "yoke" of Jesus represents his kingly authority, his right to command our bodies and our days.

When the Lord saves us, he breaks our wills in the sweetest way, showing us that his purposes and plans and wisdom is infinitely greater than ours; and that, as our creator and Judge, he has every right to command us.

Then, the central issue of our lives, of every moment of our lives becomes this one thing: WHAT IS THE WILL OF THE LORD??

Secondly, the Lord then brings us to a serious consideration of the best use of our time and energy day after day for the rest of our lives

Wisdom very much consists in making a wise improvement of time, and of the opportunities we enjoy. This is often in Scripture spoken of as a great part of true wisdom; as

***Deut. 32:29, "O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!"***

***Psalm 90:12, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."***

As the Apostle Paul made plain:

***Ephesians 5:15-17 Be very careful, then, how you live-- not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> REDEEMING THE TIME, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.***

That is what this text is about... saved from being the autonomous master of your fate and captains of your souls and private rulers of your days here on earth, so that you are WISE and realize our time here on earth is FLEETING... very brief... and we have to make the most of it by humbly doing the will of the Lord

## II. The Arrogance of Presuming Upon Tomorrow

### A. James Addresses Human Arrogance

***James 4:13-17 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." <sup>14</sup> Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. <sup>15</sup> Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." <sup>16</sup> As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. <sup>17</sup> Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins***

1. A businessman, a merchant, with a prosperous trade, making plans for the future
2. Notice his attitude about the future: "Today or tomorrow..." whatever, it doesn't matter... there's PLENTY of time, and each day is like another, a limitless resource of time

3. Notice his autonomous plans... “We will go to such and such a city... spend a YEAR there, carry on business and MAKE MONEY
  4. Notice that he goes far beyond certainty about tomorrow to certainty about a full YEAR from now... the one is as certain as the other
  5. In all his plans, the will of God never enters in... he is master of his fate, captain of his soul... he will live as long as he wants to and spend his time as he chooses
  6. He is PRESUMING on the future!!
- B. Note Verse 16: You “boast and brag”... there is an essential ARROGANCE to all of this
1. The human being is forgetting about God and making his own plans
  2. He forgets that his VERY EXISTENCE is in the hand of God

***James 4:15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live***

- a. In other words, if the Lord doesn't will for me to continue to live one second longer, I won't
- b. I have no independent existence apart from the continued sustaining hand of God

***Acts 17:28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'***

***Colossians 1:17 in him all things hold together.***

- c. The essential unbelief of sinners is to ignore God's power in sustaining their very existence
- d. As Daniel said to King Belshazzar the night he saw the writing on the wall:

***Daniel 5:23 you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways.***

That very night, Belshazzar died!

3. The arrogant man who presumed on the future forgets that time is short because of this one thing:

***Hebrews 9:27 man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment***

***Ecclesiastes 8:8 No man has power over the wind to contain it; so no one has power over the day of his death.***

4. He also forgets that God is sovereign over the things that happen on planet Earth!

***Proverbs 19:21 Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.***

5. So... he boasts about something he doesn't possess...  
TOMORROW!

C. James Probably Has this Proverb in Mind

***Proverbs 27:1 Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.***

D. Why It is So Foolish

1. The “boasting” about tomorrow shows a shocking independence from God
2. James and the proverb say the same thing: you don't even know what will happen TOMORROW, never mind a year from now
3. To assume you'll even be alive tomorrow without reference to God sustaining your breath is prideful
4. James says our lives are so transitory

***James 4:14 What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.***

5. Our time here on earth is extremely brief
6. Also the works we do on earth are extremely transitory... like dust in the wind
  - a. God's judgment on Adam

***Genesis 3:19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."***

- b. Nebuchadnezzar's statue represented the cumulative achievement of the human race across four vast empires

***Daniel 2:35 The wind swept them away without leaving a trace.***

- c. Ecclesiastes

***Ecclesiastes 1:2-4 "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." <sup>3</sup> What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? <sup>4</sup> Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.***

***Ecclesiastes 1:11 There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow.***

***Ecclesiastes 1:14 I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.***

7. Think about the rich man in Jesus' parable:

***Luke 12:18-20 he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup> And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." <sup>20</sup> "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be required from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'***

Look at those words... "You FOOL... this VERY NIGHT your soul will be REQUIRED of you!" When God demands back your soul, you must surrender it immediately.

And we have absolutely no idea when that day will come!

People die suddenly, of car accidents... or of sudden illnesses, like strokes or heart attacks; people also die over a longer period of time, but their strength is gone and they can't do anything

more, like get out of bed. We can go from prime health to incapacitation very quickly

8. So James wants us to be HUMBLED by our transitory lives, by how brief is our time here on the earth
9. We should realize every single day that our life here on earth is a MIST, a vapor

When I drive to work in the early morning, I cross a bridge over a lake near my house; frequently I see a morning mist hanging low over the lake, thick as soup... but when the sun rises higher with its mid-morning heat, the mist is burned off, and it's as though it was never there.

James says that is what our lives are like

***Psalm 90:12, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."***

10. The gospel lifts our eyes above this present age to eternity... and shows us that the world to which we are going is entirely different... there we will not be a MIST that appears for a little while and then vanishes; there, we will live forever, and our heavenly works and glory will never fade

### III. What It Means to Presume Upon Tomorrow

#### A. First, Let's Set Some Boundaries!

1. There is a BIG DIFFERENCE between the arrogant presumption about tomorrow and living as though you will never see another day
2. In one sense, it will always do us good to act as though this might be our last day on earth, as though THIS VERY NIGHT we will have to give an account for our souls
3. YET the Bible supports reasonable preparations for tomorrow

***Proverbs 6:6-8 Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!  
<sup>7</sup> It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, <sup>8</sup> yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest.***

Farmers plow and sow and water and wait for the harvest in the fall... if they assumed today was their last day on earth, they would not do all that labor.

All Christian mission shows a planning and preparations for a future spiritual harvest... so we should not fail to make preparations for the future

4. But when it comes to the health of our souls and our heavenly treasures, we should not live as though we DEPENDED UPON tomorrow to set our spiritual house in order
5. So... how do people PRESUME UPON ANOTHER DAY?
6. How do they procrastinate, and say “Today, or tomorrow... or a year from now...”?

**B. Top Priority: Salvation Through Faith in Christ**

1. Some people hear the gospel and believe that it’s true, and they postpone committing their lives to the Lord

***Acts 24:25 As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you."***

2. Some young people believe that they will have time to trust in Christ when they are older... they presume upon tomorrow

***2 Corinthians 6:2 "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.***

***Hebrews 3:7-8 "Today, if you hear his voice, <sup>8</sup> do not harden your hearts***

3. We are surrounded every day by people who are just like the man James talks about... thinking about the things of this world—pleasures, money, success, power—and very little about the state of their soul, the Judgment Day to come; they are aware of the

gospel of Christ, the teaching about the reality of heaven and hell, but their thoughts are dominated with this world system and all the stuff of the five sense world

4. This text stands over all lost people and calls them to stop being foolish... we do not know the day of our death! Our lives are so brief, and eternity is so long
5. They do not know when the Creator and Sustainer of life will say "You fool, this VERY NIGHT your soul will be required of you!"
6. And it doesn't matter if the means of death do not seem immediately at hand... God rules all things
7. This text calls on such people to flee to Christ while there is time

#### C. Putting Your House in Order

1. Some Christian people are postponing some spiritual ministry the Lord wants them to do, like evangelizing lost relatives, or speaking to a straying son or daughter
2. They assume there is plenty of time to address it in the future
3. But the Lord spoke this to Hezekiah

***Isaiah 38:1 In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover."***

4. Hezekiah had a lax attitude toward his own household spiritually...

***Isaiah 39:8 he thought, "There will be peace and security in my lifetime."***

5. But son Manasseh was growing up a monster who would undo all the good Hezekiah had done in his life
6. So, the word comes to all us parents: PUT YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER, because someday, you're going to die

#### D. People Procrastinate on Repenting

1. There is some sin pattern in their lives

2. They are troubled by it and annoyed by it, but assume they will have time to address it in the future
3. Is that not presuming on tomorrow? If the Lord has convicted you about a sin, he means for you to address it RIGHT NOW, not at some convenient date in the future

Jonathan Edwards: "When men hearken to temptation, and yield to the solicitations of their lusts to commit any sin they act as those who depend on another day. They do what must be undone. What they then do must be undone by hearty and thorough repentance, or they are ruined and lost forever. So if persons have been seeking salvation for a time, and afterwards are guilty of backsliding, and turn back after their hands have been put to the plow, they act as those who depend on another day. For what they now do, they must undo some time or other. They must go back again from their backsliding, and have all their work to do over again. And these things must be undone in this world, while men live; for there will be no undoing of them afterwards; they may be suffered for, but never can be undone."

#### E. People Procrastinating on Doing Fruitful Ministry

1. Others may have dreams of doing something significant for the Lord... some mission work, or something for the poor and needy, or some counselling ministry...
2. They picture themselves doing these good deeds in abundance, but it is always in the FUTURE; they assume they will have time when they are retired or when things get less crazy or hectic
3. They presume on a future day in which they will have their DREAM ministry, and do so many good things for the Lord

#### IV. The Humility of a Servant: What Does My Lord Will?

***James 4:15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."***

#### A. Every Person Should Come Face to Face with God

1. We should realize that “In him we live and move and have our being!”
2. We should firmly fix in our minds that, “If the Lord wills, I will live!”
3. It fundamentally comes down to the will of the Lord! He holds in his hand our lives and all our ways!
4. We should begin every day with a time in the Word and prayer in which we acknowledge this very thing to God
5. If God will that I live, it is only for one purpose: HIS GLORY!!

***Isaiah 43:6-7 Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth-- <sup>7</sup> everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.***

B. We Should Seek to Determine What God’s Will is... and Do It

1. If the Lord wills I will do THIS or THAT
2. We should seek to find out what God’s will is... and that is revealed in scripture
3. Big picture

***Ephesians 1:9-10 And he made known to us the mystery of his will ... to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.***

4. Salvation for ourselves and others

***2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance***

5. Sexual purity

***1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; <sup>4</sup> that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, <sup>5</sup> not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God***

6. Daily life demeanor

***1 Thess. 5:16-18 Be joyful always; <sup>17</sup> pray continually; <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.***

7. Specific ministry

***Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will.***

8. Financial generosity

***2 Corinthians 8:5 they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.***

9. Comings and goings

***Acts 18:20-21 When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. <sup>21</sup> But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus.***

C. Imitating Jesus in Seeking God's Will

***John 4:34 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.***

***Luke 22:42 Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."***

D. Knowing the Good We Ought to Do

***James 4:17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins***

1. James concludes saying that we who have been instructed like this in the word KNOW THE GOOD WE OUGHT TO DO
2. We cannot procrastinate... putting it off to another day; what God is telling you to do, do NOW