

2020-10-25 James 4,13-17 Disruptive Ambition

10/25

Title

Disruptive Ambition

James 4:13-17 NRSV

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money." 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. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. 17 Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.

A Scripture Lesson for Our Times

Anyone in a 2015 job interview who answered the question, "Where do you see yourself in five years?" got it wrong. If ever there was time for us all to learn some humility together, it is 2020.

Humility is a great gift! Humble people can laugh at themselves. They can be compassionate toward others. They can hold their plans and their ambitions lightly. And perhaps the greatest thing humble people can do: *They can live fully present to God, in the present moment.* The present moment is, after all, the only place we can experience God. When we live in the past, we get stuck in nostalgia or regret. When we live in the future, we get stuck in daydreams or fear. But when we live in the present, we can be in state of complete trust. In humility we can say to ourselves: *I don't know what the future holds, but I do know Who holds the future.* When we live in the present, we are able to live "as the Lord wishes" lives.

If you want to live a joy-filled life, make "if the Lord wishes" plans.

An "If the Lord Wishes" Plan

If we think James is saying, "Don't bother making plans," then we misunderstand him terribly. James is not opposed to ambition. James is opposed to arrogance. James wants his readers to apply themselves, to work hard, and yes even to make plans. But such plans should be qualified with, "as the Lord wishes." That what I mean by titling this sermon *Disruptive Ambition*. We are to want God's will to be done, and God's kingdom to come. We want that way more than we want to get our way or to prove how clever, successful, or rich we can make ourselves. In his parable of the Talents, Jesus has high praise for those who take what the Master gives them and show some us hustle.

**An "if the Lord wishes" plan
always starts in the *right now*
and
points toward *God's best*.**

Let's unpack that a little bit, because I want to encourage you to make a "If the Lord wishes" plan for yourself in 2021 and be part of West Valley's "If the Lord wishes" planning.

An "if the Lord wishes" plan begins with *right now*. It embraces the reality of the present moment, confronting the brutal facts when necessary. If mistakes have been made, we confess them and ask forgiveness. We are thankful for the resources we have, and release fear or resentment about what we don't have. We meet God here in prayers of gratitude. We notice how our life is harder than we thought it would be, and we smile. We receive God's grace to be gracious toward ourselves and forgiving of others.

Then we ask for more clarity about *God's best*. We open our hearts to God-shaped vision – that picture of a preferable future that God would give to us. At this point, it's good to remember that whatever is going to happen is already happening. So we ask ourselves, "where am seeing God doing a new thing in my life? How have I been changed by this year's challenges. What hopes and dreams are emerging from this difficult time of isolation and uncertainty? The clearer we get about our deepest longings, the clearer we get about what God is up to. That's the difference between arrogant ambition and disruptive ambition. Disruptive ambition puts a fire in our bellies for what God is doing, such that we would much rather be part of God's plans than make up our own.

At the congregational meeting today, you are going to hear from our elders and hear how they are working to make "if the Lord wishes" plans for West Valley. Notice how they are embracing the right now and have their eyes on the horizon in search of God's best.

Faith, Not Fatalism

It's especially hard to make an "If the Lord wishes" plan when our *right now* is so difficult and so not-at-all-what-we-want-it-to-be. Yet Proverbs 16:9 puts it well: "The heart of a person charts the path, but only God determines the steps." We can't plan for the future, but we can prepare for it. People who refuse to prepare for the future are not faithful, they are fatalistic. It's all chance anyway, so why try? But 1 John 4:8 says, "God is Love." John has discovered that God is a present-tense verb. So while...

Fatalistic people say: *Whatever happens, happens*

Faithful people say: *God is happening, right now!*

You and Your Plans Don't Belong to You

The elders have been doing a lot of praying and listening lately. One of our elders shared the devotional that had shown up in their in-box. It reflects our text – and our situation – in such a beautiful way that I want to share it with you.

Devotional from Sarah Young's "Jesus Today" 9/29/20

If your primary goal is pleasing yourself, your life will be filled with frustrations. The attitude that things should go your way is based on a faulty premise: that you are the center of your world. The truth is, I am the Center, and everything revolves around Me. So make your plans tentatively, seeking My Face and My will in all you do. This is a win-win situation: If things go according to your plans, rejoice and thank Me. When your desires are thwarted, communicate with Me and be ready to subordinate your will to Mine.

***Remember that you belong to Me, beloved; you are not your own.** This awareness that you belong to another can be a great relief. It shifts your focus away from yourself and what you want. Instead of striving to make things go your way, your primary goal becomes pleasing Me. You might think this would be burdensome, but it is actually quite freeing. Knowing that you belong to Me provides deep, satisfying rest for your soul.*

(Psalm 105:4)

“Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His face evermore!”

(Matthew 11:29-30)

“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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

(Psalm 13:5)

“I trust in your unfailing love, my heart rejoices in your salvation.”

His will be done!

Amen.