

**James 4:13-17**

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 (NRSV).

The title of the message this morning is *Faith Directive*. The idea being that a directive is an authoritative instruction and the letter from James is an authoritative instruction in regards to faith and the formation of faith. According to tradition James is the brother of Jesus. This could be a literal interpretation as a biological brother of Jesus (as is interpreted in Matthew 13:55) or it could be symbolic. We are all members of the family of God, adopted by Jesus, as brothers and sisters.

Last Sunday I pointed out one significance of the resurrection is how it changes everything. If there was no resurrection the Jesus movement would have ended in tragedy with no happy ending. However, the resurrection changed the disciples from deserters to bold witnesses. The resurrection changed the Apostle Paul from being a persecutor to becoming a great missionary. Now, here with James, it is the resurrection that changed James into becoming a great church leader. By the way, the resurrection also changes us. Your life has changed as a result of the resurrected Jesus.

James is known for heading the council that faced a major conflict. As Gentiles joined the church, their non-Jewish practices were in conflict with Jewish tradition. The Jews thought that the Gentiles should become Jews and get circumcised before they were baptized. It was under the leadership of James that the council refused to bind Gentile Christians to Jewish law. A key characteristic of James theology is righteous behavior and good works as evidence of faith. This brings us to today's Scripture. It is about faith formation; leading a life that is built upon biblical faith. As you know faith is about what you believe. However, faith also requires a response. Most Christians today are in a comfort zone when it comes to faith. They practice their faith only up to the point where they are comfortable but they do not follow some of the teachings of the Bible. You have to decide for yourself, are you or are you not going to live by the Bible. Living by the Bible is tough to do; it takes discipline.

The Scripture today is a good example of how hard it is to actually live by the Bible. James talks about people living out their normal, regular, routine of day to day life. They do their work, their business, and get money for it. There is nothing wrong with that. He is not criticizing commercial success. In the Bible Abraham was wealthy, as was Jacob, Joseph, and many others. What James criticizes is arrogance. Boasting about success comes from pride. It does not attribute success to God. So, what is really at stake here is theology. There is a contrast between ideologies of scarcity and the theological sound doctrine of abundance. In the realm of ideologies of scarcity there is competition for resources and mutual elimination. It is a closed system of limited resources that people control and manipulate. At its core center is selfish ambition and self gain at the expense of others and it is the main cause of oppression. However, the doctrine of abundance is theologically sound because it is what the Bible teaches. What the Bible shows us is that God is the creator, the provider, and the sustainer. God created a world full of resources

for all of humanity. This is why James calls boasting evil. Boasting conflicts with the benevolence of God.

James cautions us about something we should be able to relate to given our current situation. We do not know the future. The things that we are familiar with and make us comfortable will change. What you should do is what we should always do and that is to seek God first. That is your faith directive; one of the major steps in the formation of faith. Seek God first and live your life based on the will of God. Jesus is a perfect example. He went with the disciples to the garden of Gethsemane while he was being betrayed. His disciples were sleeping when a mob was on their way to capture him. He knew he would be tortured and crucified. In a long passionate prayer, with all that he faced, he prays "not my will but your will be done." The focus is always on the will of God. We are to always seek God first.

As I mentioned earlier living by the Bible is tough. Well, we all know what sin is. We all know the bad ones: murder, rape, assault, and armed robbery. We know the should & should not's. We know the big ten: no other gods, no idols, do not take Lord's name in vain, no stealing, no adultery, no false witness, and no coveting. We also know a lot of the biblical vices: selfish ambition, gossip, greed, and arrogance. But James is tough. He takes it to the next level and cautions us that failing to do good is a sin. **James 4:17** Anyone who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin (NRSV). I'll repeat that for emphasis. Failing to do good is a sin. Now, that is a tough lesson to follow. Why would it be a sin? Failing to do good does not violate anyone's rights, abuse anyone, or take advantage of anyone. Failing to do good is a sin because it goes against will of God.

We like to think that we are righteous, we try to maintain faith, and we try not to sin. It is easy to see the disparity between what is right and what is wrong. We know what is right and wrong. We face many challenges in life and sometimes our emotions get the best of us and we slip up. But that turns out to be OK, because we can confess. We can repent and then do our best not to slip up again. What is right and wrong is pretty clear cut. But now, here in this Scripture we see righteousness means more. It is not just a matter of avoiding the bad, we must go forward and look for ways to do the good. Ignoring the chances that you have to do good is a sin. Many times in life ignoring is the easiest path to take. It doesn't seem to be wrong. We are not physically hurting anyone.

With God's help and guidance we know what to do and are provided the strength and endurance to do it. Multiple times life deals us opportunities to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and help the needy. The faith directive - the main premise of the Scripture - is to seek the will of God first and always seek the will of God. It is not enough just to do some good. We all know that doing something that is wrong is a sin. However, this text takes it step further and cautions us that failing to do good is also a sin.