

BIBLE LIFE MESSAGES

How to Make God's Priority Your Priority

James 4:13-5:6

¹ How do you make God's priority your priority?

James, chapter 4, verse 13 through chapter 5, verse 6 will help us figure this out. ²

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." 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. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

¹ ₃

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you

¹ James 4:13-17.

failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.^{2 4}

You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened your-selves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.³

We all have our priorities in life. We have our families, our money, entertainment, sports and hobbies. But God redeemed you so that He could be first in your life. You know that is true!⁵

Verse 17 says, Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. So, if you know what to do, put God first in your life, but fail to do it, it is sin!⁶

Let us look at two activities in our lives that are often top priorities but shouldn't be.⁷

² James 5:1-4.

³ James 5:5-6.

I. Consider the Sin of Putting Employment Before God - 4:13-17

Consider the sin of putting employment before God. 8

Examine the statement: “I have all the time in the world to plan my business or employment, make long time goals and set up objectives for my life.”

There’s nothing wrong with what I just said as long as it doesn’t become the # 1 priority of your life. Good stewardship involves good planning! God wants you to do that. 9

But you are not in control! Chapter 4, verse 14 says, 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. 10

You don’t have the final say about finding a job, staying employed, where you will live or how much of a salary you will make. 11

You are not in control of your time. You may be living as though the Lord will never come again. Time will continue indefinitely. ¹²

You're not in control of your lifespan. You may be living as though you are certain you will be alive until you are at least 85! ¹³

Lord Jesus told a story about a rich farmer who decided to retire. ⁴ He decided to liquidate his assets, sit back and enjoy the easy life. God said to him, "You fool. This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then, who will get what you have prepared for yourself."

So, what's the point? Luke, chapter 12, verse 21 simply states, **This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God. God wants you to live your life for Him, not just for yourself!**

⁴ Luke 12:16-21.

Years ago I planned to settle down in San Diego, California. My mother and brother lived there, and we could live close to them. However, I couldn't find a suitable church to pastor. Years of being an Army chaplain put me out of circulation. I didn't have the reputation in civilian circles most pastors my age would have. No one knew me. Our church organizational system is not structured beyond the local church level.

One of my college friends discovered that I was available and called me. He was an elder in a local church in the San Francisco Bay area. My wife, three of our four children and I moved 500 miles north to the bay area for fourteen years. We had opportunities to serve the Lord there we could never have had in San Diego!

Finally, with my children gone from the family home, a church asked us to come to the San Diego area to pastor there. My mom was in a condition where she needed us to move in and care for her. It was God's

perfect timing! ¹⁴ Someone coined the phrase some time ago, “You want to make God laugh. Tell Him your plans!” ¹⁵

Therefore, **use the time you have to do whatever is in the scope of the Lord’s will.** Chapter 4, verses 15 and 16, **Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.**

A carpenter once said, “I am employed by God. I simply make cabinets to put food on the table”. If your life belongs to God, use it for Him! ¹⁶ Whenever you boast about your accomplishments, your successes, or your career, it is evil. ¹⁷

There is a second activity in our lives that is often a top priority but shouldn’t be.

II. Consider the Sin of Putting Your Possessions Before God - 5:1-6

Consider the sin of putting your possessions before God. ¹⁸

Examine this statement: “Since I have a lot of money and possessions, I am rich!” On April 25, 1972 in Barcelona, Spain, the well-known British actor George Sanders committed suicide. The suicide note simply stated, “It’s because I’m bored!”

You are not rich simply because you have money, influence, and possessions. You are rich when you are committed to God’s will for your life! ¹⁹

You see, **you are not in control! Chapter 5, verses 2 and 3 read, **Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days.****

You can have crops, but they can rot. How many times have you heard of frost ruining the citrus industry in California and Florida, the richest citrus areas in the country, for the year? ²⁰

You can have money, but it can be eaten away. Chapter 5, verse 3 in the Living Bible paraphrase, puts it this way, **The value of your gold and silver is dropping fast . . . Sounds like inflation to me! ²¹**

Your money can be a witness against you.

The Lord told another story about a both a rich man and a beggar dying and finding themselves in the place of the dead. ⁵

While on earth the rich man lived in luxury rather self absorbed. He didn't seem to care about anyone else except himself. The beggar, however, was in terrible physical agony and not even able to afford food. There was no help from the rich man.

⁵ Luke 16:19-31.

In the story, heaven and hell are co-located with a great chasm between them. The rich man is now in hell looking across this gulf at the beggar, now in heaven, and Abraham.

The moral of the story for me is that this earthly life of ours is **a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.** ⁶ Heaven and hell are eternal! Which life do you think is the most important to live for? ²²

You can be so focused on yourself that you become insensitive to others, just like the rich man did. ²³

You may cheat, lie, and step on others to get to the top just like chapter 5, verse 4 says, **Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.** You may just forget about the needs of others! ²⁴

Another Jesus story is about His Second Coming. ⁷ He will treat us all like a shepherd would treat his sheep

⁶ James 4:14.

⁷ Matthew 25:16-22.

and goats. He would separate them into two groups. Then He would invite the group of people who were charitable to others during their earthly life into a wonderful spiritual inheritance. Those who were not charitable He would have them depart from Him because they lived a self-centered life. ²⁵

The story is told of a farmer walking down the street and then, entering a slaughterhouse. Behind him were a line of pigs willingly following him right into the building. When the story was checked out, it appears that the man was dropping beans along the way to entice them.

Chapter 5, verse 5 emphasizes that you can get so wrapped up in the pleasures that possessions bring that you **fatten yourself in the day of slaughter.** ⁸ ²⁶

Therefore, if your possessions stand in your way remember what the Lord said to the rich young ruler, **Go, sell your possessions and give to the poor and**

⁸ James 5:5.

you will have treasure in heaven.⁹ ²⁷ Then, you will be free to . . . **seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.**¹⁰

A man, struggling with major decisions about the direction of his life, cut some letters out of paper and taped each one on his bedroom door. They spelled out “LET GOD”. He knelt in prayer and wrestled with these issues looking up at his door occasionally. He kept telling himself that he needed to just let God have His way. But his strong self interests kept getting in the way. Frustrated, he stood up, stormed out of his room, and slammed the door behind him. When he returned to his room some time later, he saw that the “D” had fallen off the door onto the floor. The phrase now simply said “LET GO”! That convinced him to surrender his will to the Lord’s.²⁸

You might need to “LET GO” of your own goals so that God can fulfill His purpose for your life.

⁹ Matthew 19:21.

¹⁰ Matthew 6:33.

“LET GO”!

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