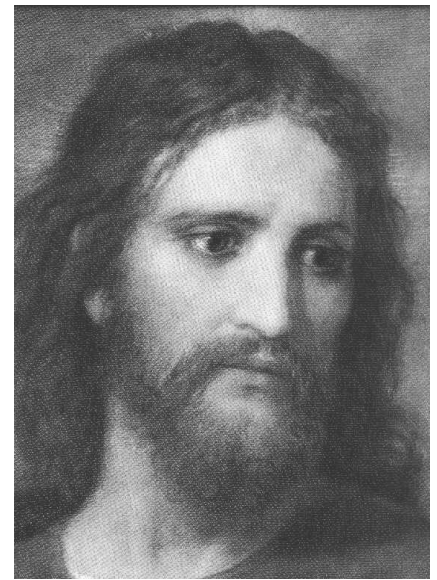


St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church-WELS
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
New Year's Day January 1, 2012
James 4:13-17 NASB



¹³ Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." ¹⁴ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead, *you ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." ¹⁶ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ Therefore, to one who knows *the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.*

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

New Year's Day – only 357 days till Christmas! I love the New Year. Not so much staying up till Midnight and shouting, "Happy new year!" But I like the prospect of a fresh start – a new beginning! For the last few years we have gotten for Christmas a family calendar – from Shutter-fly. Each of the 12 months has a picture of our grand-children. I like that. And this is really neat – there is a little picture of you on the calendar on your birthday! There is a picture of couples on their wedding anniversary! It's the perfect reminder that we celebrate that day! I love calendars – calendars with paintings of Jesus – or calendars of sheep – or calendars of Van Gogh paintings – or calendars of the Jewish Festivals. Calendars are the essence of the LORD's promise in Jeremiah. **"I know the plans I have for you declares the LORD. Plans to help you, not to hurt you. Plans to give you hope and a future!"** There is a contagious optimism that comes from faith in Jesus' never failing love. We don't know what the future holds – but we know who holds the future – Jesus does! The future is always secure for Jesus' sake. And so this New Year's Day God's Word is powerful and practical comfort about our future!

What Will Happen Tomorrow?

- 1. Boasting about tomorrow is evil arrogance**
- 2. Jesus holds the future in his nail marked hands!**

The part of God's Word we are concentrating on – is part of the letter of James. The People's Bible Commentary concerning James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1 & 2 & 3 John and Jude was written by Pastor Jeske. These letters – **James, Peter, John and Jude** are often called the General Epistles – that is they were written to everybody – not to a place like Corinthians or Galatians or Ephesians or Philippians. A man – a Church Father names Eusebius is the first person – around 300 years after the Christ-child was born – to write about the 7 general letters. Pastor Jeske wrote, *"These seven letters are a rich treasury of spiritual wisdom and strength. Although short, they are intense, deep, beautiful and inspiring. They were written in a time of testing and a time of great growth in the church by four men who were very close to the Lord Jesus: his outspoken lead disciple Peter; John the disciple whom Jesus loved; and Jesus' two half brothers – James and Jude. May our Savior bless your study of these precious words!"* We are concentrating on part of the letter by James. In Bible times James and Jacob were pretty much interchangeable. There are a several men named James.

There was James of James and John – the sons of Zebedee – the sons of Thunder! This James – of Peter, James and John died very early on – put to death at the hands of Herod Agrippa I in A.D. 44. Jesus had another disciple named James – nicknamed “the Little”. He was the son of Alphaeus and Mary. His mom is more famous than he is. She was there at Jesus’ crucifixion – literally standing at the foot of Jesus’ cross – when he died to pay for our sins. She was there that first Easter morning – to hear angels say, **“Fear not! For I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here. He is risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples he is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him. Now I have told you!”** There was another James, the father of the apostle Thaddeus or Judas – not Iscariot. We don’t know much about him at all! So – none of these three James seems to be the writer of this letter.

It has long been held – that this James is Jesus’ half brother. God’s Word says Jesus had 4 other brothers **James, Joseph, Simon and Judas.** Matthew 13:55. At first they didn’t believe in Jesus. Remember Jesus’ familiar words, **“Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor.”** Matthew 13:57. After Jesus rose from the dead the 9th time Jesus appeared to someone/anyone – it was to James! After Jesus went back into Heaven – there was a fierce even physical persecution of believers in Jesus. Many of the disciples fled Jerusalem for their very lives. James – though – stayed in Jerusalem and after a while seems to have become the head of the Church! Jesus worked many powerful blessings to His Church through James. One of those blessings is the Letter James wrote.

This New Year’s Day – James gives us very practical advice about putting our faith into practice – living lives this new year – that give glory to our crucified and risen Savior! ¹³ **Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.”** ¹⁴ **Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.** If you are in sales – it doesn’t matter what kind of widget you are selling – if you are in sales – your boss wants you to set goals – maybe one year and two year – maybe even 5 year goals. Each year you are supposed to sell more than the year before. And there’s nothing wrong with planning and preparing. God’s Word says, ²⁵ **Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said:** ²⁶ **“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, even their own life – such a person cannot be my disciple.** ²⁷ **And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.** ²⁸ **“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, ³⁰ saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’ ³¹ “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples. Luke chapter 14. The problem is one of degrees. The problem is when we think the future is all up to me! ¹³ **Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.”** ¹⁴ **Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow.** Again – who of us knows if we won’t be in the Emergency Room at the UW Health Partners – Watertown Regional Medical Center before today is over! My Grandson Bartholomew fell on the 4th of July. He fell on a lamp and the light bulb burst and there were little cuts all around his eye. We were afraid there might be glass in his eye. I knew a man**

named Levi. He was a mountain of a man – physically very powerful. He worked on the farm – did chores – cut and split fire wood – sat down for supper and never stood up again – until he was safe at home in heaven. I can't tell you all the people I have known – that suddenly and without warning – were here one moment and with Jesus the next. People are indeed very breakable!

At the start of a new year – it's instructive to remember : **You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.** Just a vapor – here today and gone tomorrow! It used to be the Pastors pictures that are in the upper entry-way above where you sign up for Lord's Supper – used to be downstairs in the fellowship hall – above the pass through windows – where you slide your tray and get your food when the Sun Beams make chili and spaghetti and Pastor Gartner and the teenagers make sloppy Joes. It's very nice the pictures are in the upper entry way – but I used to think from time to time – what it was going to be like not too many years from now – when children would go through the line to get their spaghetti – and would look up at my picture. I wondered how long before they would not know – that I really like spaghetti- and Pastor Gartner's sloppy Joes with just a touch of Picante' sauce? We are just like a vapor! I remember when I used to go with the Maenerchor – when Prof. Scharf and Prof. Sellnow and Dr. Lehmann and Prof. Eickmann and Pastor Paustin and Pastor Gabb and Prof. Zabell would go around singing – and Frieda Knoll was over 102 years old and she would listen to us sing. And now they are all gone! And the teachers I had at the Seminary – most of them are all gone to Heaven, too! Pastor Backer who baptized me is in Heaven. Pastor Weber who confirmed me – is in Heaven, too! Just like a vapor – my grandmas and my grandpas and Uncle Curly and Uncle Roy and Great Uncle Charlie and Uncle George and Uncle Paul are all gone to Heaven. We are here for just a little while and then we come home to heaven. How silly to think of ourselves more highly than we ought – for before you know it – we vanish away from this world.

¹⁵ **Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."** Do you have a bucket list – the things you want to do – before you go to Heaven? If the Lord wills – I would really like to go with Nancy to Paris – to have some of that bread you always see in the movies – long loaves of French bread. To sit in a café on the sidewalk with the heat lamps above – to have French roast coffee and a croissant – or some Mousse du Chocolate – which they eat with a huge spoon – or some French onion soup or some duc al'orange or some escargot with some white wine, not too sweet and not too expensive. To have a French waiter say, "Voila!" and the linen napkin would float down on your lap – and he would say, "Bon apatite!" I would like to walk hand and hand – along the West Bank. I would like to have a bowl of noodles beside the Great Wall of China. I would like to go to Luther land – and to Italy – to have some pasta in Venice and Milan. I would like to build a model ship out of wood – with little cloth sails. I would like to go to Haiti with Uncle Terry and I would like to sculpt something like Michelangelo and paint something like Van Gogh – and that's it for now! If it is God's will – I will do all these things and more. And if it's not God's will – I won't do any of them! It's all safe in God's hands. Because of everything God does perfectly – long range planning is right up there! So – I'm good whatever happens. The fact is – if I had the sufferings of Job from now until I died – I would have to say – God has been very very good to me! I have so much to be thankful for – eternity won't be long enough to say thank you!

¹⁶ **But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.** ¹⁷ **Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.** Do the right thing! The opposite of arrogance is humility! Humility is one of those things you know when you see it – or hear it! I was in the hospital late Friday afternoon. When I came in the hospital I heard

Christmas music – piano and cello! Nice, I thought, signed in, got a ½ cup of coffee and went to make my visit! When I came back down again – you could again hear the music. It was beautiful! I thought – that must be one very good sound system. There was a laptop computer open – maybe it was that! Then I saw a very nice little grandma from church sitting in the very back of the Bistro! Only when I went back to say, “Blessed Christmas!” – to her – that I saw the guy playing the piano and the guy playing the cello! Now that’s humble – when you sit so far back in the corner – almost nobody will actually see you! They will only hear you! That’s humble – to play in the corner – not on a stage – that says – hey, look at me. But to be literally out of sight – playing just so everyone can hear the beautiful music! This new year – by the grace of God – we have opportunity to serve Jesus in all kinds of ways – with gentleness, lowliness and humility. To make sure that people don’t notice us. They notice Jesus – our Savior – the Lord of our life – who holds the future safe and secure in his nail marked hands. Amen!