

**James 20 – Faith vs. Presumption**  
**Pastor Joe Oakley – GFC – 10/8/23**

We are continuing our journey through the James in a series entitled Wisdom for Everyday Life. Today I'm preaching sermon entitled Faith vs. Presumption. Our text is 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." 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. Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.*

**Is God against planning? No! He's against presumption. He's against making plans without Him.**

These verses are dealing with people making business plans, but the principles apply to every kind of plan. The people in these verses made business plans that included setting the time of departure, selecting a location, determining the length of stay, all with the goal of making money.

Is making plans wrong? NO. But some Christians go to one extreme or another regarding planning. Some Christians even have the misconception that setting goals and making plans is wrong. They think they should just trust God. Well – you should trust God – but do you know that the Bible tells us to plan? Some people misunderstand Bible verses like Proverbs 16:9 which says:

*In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.*

They take this verse to mean that you can make plans, but God will just override them, so what's the point? That's not what this verse means. The Living Bible tells us what it means: *We should make plans - counting on God to direct us.*

**Making plans and trusting God are not mutually exclusive. We should make plans and trust God.** James is addressing the other extreme of making plans without seeking God. I believe that Proverbs 16:9 means to seek God for a plan and then trust Him with the outcome. We all see through a glass darkly. We are not perfect in hearing God. So, we should seek the Lord when making plans and then hold them with an open hand submitted to the will of God.

Notice the 4 expressions of the plan these people made in James 4: "we will go," "we will spend," "we will trade," and "we will make money." This shows that their plans are firm and full of confidence and expectations. But it was all based on their will, not God's will. In fact, God was not included at all!

When I read this it reminded me of Lucifer's 5 "I wills" found in Isaiah 14:13-15

*For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation... I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit.*

Lucifer's pride and presumption in exalting his will over God's will resulted in him being kicked out of heaven. **The essence of the sin of presumption is choosing your will over God's.** Actually, presumption is trying to force God to do our will.

Satan actually tempted Jesus with the sin of presumption in Luke 4 when he took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and tempted Him to throw Himself down presuming that the angels would catch Him. Jesus answered the devil with Scripture showing that the devil's Scripture-backed proposition was actually disobedience and sin.

So, James rebukes people who make plans apart from an awareness of the will of God, and with an underestimation of their own limitations and an overestimation of their ability to accomplish things apart from God. This attitude that James challenged goes far beyond making wise plans for the future. These people were presuming upon things that were not in their power.

Also – they had no thought of God or His kingdom. Did they say, 'We will to-day or to-morrow do such and such a thing for the glory of God, and for the extension of His kingdom'? Oh, no, there was not a word about God in it, from beginning to end!

James is obviously not rebuking his readers for making detailed and wise business decisions in advance. The problem is that they make plans without the Great Planner; they leave God out of their planning. And that is presumption.

**Presumption means, "to take too much for granted; showing over confidence and arrogance."** Synonyms include arrogant, impertinent, audacious, pompous, pretentious, rash, self-assured, conceited, egotistic, and self-reliant.

The word presume is similar to the word assume. Both words are based upon supposition rather than fact, but one is stronger than the other. To assume is to suppose something to be true.

To presume is to suppose something with confidence—and then it has the further connotation of acting upon it. Presumption is acting on an assumption rather than a word from God. Presumption then, is the arrogant attitude of one who confidently assumes a thing to be true and then acts upon it.

It is taking upon oneself the authority to do something that 1) he has either not been given to do at all or 2) has been given to another.

And **the Bible says that presumption is a very serious sin.** That's why Psalm 19:13 says:

*Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.*

Notice the presumption is a great transgression. That's because of what presumption does! It controls and dominates your life. It takes the place of God in your life. That's why so many people who presume upon God turn on God when what they presumed does not prove to be true!

As I was preparing this sermon this week, I needed a good illustration of presumption, so I prayed about it and God brought this to my memory. Years ago at another church, a man came to me for counseling. When we got together I asked him, "What do you want to talk about?" He said, "I'm mad at God." So I asked him, "Why are you mad at God?"

He said he had been experiencing financial difficulties and he came up with a plan to take all the money he had, go to Las Vegas and gamble with it to make the money to pay his bills. He said, "I believed God was going to bless my gambling. I even asked Him to, but He did not. So I came home totally broke and now I'm mad at God."

Needless to say, I spent some time explaining to him the difference between faith and presumption. In fact, **faith and presumption are opposites!**

Presumption places ourselves and our decision-making processes in control ahead of God's Lordship in our life. But faith trusts in God and lives according to His will each day.

In genuine faith, it is God who initiates the desire for change, and we respond with obedience to what God has initiated. In presumption, it is we who initiate our desire for something, and we try to force our desire on God by one means or another.

There's a big difference between faith and presumption. The difference is hearing from God, obeying God and trusting God with the outcome. Romans 10:17 says:

*Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

Notice, it does not say faith comes by hearing the word of God. It says faith comes by hearing and hearing comes by the word of God. When you spend time with God in His word, He will speak to you and when God speaks to you, it will build faith.

**We can't just arbitrarily decide what we want and then presume that God will make it happen.**

We cannot decide on our own apart from God that we want a new house or a new car and speak it into existence. We can't decide were going to go on a Hawaiian vacation and all we have to do is speak it and God is obligated to oblige us. That's not how it works.

There is a difference between faith and presumption. **Our words only have power when in faith we speak God's word and God's will and then trust in God's ways and God's timing.** Lamentations 3:37 says:

*Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it?*

Yes, our words have power, yes our words must be spoken in faith - but if our words don't line up with the word of God we are wasting our breath. In Jeremiah 1:12 God says...

*I am watching over My word to accomplish it.*

Not our words – His Word! To have power, our words must speak His Word. That's why Psalm 2:7 says: *I will declare the decree of the Lord.*

To avoid presumption, we only move out in response to the word of God. For instance – think about when Peter walked on the water. You see, Peter was not in charge of the water-walking – Jesus was! Peter did not walk on the water until Jesus called him out of the boat. He was moved to action by the word of God, not by His own will.

As far as we know, Peter never walked on water again. He only did it when Jesus told him to. To do otherwise would be presumptuous. And we should only get out of the boat at the command of God. Otherwise, we would be presumptuous.

Faith is based on what the word of God reveals about the character of God, the ways of God and the will of God. Presumption is believing something to be true because it seems reasonable to us, to our will and our ways – even without any proof.

Faith comes by hearing God and it is expressed in trusting God no matter what. Presumption tells God what to do and then gets upset if He doesn't do it.

Faith requires total dependance on God. Presumption is total dependance on self. The goal of faith is to glorify God. The goal of presumption is to glorify self.

Faith is characterized by humility. Presumption is characterized by arrogance. That's why James said in James 4:16

*As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.*

**Not submitting to the will of God is the ultimate arrogance.**

James says that **arrogance is the cause of presumption**. Arrogance causes us to not take God into account in making plans. Arrogance refers to pride and self confidence in defiance of God. This is made obvious by bragging or boasting in self.

The Greek word for boasting alazoneia. Vine's Bible Dictionary says that alazoneia originally described the characteristics of a wandering quack. He offered cures which were no cures and boasted to be able to do things that he was not able to do.

In our own history – at one time quack doctors – called snake oil salesmen – outnumbered real doctors 3 to 1 as they sold fake medicine with the boast it was a miracle cure for anything. James says this is a picture of those who boast in their presumptions about what they will accomplish in the future without God!

James' conclusion is that all such boasting is evil. It is evil because it leaves God out of our planning, as though He does not matter. It sets human beings above God and robs Him of the glory and sovereignty that belong to Him alone.

I was surprised to learn that in the Hebrew – **the word presumption has the same root word as the sin of pride**. Presumption is rooted in pride – thinking that I know better than God! Presumption assumes that my will is God's will. But we should always be submitted to the will of God.

Presumption is when we don't seek God, but instead make our own decisions about where we live, who we marry, what job we choose, what church we attend, how we spend our money, if we tithe, if we go to church, if we pray, read our Bible, if we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. But we will not succeed apart from God. We will not be blessed apart from God. We can go without God...but the result is always defeat.

This is what happened to the Children of Israel in Numbers 14:41–45. They disobeyed God and then tried to fight an enemy without God.

*“We will go up to the place the Lord promised.” But Moses said, “Why are you disobeying the Lord's command? This will not succeed! Do not go up, because the Lord is not with you. You will be defeated by your enemies.... Because you have turned away from the Lord, He will not be with you and you will fall by the sword.” Nevertheless, in their presumption they went up toward the high hill country, though neither Moses nor the ark of the Lord's covenant moved from the camp. Then the Amalekites and Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and attacked them and beat them.*

In presumption the Children of Israel tried to fight a battle without God's command and without God's presence and it resulted in defeat at the hands of their enemies. Presumption is taking something for granted without seeking God. And **God is not obligated to bless what we do in presumption!**

To combat this presumption, James says in 4:14:

*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.*

James says our life is a vapor and we don't know what will happen tomorrow. But God does! Vapor is like a mist that evaporates quickly under the sun, or like smoke blown away by the wind. It dissipates quickly. James is pointing out the uncertainty and brevity of life.

I use this verse a lot in funeral messages. No one can be certain when death will come. None of us know how long we have left to live. No one is guaranteed one more day.

**So, we need to live with an understanding of the brevity of life, but also an understanding of the eternity we face after death. We must be ready to meet the Lord at all times.** We cannot presume that we will all live long lives and die peacefully in our sleep. We should believe God for that – but we must not presume that. James 4:15 says:

*Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this or that."*

James shows us the right attitude we should have as we face the uncertainty in human life. We must entrust our future totally to God. Instead of saying "Today or tomorrow we will..." we should commit our plans – and our whole lives – to the will of God.

**The expression "If the Lord is willing", is not merely a casual formula.** It's more than saying the words – it's a conviction and acknowledgment that God has the final say on everything, and that the future is in His hands. This acknowledges God's absolute control, authority, and sovereignty over everything.

I did a study on this and was surprised how many times people said they planned on doing something, but it would only happen if it was God's will. I'll give you a couple of examples: In 1 Corinthians 4:19 Paul told the Corinthians:

*I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing.*

In Acts 18:21 Paul told the Ephesians:

*But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will."*

We need to always trust in the will of God. We need to say, "Here's what we plan to do, God willing."

Then James says something in James 4:17 that seems out of place.

*Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.*

As a conclusion of his argument against presumption, James defines sin, not in terms of doing what is forbidden by God, but in failing to do what we know to be the right thing to do. This is called “the sin of omission.”

**Sins of commission are the wrongs we commit or do.**

**Sins of omission are the right things we do not do.**

Not doing what you know is right is just as much a sin as doing what you know is wrong. What does this have to do with presumption? James is saying that failing to do the right thing by presumptuously not including God in your planning is sin.

In closing, when some people think about the uncertainties of life, it results in fear that makes them passive or inactive.

But, **uncertainty about tomorrow is not a cause for fear!**

**It is a reason for realizing our complete dependence on God.**

We don't know what will happen tomorrow, but we will not be in fear about tomorrow because we serve the God who holds tomorrow in His hands!

We don't fear tomorrow because Jesus said to not worry about tomorrow.

We don't fear the future because Jesus said He would be with us to the end of the age!

We don't fear the uncertainties of life because we serve the God who never changes! Hebrews 13:8 says:

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*

Malachi 3:6 says:

*I am the Lord, I do not change.*

Because of that we can face tomorrow.

As the old song says:

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow.

Because He lives, all fear is gone.

Because I know He holds the future.

And life is worth the living just because He lives!