Boasting and the Will of God
James 4:13-16

Intro
We live in a world that seems to have forgotten that it is God who is in ultimate control of all things. God is absolutely sovereign. Humanity has been able to accomplish so much that many times people convince themselves that they are self-sufficient and that all things depend on them. They believe that they will be able to accomplish whatever they set their minds to do. It is just a matter of hard work and a lot of persistence and talent.

But how often have people been proven wrong? It is good for all of us to work hard and be persistent, but it will take a lot more than that to accomplish our goals. One thing in particular that will play a very important role in whether or not we accomplish what we have set out to do is the will of God. Our plans, our aspirations, our ambitions and our endeavors are all dependent on God’s will. Ultimately we have to put everything into God’s hands and pray that His will be done and not necessarily our will. Humanity may propose but God disposes.

Context
In the book of James, James deals with a contemporary picture not only of his time but also of our time. The Jewish people were successful traders of the ancient world, they had great commercial abilities. Whenever a city was established, their founders looked for citizens to occupy them and citizenship was offered freely to the Jews, for where the Jews came—the money and trade followed them.

In this passage James writes to business people, Christian business people. He warns believers of the worldliness which causes its victims to neglect God and to arrange their lives as though He is absent and as if they alone are masters of their destiny. James tells his readers to be careful of self-confidence, self-independence and self-sufficiency in leaving God outside one’s plans and ambitions.

James 4:13-16
In this passage James has been dealing with the subject of worldliness and its contrast with true godliness. In James 4:4 we read, “You adulterous people don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” Basically, worldliness involves following the world’s immoral and unethical standards. Worldliness manifests itself in a variety of ways, but always behind the activity - whatever it may be - is the desire to be involved with the world and what it offers at the expense of one’s relationship with God.

It involves an arrogant, self-centered determination to satisfy one’s own wants and desires. One of the ways we manifest worldliness in our lives is by simply excluding God from our plans and activities.
We make our plans without any thought or concern for God and His will for our lives. It is in this area that James turns our attention to.
Verse 13
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.” “Now listen” is a forceful demand for attention. It is used one other time in the New Testament - again by James 5:1. James wants the attention of the business minded people who are involved in planning their business activities.

Notice the well laid out plan:
- We will go to this or that city
- Spend a year there
- Carry on business
- Make money

But without God or acknowledging God and His will.

These kinds of people display a confident assurance that they have control of their lives. They mark out their course. Their plans are well laid out. This is emphasized by the repeated use of the word and: (1) Go to such and such a city, and (2) spend a year there and (3) engage in business and (4) make a profit. There is a certain arrogance in this type of thinking because we honestly cannot direct everything that is going to happen in our lives.

Jeremiah 10:23 states this truth so clearly, "I know that people’s lives are not their own; it is not for them to direct their steps."

In verse 14 we are reminded that we do not know the future. God gives us memories to reflect on the past, but He has not given us eyes to discern the future. There is a goodness about God in veiling our eyes from the future, for if we knew what tomorrow would bring; we would live in constant fear. If you knew the day of your death you would die a thousand deaths before dying just once. Imagine if you knew of everything that was to come. It would be terrible. God hides the future from our eyes that we might live in confidence and in hope in Him.

Proverbs 16:3 “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.”
Psalm 32:8 “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.”

Verse 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."

The problem with the planning of verse 13 is that it fails to take into consideration the uncertainty of life. We do not know what life will be like tomorrow. In fact, we do not even know that we will be alive tomorrow.

Our lives are like the transitory mist that is here for a brief time and then is gone. The Bible uses various figures of speech to depict how fragile and short our lives are. Words like "vapor," "breath," "shadow," "grass" (cf. Job 7:7-9; Ps, 39:5; 102:11; 103:15,16; 144:4; Isa, 40:6-8).

Jesus demonstrated the folly of this kind of planning in a parable He told in Luke 12:16-21 of a man who had economic success but was a fool.

"The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' ‘Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns"
and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” “But 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?’ This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

In this passage James is describing the self-confident and self-sufficient person who does not acknowledge God in his business affairs. This type of person feels that success will be accomplished by their own ability and talent - no need for God. It is utter foolishness to leave God out of your plans, let alone your life.

“What is your life?” That is an interesting question. Some answers are given in earth’s best literature. For example:
- Hans Christian Anderson wrote, “Life is a fairy tale, written by God’s finger”
- Robert Browning wrote, “Life is probation and the earth is not the goal, but the starting point.”
- Thomas Carlyle wrote, “Life is a little gleam of time between two eternities”
- William Shakespeare wrote, “Life is a tale by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing”

James says life is like a mist that appears for a short while and then disappears. How soon life vanishes away. There are certainties about life and number one is that it will end.

**Verse 15**

*Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”*

Instead of saying “Today or tomorrow we will go to this city or that city…and make money.” The believer ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will.”

No one can live independently of God and have a blessed and happy life. It is foolishness to leave God outside of our plans. We are dependent upon God for life itself. We don’t have the power to control our own destiny.

What James is condemning is not the making of plans, or even planning to make a profit. Rather, he condemns the making of our own plans as though we are sovereign over our lives and we boast about it. ‘If the Lord wills’ should be in all the plans we make. In effect, we are called to acknowledge God’s sovereignty over life and all its activities.

This expression, "If it is the Lord's will" is used several times in the New Testament (Acts 18:21; 1 Cor. 4:19; 16:7; Heb. 6:3). The point is not that these words have to be recited every time we express plans we have made, but that all our plans should be made with recognition of God's sovereignty. We plan but we pray that God's will be done and that He will give us the wisdom, and strength to do it according to His will. The plans we make for tomorrow are totally contingent on God's will.

**Verse 16**

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

They had been warned in James 4:6 that God is opposed to the proud, but their actions demonstrated their attitude of arrogance.
The word arrogance (*Alazoneia*) carries the idea of boasting or bragging to impress others - making extravagant claims which cannot be fulfilled. But in ancient world *Alazoneia* was originally the characteristic of a wandering quack. He offered cures which in reality there were no cures and boasted of things that in essence he was not able to do. It’s like the typical Snake Oil Salesman in the Westerns who boasts of his concoction to heal all your ailments. Boasting is evil because it is an attempt at usurping the place of God. The Old Testament warned against this type of boasting.

In Prov. 27:1 we read, "*Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.*"

**Verse 17**

*If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them.*

James concludes this paragraph by stating a general principle that demonstrates why their conduct is evil. Sin is more than just doing what is wrong; it is also the failure to do what is right. And what is right is not to brag about your plans and endeavors but to pray to God that His will be done. Ask for His guidance and direction in your future plans and get to know His will.

**Conclusion**

James says that we must have an attitude of dependence on God and a recognition of His sovereignty in all the activities and plans of our life. It is foolishness to think we can control our destiny and future.

Finally, I would like to close with a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He said, “*I still believe that standing up for the truth of God is the greatest thing in the world. This is the end of life. The end of life is not to be happy. The end of life is not to achieve pleasure and avoid pain. The end of life is to do the will of God, come what may.*”

Jesus said, “*Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*” (Matt. 7: 21)

So, you have a choice. Your will or God’s will.