

## **“Lord Willing and the Creek don’t Rise”**

**James 4:13-17**

Sunday, May 8th, 2022

Have you ever heard the phrase, “Lord willing and the Creek don’t rise?” I’ve used it on occasion. The first time this phrase was known to be in print it was written by a man named Benjamin Hawkins in the late 18th century. Hawkins was a politician and a native American diplomat. This was back in the day when native Americans and white settlers were constantly fighting for land in the United States.

While in the American south, the President asked Hawkins to return to Washington. In his response, Hawkins was said to write, “Lord willing and the Creek don’t rise.” Hawkins capitalized the word “Creek.” Therefore, it is thought that what he was referring to was not a body of water at all, but instead was the Creek Indian tribe. Since the Creek Indians were prevalent in the southeast, Hawkins knew that there was a risk of the Creek Indians attacking.

“Lord willing and the Creek don’t rise” is a biblically correct phrase, at least in terms of God’s superintending the events and activities of each of our lives. If the Lord wills something to happen, it is going to happen. If the Lord wills something not to happen, then there is nothing we can do to bring about a different conclusion. God is absolutely sovereign and it behooves us to seek His will in every possible decision.

James addresses the sin of presumption with his readers in this New Testament letter which we name “James” after him. “Presumption” means to take God for granted in any possible area of life. Please turn with me now to the the last five verses of **James Chapter 4 (13-17)**.

### **James 4:13-17:**

“Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; **14** whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.

**15** Instead you *ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” **16** But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

**17** Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin.”

During the Battle of the Wilderness in the American Civil War, Union general John Sedgwick was inspecting his troops on the front lines. At one point he came to a trench wall, over which he gazed out in the direction of the Confederate enemy. His officers suggested that this was unwise and perhaps he ought to duck while passing the wall. “Nonsense,” snapped the general. “They couldn’t hit an elephant at this dist--.” Sedgwick fell to the ground, fatally wounded.

Presumption can be downright deadly!

We'll look at our passage one verse at a time, beginning with Verse 13 - "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit';

*This sounds like good planning, doesn't it?* Soon ("today or tomorrow") we will go somewhere ("such and such a city") for a specific period of time ("spend a year there") and make money ("make a profit").

It is good to make plans. The Bible commends the ant for gathering food in the summer to guarantee a supply in the winter (**Proverbs 30:25**). The Bible commends Moses for planning to lead his people out of Egypt. God blessed Joshua for planning to lead Israel into Canaan. Paul rightly planned to take the gospel to places where Christ Jesus had never been preached.

Applying this to our lives, we *should* plan for the future. Saving money and investing some of it for the future is a wise and responsible use of the finances God gives us to steward. Think of the five and ten talent servants of **Matthew Chapter 25**:

**20** "So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' **21** His lord said to him, 'Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' **22** He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' **23** His lord said to him, 'Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'"

Having insurance is another responsible way of protecting against loss of home, transportation, failing health, employment and death. Those who think they are exercising faith in God to provide for them while they themselves do nothing to prepare for the future are simply not wise. James said as much earlier in Chapter 2 of this letter. I've supplemented it for the the lesson from verse 13 of **James Chapter 4**, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith *without* your saving and investing finances, and I will show you my faith *by* my saving and investing finances."

**With verse 14**, James confronts the folly of making plans without acknowledging our frailty. "... you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away."

*How can we know with any certainty that what we think will happen tomorrow actually will?* Yes, it is easier to predict tomorrow than it is to predict next week, next month, or next year. But, it is arrogant and foolish to think that things will happen simply because we have established them to be so. Only God knows that for sure.

This past week I began planning which book of the Bible we will study once our present series on James concludes (there's only one chapter left after today!). As I began to map things out, I had little difficulty indicating what verses of James will be studied on what Sunday - they will take place over the next few weeks.

However, as I began to look at the rest of this year after James has concluded, it was much murkier what text of Scripture would be covered on what day. I tried to account for what Sundays I might be off, and what my health or other circumstances in the body life of the church might take place. At best, what I've completed is a template to help guide where we'll go. I'll need to adapt, to innovate, even overcome. I have a 26 month preaching outline I've developed.

James asks a penetrating question in verse 14, "For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." Wow - in actuality, we're not very noteworthy because we're nothing but mist - vapor. We are frail and we lack durability. To think that we can plan things for tomorrow or a year from now is to think beyond our capabilities to make sure they take place the way we think they should.

**As we move into Verse 15** - "Instead you *ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." No matter what we think about being independent from God, we actually are quite dependent upon Him for everything - the beating of our hearts, the breathing of our lungs, and the functioning of the rest of our bodies reveals our dependence we have of God. He must "will" for things to take place because we cannot will anything into existence, even our well thought out plans apart from God.

What James is confronting here is planning without seeking God. In essence, it is practical atheism. You may be familiar with the Latin expression *Deo Volente* (abbreviated "DV"). It means "God willing."

Pastor Kent Hughes writes, "*Deo Volente* is to be the constant refrain of our hearts as we conduct the affairs of our lives. "If God wills," must be written over students' plans - the choice of a life partner, future education, all everyday activities. Older people need to say from the heart, "If God wills, I will spend my time...If God wills, my children will become...If God wills, I will take up this volunteer ministry...If God wills, I will wake up tomorrow." All of us should have this heart attitude." (Hughes, 206)

**We come to Verse 16** - "But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil." "Human boasting is worthless, for it gives man and not God the glory. Such boasting includes bragging about accomplishments. This is not only unjustified but also totally unacceptable to God. It is evil. Through the personal experience of a thorn in the flesh, Paul is able to teach us that we can boast only in weakness; in this weakness the power of Christ becomes evident." (Kistemaker, 150)

**And, finally, we read verse 17** - "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin." Here's the person who knows there's a God, who affirms there's a

God, who knows God has a will, who knows God's will is supreme, and *yet who does what?* Disobeys it! This is absolute defiance of the God who deserves our obedience!

Poet William Ernest Henley helps us appreciate more this defiance in his well-known poem "Invictus."

"Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate,  
I am the captain of my soul."

Of course, that is not true. This describes the very essence of sin, which is what happens when we know what to do, but don't do it. Our souls belong to God. And He will dispose of them as He sees fit.

Here's what it looks like when presumption takes over a person's life.

"The clinical diagnosis is pancreatic cancer. His life expectancy is six months." With those words, 62 year old John Brandrick of Cornwall, England, decided to go out in style. He quit his job and stopped paying his mortgage. He emptied his savings account and sold all that he had (except the black suit in which he planned to be buried). He then spent every pound he had, enjoying expensive dining, entertainment and travel.

But as time went by, Brandrick's health didn't deteriorate as expected. A subsequent scan revealed that he didn't have cancer at all. "It was such a relief," Mr Brandrick said after hearing the news. "But that wrong diagnosis has left me in financial ruin."

Bankrupt and facing homelessness, Brandrick explored his legal options to sue for compensation for his financial demise resulting from the errant diagnosis.

Rather than living like we might die today, most of us live like we'll never die at all. It's this "wrong diagnosis" that leaves us ill prepared for what awaits us when we stand accountable to God for how we have chosen to live our lives.

*What decisions have you had to tackle lately? What choices are you presently facing? Have you sought God's will, help and direction? Have you considered the impact your decisions have on others?*