

On the Way with Saint James, (Part 5): The Gift and the Giver James 1:16-18; 4:13-17

Message outline:

1. The Truth about the Profiteer
 - a. The profiteer's business: "more"
 - b. The profiteer's boast: "mine"
 - c. The profiteer's blunder: "mist"
2. The True Pilgrim
 - a. The pilgrim releases
 - b. The pilgrim receives
 - c. The pilgrim is reborn
3. The Trail's Pioneer
 - a. The Pioneer went
 - b. The Pioneer walked
 - c. The Pioneer waited

Introduction

A schedule is a net for catching days. — A Dillard

Everyone has a plan till they get punched in the face. — M Tyson

The best laid schemes of mice and men often go askew. — R Burns

You know, there are plans. And then there are *plans*.

When we read and teach the Old Testament, it seems like the big temptation is to worship false gods. As a Christian and as a pastor, I'm in the habit of translating that temptation into modern terms, so that our idols are money, sex, and power.

Sometimes I wonder if I'm "translating" that idea of idolatry correctly. But just yesterday I was doing my daily Bible reading. In Deuteronomy, Moses says to Israel that when they go into the promised land, they're going to have kings. But that it is very important that those kings do not become obsessed with "multiplying gold, wives, and horses," because type of a king will lead God's people away from his heart. Gold, wives, horses. Money, sex, power.

When we make plans, are they the kinds of plans that will lead others, and lead our own hearts, toward the heart of God, or away from it? What if our plans get punched in the face? What if the day busts through the net of our schedule?

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James says if we treat our days and lives as a path toward pure profit, we're in great danger. Let's take a look at his warning.

1. The Truth about the Profiteer

First, we need to recognize the truth about the profiteer. To profiteer means to take advantage of people, places, and things in an unethical way.

a. The profiteer's business: "more"

What's a profiteer like? James shows us that the profiteer's business is MORE.

In 4:13 he says, some of you are making lots of plans, putting in lots of hours. You've got your weeks, months, years—maybe you've got your whole life planned out.

And I'm not worried about your schedule. I'm concerned about your heart. Because if you are planning your moments and days and lives as if your only business is to have more experiences, more money, more power, more freedom, more profit When will you need no "more"?

b. The profiteer's boast: "mine"

And while the profiteer's business is "more," the profiteer's boast is MINE.

James says: You people who (4:13) say "we will go here and do this and make money"—your attitude, verse 16 is arrogant, boastful, evil.

I don't have to declare from the rooftops that getting what's mine is all-important. I never have to publish a plan to take over the world to become a boasting profiteer. I can brag *to myself* about my superiority, and justify to myself all my ugly plans to get MORE for no one's sake but MINE.

c. The profiteer's blunder: "mist"

So the profiteer's business is MORE and their boast is MINE. Then James says that profiteer's has one great blunder: they forget they are a MIST.

In 4:14 he says: You've launched your "more can be mine" campaign. But you don't even know what's going to happen tomorrow!

Did anyone who went to work on Wall Street on September 11, 2001 know what was going to happen at the World Trade Center that morning?

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Did the soldiers marching to World War I have any idea that four years later, tens of millions of them would be dead?

Does any 40-year-old man who's in good shape, has a pretty wife and some well-behaved kids and a solid career think that he's going to drop dead during his daily exercise routine?

James's answer: no! You're a MIST. "What is your life?"

He's not saying this to be mean. Look at 1:16. He says, dear sisters and brothers, I don't want you to be deceived.

The word "deceived" is related to the word for "planets." Back then everyone assumed that the earth was at the center, that the stars moved in a regular way across the sky, and the planets wandered aimlessly. To be deceived is to be on the wrong track. To be wandering.

Isn't it ironic? You think you've got a firm plan. You've got everything mapped out with more certainty than the pattern of the stars. But he says, you're like wandering planets. Why are you in the business of MORE when it can all vaporize tomorrow? Why are you boasting of what's MINE when you can keep nothing? Why make this tragic blunder, forgetting that you're a MIST?

2. The True Pilgrim

James tells us the truth about the profiteer. And he calls us instead to the life of a true pilgrim. And there's three things he shows us about the true pilgrim.

a. The true pilgrim releases

First, the true pilgrim releases. Saint James says, "if we're going to travel a few kilometers today, you're going to have to take your hands off your plans."

The true pilgrim releases their grip from all that anxious and pointless hustling. The true pilgrim releases their grip so that they can have open hands. They start a new day, week, month, year, saying, (4:15) "If it is the Lord's will we will do this or that." The true pilgrim makes their plans, sure. But they have released their hands from the arrogant schemes of the profiteer.

b. The true pilgrim receives

And with those open hands, guess what else the true pilgrim can do? The true pilgrim, James says, receives.

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They're free to receive not just the events of each day, week, month, and year as the Lord wills. The true pilgrim is free to receive *everything* from God.

The true pilgrim (1:16), no longer is not deceived into thinking they'll live forever and keep their things forever and plan their experiences forever. They are free to receive (17) "every good and perfect gift from above."

James says, "Sisters, brothers, our Father is more stable than the stars and the entire universe. There are no shifting shadows of change with him. There's just solid, dependable, loving, perfect gift-giving. Be a true pilgrim. Be free to receive."

c. The true pilgrim is reborn

But the true pilgrim doesn't just release and receive. The true pilgrim is reborn.

Look what James says in verse 18. The true pilgrim is born not just naturally, but supernaturally. By the word of truth. Born by this giving Father. And he's made the true pilgrim a firstfruits of the whole creation. Now they're the beginning of a new creation, a new humanity leading a new world. Showing the world how to receive the Father's good gifts, and how to trust the Father with everything.

You don't really trust the Father with everything unless the Father has, by his own will, rebirthed you by his word of truth. By his Son, Jesus.

3. The Trail's Pioneer

James wants us to think of the foolishness of the profiteer. He wants us to become true pilgrims. But more than anything, James wants us to think of Jesus, the Trail's Pioneer. Jesus has blazed the trail for us, hasn't he? How? He went, he walked, and he waited.

a. The Trail's Pioneer Went

The Trail's Pioneer, the Lord Jesus, is the one whose plans matter. He and his Father planned for Jesus to go from the Jerusalem in above to the Jerusalem here on earth. Not to make a profit, but to give up everything. Not to carry on business, but to love and serve.

And so the Trail's Pioneer Went.

b. The Trail's Pioneer Walked

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And the Trail's Pioneer walked. Literally, he moved from place to place for three years, with no real home.

Instead of planning every moment like an anxious control freak; instead of bouncing around like a tourist; Jesus our Pioneer walked the same pilgrim trail as us. First. One steady foot in front of the other. Receiving his daily bread and everything else he had with thanksgiving from his Father's generosity. Experiencing our sorrows and troubles and weariness.

Until he cleared the path for us.

c. The Trail's Pioneer waited

And while the profiteer in all of us is looking for more to call mine; while we want it now, the trail's pioneer waited.

Jesus, the Son who had infinite and eternal freedom, went through his life saying "If my Lord, my Father, wills, I will do this or that."

And so even in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus had to say to his Father: "If there's any other way, show me. But if it is your will that I suffer and die, then it's my will. What is my life? I am a mist! I'll trust you to make something of my short life by raising me from the dead."

Jesus, who with his Father had no changing shadows for all eternity, saw the sky turn dark over Calvary; found himself in the valley of the shadow of death; and was put in the darkness of the tomb.

But the trail's Pioneer has blazed a trail from the grave to glory, the firstfruits of a new creation. The firstborn back from the dead. The trail's Pioneer waited till his Father exalted and glorified him. For us.

Conclusion

You know, they say that if you don't make a plan for your days, your months, your years, your life, then someone else will. You can't let anyone else be the master of your life.

But the reason that you can't let someone else plan your days and your years and your life for you is not so that *you* can plan your life. What is your life!? Your life is not for multiplying gold and wives and horses. And the one who gave his life for yours has all the wealth and power in the world, and loves to share it with his one bride, his precious people, his church.

The one in whom you have new life, the one in whom you have a freshly-blazed pilgrim trail ahead of you, and his Father, who gives every gift perfectly—which we know because he gave his perfect Son.

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If you are ready to walk the pilgrim trail and leave all that profiteering behind, then you can be sure that you'll never walk a single meter of the pilgrim trail without the trail's Pioneer right at your side. He's seen and felt it all, and he's made it all the way through life and death and resurrection to glory. And he wants you and me to loosen our grip, to breathe easy, to receive good and perfect gifts, and to walk beside him all the way home. Will you? Will we?