



Meditation

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If the Lord wills....

Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

James 4:13-15

As we begin this new year, the inspired James speaks to us. The Holy Spirit sees our need to hear the precious truth concerning the will of God, a truth to be applied to our entire life every step of the way.

The fundamental truth

The scriptural truth concerning the will of God is an important doctrine and fundamental truth to us who confess the sovereignty of God. The text speaks of the living, active, sovereignly efficacious will of the living God. That truth has several implications.

In the first place, what God wills shall certainly come to pass. God sovereignly executes His will, “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Is. 46:10). No man is able to frustrate the purpose of Almighty God. No man is able to change God’s eternal will. His will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Do you believe and confess that? The confession James sets before us—“If the Lord wills, I shall live and do this or that”—is possible only on the basis of this fundamental truth.

In the second place, God’s will is all-comprehensive. There is not one detail of history that takes place without the will of God. Many years ago I sat in a church where a well-known “Reformed” theologian was the visiting preacher. This man stood in the pulpit—before the face of God—expounding Psalm 2: “I will declare the decree...thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee.” This man had the audacity to stand before God and say, “Some people think God’s decree includes everything, that He even cares for sparrows, for birds. That is nonsense. God decreed one thing,

that is Christ.” From there he went on to deny God’s sovereign decree of predestination. Now, Reformed theologian or not, Reformed church or not, the god this man proclaimed was an idol, the god of his own imagination. The God of the Scriptures is sovereign. In revealing the all-comprehensive nature of His will and His tender care over us, Jesus says in Matthew 6:25, 26, “Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?”

There is not one minute of detail in history that takes place outside of the will of God. God wills the sicknesses that come to us in this life, including COVID-19, as well as the deeds and final destination of all men and angels and devils. All things come to pass under His direction and according to His sovereign determination. Unless we believe and confess this fundamental truth, we can never say, “If the Lord wills, I shall live and do this or that.”

In the third place, Christ stands at the very center of the whole counsel of God. Everything is for His sake. God’s purpose is to glorify Himself through Christ. And the living will of God becomes very personal at exactly this point, because Christ never stands alone, but always as the Head of His people. All God’s counsel is realized through the salvation of a people in Christ. The infinitely wise, supremely blessed will of Almighty God is your final blessedness in Christ!

When you sit back and contemplate this fundamental truth of the will of God, what a marvelous truth it is!

All that God determines to do is for the sake of His people in Christ. No wonder Scripture records so many speeches and songs extolling the greatness of God’s will! No wonder that the heavens resound with the songs of the angels and saints singing praises to God for all His wondrous works! No wonder that Scripture repeatedly reminds us that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called

according to His purpose; that if God be for us, nothing can be against us; and that all things are ours, even as we are Christ's and Christ is God's. What a blessed truth this is!

James 4:13-15 applies that truth to our everyday lives.

The text speaks of tomorrow. A new year, 2021, lies before us. This text speaks of that. About 2021 it says, "You do not know a thing about tomorrow."

What does that mean? After all, we do know certain things in general about the future. The Lord has taught us certain things. For instance, we know that the earth here is no abiding place. We know, too, that a man will reap what he sows. That also has to do with the future. However, about the future of our own lives, about the future of my life on this earth, I know nothing. What does God's will hold for us in the year 2021? We make plans for tomorrow. Perhaps we even make New Year's resolutions. But history is not in our hands. God is writing history. He has certainly impressed us with that truth in this past year, crippling the world with a little virus.

All things concerning your life are in His hands. How many of us shall see this new year come to its conclusion? How many of us will go to heaven this year? We do not know. When I go to the pulpit, I do not know if I will make it to the *Amen*. How profoundly that truth was impressed upon the minds of several hundred people when their minister dropped dead in the pulpit Christmas eve several years ago. Many begin to die right in church. In the short time I did ambulance work, I helped carry out at least half a dozen. Even young men and young women die, and children. I have seen it many times—seemingly in the strength of health—gone.

Every breath you take, every step you walk, it is all in God's hands. Every particular event in your life is known by God and determined by Him with absolute precision and executed by His living will. You must want it that way, too. If you want to worship God as God, then you must be willing to humble yourself as the insignificant creature that you are. That is our place. Our place is to say in all humility, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."

Our failed contemplation

But we fail to contemplate this truth.

"Go to now! Wake up, look at yourselves!" the Spirit says to us. "Listen to yourselves, to your evil boastings!"

James refers to merchants, businessmen. But remember, this is only an example. This one example is all-inclusive. "Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain" (James 4:13). We do this, do we not? We make plans, not even mindful of God's will. "Today

or tomorrow"—If not today, then tomorrow; I am the one to decide that. "We will go"—we have the willing and the means in *our* hands, don't you know. "Into this or that city"—I will look at all the demographics and projected statistics and benefits, and I'll decide; the opportunity is all mine. "And we will continue," we will work there—yes, I have that ability, too. "For a year"—however long I determine. "And buy and sell" and make great profits—there is no doubt. This is not a mere hope. This is the way it is; we are going to make it.

That is the way we speak. James is not writing to the world, but to the church, to you and me. I do not think you are much different from me. We already have begun to think about upcoming events and activities in the year 2021, and even beyond that. We make plans for the future of our children. Young people make plans for higher education, jobs, marriage. We make plans to buy houses and cars, to invest money, establish businesses. We watch our assets and investments and buy insurance policies, and all is well.

Well, is it wrong to provide for tomorrow, to plan for the future? I answer without hesitation, "No." Solomon tells us to learn of the ant, that little creature, that "provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest" (Prov. 6:8). Joseph was commended for laying up food in the cities, in preparation for the coming years of famine. The Lord calls us always to be good stewards of the things with which He entrusts us.

But we sin when we make our plans in such a way that we exclude God. We know intellectually the truth concerning the will of God, but we ignore it by the way we live. We do that in many ways. We exclude the will of God from our experience when we undertake things without prayer. We ignore the truth of God's sovereign will when we place our confidence in future contingencies and events without any regard to the will of God. Maybe we spend money that we do not even have assets for, figuring all along that tomorrow I will be all set. Tomorrow, I will have earned enough to pay for this thing...tomorrow.

Then when God wrecks our plans on the rock of His unchangeable will, we are quick to complain. When the Almighty shows us that we are creatures, and that His will is different from ours, we are quick to criticize and complain. We insult the Almighty.

But notice the folly of it (v. 14): "whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

Your whole life is a vapor, a breath. You go for a morning drive in an outlying area, where there are low spots in the roadway, and you see those little patches of

fog. You enter one and immediately pass through it; it is gone. The sun becomes strong; you come back that way a half hour later; the vapor is gone. It vanishes. Literally, your life appears for a little time, and then is snatched out of sight. Begin the year by looking back over your life. Where has it gone? Small and insignificant are we. There is only one Great, that is God.

Thank God that His will is sovereign, unchangeable, all-comprehensive and centered in our Lord Jesus Christ! Thank God that He is faithful to us in Christ! Now think upon that wonderful truth of God's will.

A comforting confession

Then you will embrace this comforting confession: "For that ye ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that" (James 4:15). It is good to say this—"if the Lord wills"—to say it purposefully. But you must not only say it. The power and the comfort of this confession lies not in saying it, but in the inward attitude of the heart. The meaning of this exhortation

is this: At all times, with all things, whenever we look forward, we should remember in thankfulness God's will and the accomplishment of that will in Christ for us. Then with reverence, we will bow before Him in absolute dependence upon His will for life and for death, for health and for sickness, for the accomplishment of any purpose or expectation. We will do so knowing that whatever befalls us is not by chance, but by the hand of our Father who leads us through all our life to our home in heaven. "Thy will be done, Father."

That is our comfort. We are led by Father's hand. If we were given the direction of our own lives, we would never arrive in glory; that is sure. But to you who are in Christ Jesus, this is your comfort. Our heavenly Father seeks our good. He not only knows our place in glory, He knows the best way to lead us there.

If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that in 2021. But whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.