

When I was an Ag student, a financial planner came to the college to share with us, all about the benefits of superannuation, and planning for our retirement. And so, he extrapolated the figures, and he showed us that by putting a little bit into super each week, by the time we reached the age of retirement, we'd be able to afford to do it...

Anyway, this got one of my mates thinking. And after the session, he went back to his dorm and did his own figuring... And he said to me later, "You know Michael, I've worked it out. All I have to do, is get my dad to put \$15 000 into superannuation for me now, and when I'm ready to retire, that'll be over \$1 000 000...."

He had it all worked out. His retirement wasn't going to cost him a cent, and all it would cost his dad was \$15 000. And he was serious. He was going to try and talk his dad into it...

He had it all worked out. He was 17 years old, and his retirement was already planned...

*I thought I had **my** life figured out too. All I ever wanted to be was a farmer. I was at Ag College, and so the next step was "Go home and work on the family farm". One day I was going to inherit "Tenomby", and that's where I was going to die....*

Obviously, not everything went according to plan.

*My **wife**, on the other hand, well, she **didn't** have **everything** figured out, but the one thing she did know was "She was not going to be married to a minister" ... How's that going for you, Robyn??? Obviously, not everything went according to*

her plan, either. She thought she was safe when she married a farmer...

Today's message, is about the sovereignty of God. It's about how, when we make **our** plans, what part does **God** figure, in those plans? And does The Lord have a right to change them?

God is **king**. God is sovereign. And if our Heavenly Father, is **our** King, how does His kingship – how does His Lordship – how does His **rule**,,, impact on **our** lives, and on **our** plans?

I've asked Justin to share a bit of **his** family's story:.....

I asked **Justin** to share **his** family story, because I want to make this real for you. You see, there's a danger, that when we pastor/minister types start telling **our** story, because, most other people just turn off. (Not because it's boring, but because you might feel that it's irrelevant for you).

It's all very good and nice for me to share how I had my plans and dreams and ambitions, to go farming, and how God took all that away. And of course I could tell you how, in hind-sight, God obviously had a **different** purpose for me – to go to Bible College, and become a full-time minister, and then to leave a thriving church, and to start another one from scratch...

I could tell you that whole story, and you'd probably agree, "Yes, God was at work.", but you'd probably also dismiss it, as being irrelevant for you...

You see, sometimes we feel there's 2 levels of calling. We feel there are: - those who are called to full time ministry ("They're the special people".. preachers & Pastors & missionaries & chaplains); - but then there's the rest of us.

And so, if I tell my story, about how I had my plans, and God diverted me from them, you may be just as likely to say, "Well, that's fine for you minister types.... But, God's not going to call **me** to be a pastor, and so God's not likely to divert **my** plans, anything like that..." And we act as if God doesn't lead and direct **anyone** but those that He's calling, into a full-time ministry. What a nonsense...

The point is, "The Lord has a plan and a purpose, for each and every one of us." And He only reveals His plan to us, one step at a time. And so The Lord **demand**s, that we be open to His leading and direction, and that our plans, are **always**, subject to **His** revision, and to His sovereign will.

A few weeks ago, Justin preached on Wisdom, and how "Godly Wisdom" isn't about "**knowing** stuff" – It's about "obedience" to our Heavenly Father. And he quoted Charles Stanley, who said: "*Earthly wisdom, is doing what comes naturally.* (and of course, that would have to include good honest planning: planning a career; a business plan; a plan for when to get married and how many kids to have; planning for our kids education; planning for retirement. That's natural wisdom – worldly wisdom)... **Godly wisdom is doing what the *Holy Spirit* compels us to do.**"

Justin also said “*Wisdom = lifestyle*”. Alright, it’s not just about what we believe – it’s about how we live. (Which is very much the drive of James’ letter).

And so, a life of Godly Wisdom, means that our plans, are subject to God’s sovereign will... Worldly wisdom, would have us revising our plans, periodically.... But as disciples of Jesus, our plans and even our current circumstances, must always be open, for **immediate** adjustment, because God is King. And as **our** King, He has every right (no matter how marvellous our planning) the Lord has every right, to screw our plans up, and throw them in the bin.

Henry Blackaby says:

*You cannot stay where you are, **and** go with God.*

Adjusting your life to God, is another turning point. If you choose to make the adjustment, you can move on to obedience. If you refuse to make the adjustment, you will miss what God has in store for your life.ⁱ

For most of last year, I was preaching my way through the book of Acts. And something that I noticed, was time and time again, people would have plans, “I’m going to go such-and-such-a place, and do such-and-such”,,, But then the Lord would step in, and take them in a very different and unexpected direction ...

And because they were willing to drop **their** plans, and follow this **new** direction, the Lord did amazing works through them...

And wow, I wonder, what amazing things the Lord would do through **this** church, if only every one of us, were willing to make major adjustments to our lives, to obediently follow Jesus....

And I really like the way James talks from a business point-of-view, rather than a ministry point-of-view... You see, James is such a tremendously practical letter. It's not so easy for us to dismiss it, as being "irrelevant".

It's very easy for those of us who run a business, or for those of us with a career, to understand what James is saying. In fact, it's very easy for **any** of us, who have a plan of any sort (a plan; or an ambition; or a dream) to understand what James is saying.

Let's look at it again:

¹³ Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— ¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Anyone involved in business these days, really has to have some kind of a plan. If you go to the bank to get some finance, they're going to want to see cash-flow budgets for the next few years... They want to see a business plan. You have to be able to state: Where you're going; what you're aiming for; what you're hoping to achieve...

So, let me ask a question, "Is James telling us, that as a Christian, it is wrong to make plans?" No, that's not what he's saying.

Is he saying, "It's wrong to make a profit"? No, that's not what he's saying either.

What James condemns, is the arrogance of certitude. It is arrogant, to be certain of our future. Because such certainty, elevates **us** to the position of God.

"This is where I am going. This is what I am going to do. This is where my life is headed." "I'm setting my goals, and I'm going to achieve them."... Arrogance. How could I possibly know, where I will be at a year from now, when I mightn't even live until tomorrow?

James is warning us, about having a certainty to our plans, that closes off any possibility that the Lord (in His sovereignty) will direct us to something entirely different.... He may even cut our life short... The Lord has that right... Can you accept that?

James says, **What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.**

That is so true, but many of us live, as if it isn't. We all know that life is short. *The research is now in, and it's been confirmed. 100% of Australians will die...*

But we want to be more significant than a vanishing mist. And so we do everything that we can, to stretch our lives.

Did you know that our governments, are really worried, about how our nation, and our health system, can cope under the strain of an aging population, trying to squeeze a few more days or weeks out of life. This present, physical life, is often seen as the most valuable thing. And we spend hundreds of thousands of dollars, in medical care, in the last week of a person's life. It's sending our country broke. It's accumulating a debt, that our children and our grand children will suffer, so we can get an extra week or two of life....

Scrivo has a saying, "Cemeteries are full of people who the world could never live without..."

The worldly perspective, is "I am significant". But the Godly perspective on life, is one of humility.

One of the biggest challenges, for disciples of Jesus today, is to get rid of the feeling of self-importance that we have, and to get back to the Biblical understanding of life. My earthly life, is like a mist – it appears for a while, and then it's gone.

Paul talked about it, in terms of treasure inside of a jar of clay... The physical life, ends – like a jar of clay that

breaks... But inside, we have something eternal – we have this treasure – a soul that is resurrected to a new, eternal life...

And many of us need to learn Godly humility. Our physical life isn't as precious as we like to think. You know, psychology would tell us that we need to increase people's self-esteem... Jesus never did that... He taught us to look **beyond** ourselves. He taught us to seek first, the kingdom of God. Our worth is not found in who we are, on this earth. Our worth is found in Christ – an eternal worth.

And when we begin to understand this, and live with **this** understanding, **our** plans won't be so important – in fact, our primary plan, will be to seek first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and He'll see that we have everything else we need.

Let's humble ourselves a bit. The Lord is the King. We are His servants... We might make our plans to stretch out for 10, 20, maybe even 40, 50 years... But we don't even know what's going to happen tomorrow.

As soon as I read this passage, I instantly thought of a parable Jesus told about a top-notch farmer. He said, "What am I going to do with all grain I've grown?" "I know, I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. And then I can store up all my wealth, so I can take it easy (eat, drink and be merry)...” Luke 12:20 **But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'**

He thought it was a good plan, but it was an empty plan. It was a meaningless plan.

So, James says, we should say, **"If the Lord wills" ,,,,** this is my plan...

And of course, it's not just a matter of words. God's not interested in our words. He's interested in our heart, and in our actions. Are **my** plans, subject to the sovereignty of God?

*When we moved to St George, there had been a string of ministers, here for 6 months, 3 months, a year, 2 years... And for years, people would ask me, "So, how long are **you** going to be here?" And my answer was always pretty much the same. And it's the same answer I'd give you today: "I'm prepared to be buried here. I'd like to live the rest of my life in St George. But if the Lord tells me this afternoon, that it's time to leave, I'll leave immediately..."*

As disciples of Jesus, that's what the Lord requires. Jesus said to the fishermen, "Come. Follow me". And they left their nets and followed Him...

You understand this, don't you??? You know the right thing to do, is to adjust your life, to be obedient to God...? It's not hard to understand... Well, here's the crunch:

V 17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

If I know the right thing to do, and don't do it, I'm sinning against God.

Discipleship, is not only about “not doing the wrong thing”. Discipleship includes “doing the right thing”. It's about adjusting our lives, and our plans – it's about putting our hopes and dreams and ambitions on the altar of sacrifice, to follow Jesus. He gave up everything for us, and He requires us to give up everything to follow Him.

Jesus said, ^{Luke 14:33} **..., any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.**

Are you willing to give up your plans for Jesus? What does God want you to do, but it hasn't been part of your plans?

You know, most of us would like to think that God will only have us serve Him, how we want to serve Him. What a load of rubbish that is... He'll take you places you don't want to go. He'll have you doing things you never wanted to do. And He'll bless you as you do them...

Or, we might feel that He will only call us to do what we know we can achieve... But, God does the exact opposite. God calls us to **God-sized** assignments, because if we do what we know we are able to do, the world will see that **we've** done it. But if God does, what only God can do, and He does it through us, God gets the glory. And we will know, that God

has visited us, and God has done something wonderful in our midst.

What does God want you to do, that has not been part of your plans?

- Does He want you to teach RE (Maybe in one of the little schools, out in the bush)?
- Does He want you to start a bible study group?
- Does He want you to just get together, with one other person (who's not a Christian), and read the Bible together with them?
- Is the Lord calling you to go to Bible College, and to go into full-time ministry?
- Or is he just asking you to take one day a week, out of work, so you can take that day, to visit others and share the love of Jesus with them.

What does God want us as a church to do?

- Does He want us to plant more churches?
- Does He want some of us here, to be those who are doing the planting?

What does God want us to do, that is **bigger** than our plans???

And are our plans, subject to change, because as our King, God has the sovereign right to change them?

Let's talk about it....

ⁱ Blackaby, Henry & Richard & King, Claude. Experiencing God – knowing and doing the will of God. Lifeway Press. 2007. P156.