

Bible thought for ACM 2021- James 4:13-17

Isn't it exciting to be out of what feels like the coldest of the Covid times? The weather has been improving, the restrictions are unlocking, I even managed to get a haircut last week, after weeks of new growth. You could say that "was a great weight off my mind"- get it?!! A great weight (of hair) off my mind...? Nevermind!

Tonight as we look out onto the post lockdown landscape and come together with a new programme of hopes and dreams for the future, it's exciting to think about what we might do as a church.

But hang on. Not so fast. What we might do? Before we jump into activity mode, we need to listen to God. I was part of an annual church meeting exactly 10 years ago as we laid out our "2020 vision" for the growth that we were hoping to achieve. That church no longer exists! How many other 2020 visions got scrapped by covid. So I think James 4 gives us a sobering and important warning. Let's hear what God says from James 4....

"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.' 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. ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.' ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them".

James 4 is the go-to passage for how to make plans with the right perspective, even if we aren't all in the business world of v13. It's not wrong to have a 4 ½ year plan as we are going to talk about tonight. But this passage helps us to remember 3 important perspectives.

1) As we plan remember death!

v14. Covid has been a painful and needed reminder that life is fragile. I take part in a funeral of a family friend next Friday- husband and wife both died of cancer and covid within a month of each other. I don't mean to pour misery on our meeting, but death has a way of focusing the mind. Do you remember the rich fool in Luke 12? He made plans to tear down his barns and build bigger ones. God had other plans! Death need not be fearful but hopeful for a Christian- Christ is risen! But the OT tells us it's wisdom to contemplate our short lives!

2) As we plan remember God!

v15. If it's the Lord's will. You might have heard people say, I'm going on holiday "DV". It stands for "Dieu Voulant"- God willing. If God allows it. We are all the more conscious of the provisionality of our plans after the last year. And so we must always bathe our plans in prayer, asking for God's will to be done and not ours. That's why we started this planning process as a council with an evening of prayer, and why we need you to pray regularly for God's plans and not ours! Hence the bookmark which will remind you. If you need another one, let me know. More on that later.

3) As we plan remember godliness!

v16. Let's not be guilty of being arrogant, it's such an ugly attitude, and non-Christians can spot it: Thinking we know best and boasting in our scheming. When I get into strategy mode, I often do so relying on my own strength. No, v17 instead of evil we must carry out the good that we ought to do. That will mean making plans that are bathed in the fruit of the Spirit. Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, and Self-Control. Never underestimate characteristics like kindness and gentleness. It's probably going to be more important in eternity not what projects we step out on in faith, but the way in which we do. If we all try to do the next Christlike thing we won't go far wrong!

Let's pray.

Charlie Newcombe Annual Church Meeting 19APR21.