

BaptistWay Bible Series for October 3: Living as if God doesn't matter

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How can we live a life that matters? It may require a shift in priorities.

Our lesson begins with an admonition from James: "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.' 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" (James 4:13-14).

In our lesson this week, James says the things we think are important, in reality, are of little eternal consequence. Life becomes meaningful only when lived for Christ.

Living a life that seems right

Why do we carry on business and focus on making money? Because we believe real life demands it. When bills are piling up and job situations are less than ideal, when important relationships are strained, it's easy to prioritize money and making a living. It gives us a semblance of control over the challenges of life. But as we struggle to maintain control, we often live as if God doesn't matter.

James reminds us "real life" isn't real at all. Think about verse 14. Our lives are nothing more than "a mist that appears for a little while." Shouldn't we make sure we achieve God's purpose during our short time on earth? By taking our attention off our problems and putting it on God, our problems may take care of themselves.

Think for a moment about your life priorities. They were probably set into motion when, as a child, you decided what you wanted to be when you grew up. Even as children, we understand money, prestige, power and popularity can help us achieve our goals. Sometimes we make our life plans based on which choice will deliver these things.

Now let me ask another question. Do money, prestige, power and popularity help us grow closer to God and his purpose for our lives? In reality, they make us more self-reliant. And the greater our wealth, the more energy we must spend on maintaining it.

In short, our own kingdom becomes a greater priority than God's.

James' challenge

Today, James asks us to take a hard look at ourselves. We make plans that revolve around profit and pleasure. We hoard our wealth and possessions. But just as our lives are short, our "stuff" can disappear in a moment. Should something so transient be such a high priority?

Solomon says, "All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord. Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed" (Proverbs 16:2-3). When we're motivated by earthly success, we can't put God first in our lives. To achieve real success, we must seek God first.

Our challenge, therefore, is to adopt a more eternal mindset. Rather than building a kingdom for ourselves, we should make God's kingdom our first priority. And rather than being distracted by bills, work and other obligations, we must strive to discover God's purpose for our lives.

Today, James asks us to put aside the things of this world and commit anew to putting God first in our lives. We must listen to Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and

all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:33-34).

How do we do this?

- Seek God's will for your life. "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).
- Be renewed by your faith. "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24).
- Commit to live for God. "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17)

Trust that if you put God first, He'll take care of your needs. "Those who seek the Lord lack no good thing" (Psalm 34:10).

Food for thought

James focuses a lot on money in our passage this week. Is money inherently evil? Is it possible to have money and still put God first?

What's the thing in your life that can become more important than God? How do you keep it from taking first priority?

Do you know what God's purpose is for your life? What are you doing to accomplish it?