

“If the Lord Wills”  
(James 4:13-16)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. The Lord has made us many wonderful promises in prayer.
  - a. We may ask for whatever our heart desires: of course, if we’re believers, what we’ll really want is what will honor Him.
  - b. If we ask according to His will, we know He hears us.
  - c. And if we know He hears us, we know we have what we have asked for (1 John 5:14-15).
  - d. Even if what we ask for is something great, we know He is able to do far more abundantly beyond all we can ask or think (Eph. 3:20).
  
2. But what about when we don’t know His will?
  - a. I’m sure we’ve all thought about this.
    - (i) What kind of work should I prepare for?
    - (ii) What college should I go to?
    - (iii) What job should I take?
    - (iv) Whom should I marry?
    - (v) Is it the Lord’s will that my spouse, my children, my parents, my loved ones and friends be saved?
  
  - b. There are many things we pray for, not knowing exactly how to pray, simply because we don’t know His plan.
    - (i) James addresses this issue in our text this morning.
    - (ii) He reminds us that God has a specific plan that we need to allow for.
    - (iii) And the way he reminds us is by way of warning: to guard ourselves against presumption.

B. Preview.

1. We might consider for a moment that presumption – assuming things to be right that aren’t right, assuming God should work in a particular way rather than in the way He wants to work or says He will, or assuming things about ourselves or to ourselves things we shouldn’t – is another way to summarize the sins James addresses in his letter.
  - a. We should not presume that we’ll receive anything in prayer, especially wisdom, if we don’t ask in faith (1:5-8).
  - b. We should never presume that it’s better to be rich than poor (vv. 9-11).
  - c. We should never assume that God is the One who tempts us when we are tempted (vv. 13-18).
  - d. We shouldn’t assume that it’s enough to hear and know God’s Word without doing it (vv. 21-25).

- e. We should not assume we're Christians if we cannot bridle our tongues (v. 26), if we're unconcerned about the suffering of orphans and widows (v. 27), if we show favoritism (2:1-13), or if our lives don't produce good works (vv. 14-26).
  - f. We should not assume to ourselves the office of teacher if we're not gifted and called (3:1-12), if our speech doesn't promote peace (vv. 13-18), and if we're so self-centered that all we can think about is what we want and our way of doing things rather than how Christ wants to do them (4:1-10).
  - g. To insist on seeing things as we choose to see them or on doing things the way we want to do them is presumption.
    - (i) James has called this kind of "wisdom" earthly, demonic wisdom (3:15) and spiritual adultery (4:4).
    - (ii) He says it is to become a judge of the Law and of God.
2. What he has applied to these categories, he now applies to the decisions we make in everyday life.
    - a. We can never assume that the plans we make are going to stand; we must be ready to submit to God's will, if He has willed differently.
    - b. To assume that *our* plans will be accomplished is arrogance and sin.
  3. This morning, let's use what James tells us to help us make better choices and to direct us in prayer. We'll look at two things:
    - a. First, God has two "wills": His preceptive/revealed will and His decretive/secret will.
    - b. Second, we must always govern our lives by God's revealed will, but we must always be ready at the same time to submit to His secret will.

## II. Sermon.

- A. First, God has two "wills": His preceptive/revealed will and His decretive/secret will: Moses writes, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law" (Deu. 29:29).
  1. There are things He has revealed to us so that we would know how to live according to His will: we call this His preceptive/revealed will: His law of command.
    - a. These commands are revealed throughout Scripture.
    - b. But they are summarized for us in the Ten Commandments.
      - (i) The Ten Commandments are exhaustive categories.
      - (ii) They not only forbid certain things, but command their opposite.
      - (iii) They not only apply to what we do, but also what we think and desire.
      - (iv) They are a complete rule of practice.
      - (v) "I have seen a limit to all perfection; Your commandment is exceedingly broad" (Psalm 119:96).
  2. But God has another "will," a plan that is secret until He reveals it, a plan that includes whatever actually takes place in this world.

- a. This is God's eternal plan.
    - (i) It isn't something He made, but is eternal in Him: part of His Being.
    - (ii) It is His eternal purpose, what He has desired to do from all eternity.
  - b. It includes everything that actually takes place in His world.
    - (i) Not everything God commands preceptively will actually happen.
    - (ii) God had not planned to keep His creatures from falling.
    - (iii) Nor has He planned to force them always to do what's right.
    - (iv) In other words, God's plan/will is not that all would keep His commands.
    - (v) In still other words, His plan includes evil.
- B. Second, we are always to live by God's revealed will, but we must always be ready to submit to His secret will.
1. Whatever God tells us to do, we must do, at all times and in all places.
    - a. God has given us the commandments to guide us in the good and right way.
    - b. It is these He expects us to frame our lives by.
    - c. This includes *not doing* whatever He has forbidden.
    - d. And, as we'll see this evening, it includes *doing* everything He has told us to do.
    - e. God revealed this to us so that we would know how to live a life pleasing to Him.
  2. But God has a sovereign plan as well, and we must always be ready to submit to it.
    - a. Though we don't know what it is until it happens, we must still submit to it.
      - (i) Consider James' illustration: there were those who planned to go to a city, engage in business a year, make a profit.
      - (ii) What's wrong with that?
        - (a) In their hearts, they weren't submitting to God's will.
        - (b) They were assuming they knew what tomorrow would bring; but they didn't know:
          - (1) They might get sick, or die, and not be able to go.
          - (2) They might go to that city and instead of making money, lose it all.
          - (3) They might die there.
          - (4) James reminds us that our lives are like vapor that appear for a little while then vanishes away.
          - (5) Our lives are short and uncertain.
          - (6) It is presumptuous to say that anything we want to do will take place.
          - (7) James tells them, "But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil" (4:16).
          - (8) Solomon writes, "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth" (Prov. 27:1).

- b. Instead, we should say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that” (v. 15).
  - (i) Though we make our plans, we must remember that God will direct our steps.
  - (ii) “Many plans are in a man's heart, but the counsel of the LORD will stand” (Prov. 19:21).

### III. Application: How should this affect our lives?

#### A. First, it should direct us in prayer.

1. When we pray, we know we have the right and privilege of asking whatever is according to God's will.
  - a. We may ask for the things we need – work, finances, food, clothing, housing, a spouse, children, etc.
  - b. We may pray for spiritual blessings – spiritual strength, wisdom, God's blessing on our Bible reading and insight, more of His gracious Spirit, that our loved ones would be saved, etc.
  - c. We may pray for the needs of God's kingdom – expansion of His kingdom, that He would raise up missionaries, that all the nations would be disciplined, that every one would bow before Him.
2. But in those areas that have to do with His secret will, we may express our desires, but must add “if the Lord wills.”
  - a. We may pray for a job, but which one is in God's hands.
  - b. We may pray for money, but how much is His decision.
  - c. We may pray for a spouse, but He has determined how we will find them, and for children, but He has determined how and when they will come.
  - d. We may pray for God to pour out His blessings in revival, but when He will send it is His decision.
  - e. We may pray for the salvation of our loves ones, but whether they will be saved and when will be according to His sovereign will.
  - f. In everything we lift up like this, we must say, “If you are willing.”
  - g. There is nothing unspiritual or lacking faith in this:
    - (i) When Paul was asking by the Jews at Ephesus to stay, he was unwilling, but said to them, “I will return to you again if God wills” (Acts 18:21).
    - (ii) He wrote to the believers at Corinth, “But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills” (1 Cor. 4:19).
    - (iii) Our Lord Jesus, on the night of His crucifixion, prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will” (Matt. 26:39). (Christ, in His humanity, did not know everything in His divine mind).
    - (iv) If we don't know what God's will is, we must say in submission to His plan, “Lord, do this, if you are willing.”

#### B. Second, this should also guide us in our decisions. Whatever plans we make, we must submit them to God's will.

1. We might set out to prepare for one thing, but the Lord might direct us into another path.
  - a. Amos was a farmer, but the Lord called him to be a prophet.
  - b. James and John were fishermen, but the Lord called them to be His apostles.
  - c. Luther and Calvin were both preparing to become lawyers, but the Lord called them to be ministers of the Gospel and leaders in the Reformation.
  - d. Martin-Lloyd Jones was a medical doctor, but the Lord called him to become a preacher of the Gospel.
  - e. I doubt that Oliver Cromwell, when he became a member of Parliament, could have guessed that he would eventually be the Lord Protector of England.
  - f. Whatever plans we make – trips, investments, even wedding plans – must all be surrendered to His will.
  
2. The Lord may have plans for our lives, time, talents, resources that we have not thought of.
  - a. And so we must not be dogmatic about where we will go, what we will do, what we will say, how we will say it.
  - b. You have heard it said, Blessed are the flexible, for they will not be broken.
  - c. James tells us we must be flexible – willing to flex with God's will.
  - d. To presume on God, or to resist His will is sin.
  - e. Why would we want to, when in our heart of hearts we really want to be used by God in the way He wants to use us - isn't that what His Lordship and Sovereignty are all about – and also when we know that whatever He has planned is best?
  - f. We can submit to Him because He loves us, and because we love Him.
  - g. And so let us do so for God's glory. Amen.