How to Beat the Odds - Part 1

# Living for the Moment (James 4:13-17)

We’re beginning a brand-new series called “How to Beat the Odds” and I’m believing it has the potential to change all of our lives; because we’re going to consider our perspective, our priorities, and recognize the truth that our time is very limited. Now the sad thing is that most of us do already recognize this, but subconsciously we blot it out of our minds, we ignore it, and yet the truth is unless the Rapture occurs in our lifetime; you know, that blessed and glorious event when Jesus returns and takes those who believe up into heaven, the reality is that all of us are going to die.

And so, I want to talk to you about “Living for the Moment” because you really just don’t know how long you’ve got. Now, I don’t want to speak negativity over myself or anybody else, but we all know that the possibilities are endless, and so in spite of the fact that I could live much longer or I could just live less; we all must recognize that life itself is very brief. On the other hand, most of us have things that we’re looking forward to, planning for, or dreaming about. For some of you, you’re looking forward to graduating, others of you are looking forward to getting married, and for some of you it’s time to buy a house. Still for others of you it’s getting out of debt, downsizing, or changing your career, but whatever your dream is, you’ve started to plan for it, you’re considering your options and organizing your resources. And so, wherever you are on that spectrum this message is for you.

Now this series was actually birthed in my mind just this week as I was preparing for Wednesday night’s Bible study. The idea came from my personal reflection on James chapter 4 and how often I find myself wrestling with choices, plans, and priorities. And I believe that all of us find ourselves from time to time feeling overwhelmed by the invitations, activities, and decisions that are all confined to 24 hours a day and 168 hours a week. None of us are excluded, and therefore we all must consider the value of doing this whatever it is, or maybe whether we’d just rather be somewhere else.

As I reflected on this, I believe that we will all find it helpful to filter that decision, whether to say “yes” or to say “no” through the filter of if you only had six months to live. I assure you, if you begin thinking through the filter of having just 183 days to live, you will have clarity like never before. As a matter fact, you’ll find it so easy to say “no” you may actually find that you have some free time because so much of your time was occupied with those things that really don’t matter that much.

And so, if someone wants to meet with you, you might consider saying, “Well, I can meet with you for half an hour but no more.” Or maybe that project you’re considering is going to take away too much time from those things that are more important. Or maybe it’s that job you’re working on that’s requiring too much of you and with new found courage you’ll renegotiate. And so, what I’d like you to do is consider how your life, your Google calendar, or your day planner would be different if you had only six months to live.

If you have your Bibles, would you turn to James chapter 4 as we consider just how fleeting our lives are? I believe this passage will inspire each of us to “Live for the Moment,” because through this message, through the Word of God, you’ll recognize just how incredibly brief our lives really are. James tells us in chapter 4, reading verse 13 through 17,

“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 don’t even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You’re a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it’s the Lord's will, we’ll live and do this or that." As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins” (James 4:13-17).

James asks us an incredibly important question, “What is your life?” echoing Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes and then he says, “You’re a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.” Today we’re going to talk about “Living for the Moment” because life is brief, you’re here for a little while and then you’re gone. There are no guarantees, and so there are three action points I want to share with you as we consider “How to Beat the Odds.” And the first is simply recognizing that “The Right Time is Now.”

## The Right Time is Now

You see, life is fleeting, and yet we often find ourselves putting off till tomorrow what could be done today. It happens so easily with the pressures, expectations, and demands of all of our relationships. And so, we need to ask God for wisdom to prioritize our days like the psalmist did in chapter 39, verse four and five,

"Show me, O Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath” (Psalms 39:4-5).

In other words, the right time is now. And yet, so many of us are living our lives with this mindset of when such and such happens, then I’ll do this or that. You know, when I’m more comfortable, when I know more people, then I’ll start serving in the church. When I get a bigger house, then I’ll practice hospitality, then I’ll have people over. When I get out of debt, then I’ll start to tithe. When I’m in a good place financially, then I’ll start giving 10% to the church. When I’m done this or that, then I’ll spend more time with my family, then I’ll start investing in our marriage again. But the truth is, that your “then” may never come, and so we need to recognize that “The Right Time is Now“ and ask God to turn our “thens” into now.

You see, life is brief, it’s fleeting, it’s flying by, and what was once yesterday has now become 5, 10, 15, or 20 years ago. And the Bible tells us in Proverbs chapter 27, verse 1, never to boast about what?

“Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth” (Proverbs 27:1).

And yet, many of us are so driven and goal oriented that we’re missing out on life, forgetting that life is right now. But if we can begin thinking biblically, recognizing that the right time is now, if we’re engaged in a conversation, we connect, we listen, and we turn our “thens” into “nows.” You know, if you’re with your spouse, your kids, a friend or coworker, no matter where you are, you just make sure that you’re all there. This is it right now, so with everything in you, in this moment, you’re fully engaged and you’re there; because the right time is now. You don’t know what a day may bring forth.

And so, you and I need to start living now because if you don’t the moment will be gone and today wasn’t an accident. God made this day in your life to strengthen you, to change you, and to move you one step closer to the person he’s created you to be. And so, I’d like to encourage you to make a choice to celebrate this day, knowing that the right time is now, in anticipation of what God is going to do.

You see, the Bible says this in Psalm chapter 118. David said, “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalms 118:24). And so, our first action point requires a choice. It’s something you decide to do. And the Bible says this is the day, “The Right Time Is Now”, this day, this moment, because tomorrows not guaranteed. “You’re a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (James 4:14). And so, let’s you and I choose to embrace this moment, “let’s rejoice and be glad in it,” and wherever we are, let’s be all there. And then our second action point is that we’re going to “Do What We Know.”

## Do What You Know

Now you’ve heard me preach week after week about how God loves you, that you’re important to him, and that your life has meaning and purpose. And as important as all that is, as true as that is, there’s a qualifier that keeps that in perspective. And that’s simply that the world doesn’t revolve around us; that God is the center of the universe; not you or me. And without him, without God, we’re nothing. And without God our lives are insignificant. And so, it’s not about my problems or your problems, my goals or your goals, my plans or your plans, but it’s God’s will that matters. That’s why James says you ought to say,

"If it is the Lord's will, we’ll live and do this or that" (James 4:15).

And so, we need to have a little bit of humility, because humility reminds us that our purpose here is to follow God’s plan for our lives and not our own. Now, 9 times out of 10, this involves helping others, but chances are that if you’re like most people, you’ve got your share of good intentions, and yet you haven’t gotten around to doing most of them. You know, maybe you had the opportunity to give to someone in need, but you didn’t. You see the opportunity to speak a word of encouragement to someone who’s discouraged, but you don’t. You have the opportunity to serve in a ministry of the church, but you stay at home. And so, James encourages us to turn our best intentions into actions. He tells us to “Do What You Know” because verse 17 says,

“Anyone who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins” (James 4:17).

Now, if you’ve grown up in the church you’ve probably heard all your life about sins of omission and sins of commission. Sins of commission being those sins that you do, like lying, stealing, cheating, and so on. Where on the other hand, those sins of omission are those sins when we’ve done nothing. It’s not taking action when you know what you should have done. The apostle Paul acknowledges this very real struggle in Romans chapter 7,

“I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't…” (Romans 7:18-19 NLT).

And so, the solution to overcome that struggle is found in Jesus Christ and by being led by his Spirit. You see, we’re more than conquerors in Christ, and so what we need to do is ask God to close the gap between our good intentions and what we do.

We begin first by identifying those good intentions that God wants you to do but that you haven’t done yet. Maybe it’s reaching out to someone who doesn’t know Christ, going on a missions trip, serving someone sacrificially in the name of Jesus, using your gifts at church or starting to tithe faithfully; whatever it may be for you but you just haven’t done it yet. Maybe there’s someone you’ve hurt and God wants you to apologize. Or maybe there’s someone that hurt you and God wants you to forgive them. What are those good intentions that you haven’t followed through on?

Life is brief, “the right time is now” and so I want to encourage you to “do what you know.” Because the Bible tells us in Proverbs chapter 3, verse 27,

“Don’t withhold good from those who deserve it when it’s in your power to act. Don’t say to your neighbor, "Come back later; I'll give it tomorrow" — when you now have it with you” (Proverbs 3:27-28).

We’ve been talking about “Living for the Moment”, so close the gap between those good intentions and your actions; be obedient to what God calls you to do. “Do what you know,” don’t postpone it, don’t put it off till tomorrow, do it today before the sun goes down.

Action point number one is to recognize that “The Right Time is Now”. Action point number two, “Do What You Know”. And then number three, “Always Pursuing God” just go after Jesus with all of your heart.

## Always Pursuing God

You see, life is incredibly brief, like a mist that vanishes so quickly, and we don’t want to miss out on God in this moment, in this life, or for eternity. The problem is that so many people are settling for just a little bit of God, you know, maybe just enough to say they believe, but not enough to really lose their own identity. You know, it’s still their own life, they still do their own thing, and they’re still pursuing things that they want. And so, they might go to church, give Jesus an hour, toss a couple dollars in the basket, but they’re still going to do their own thing, doing life their way, and that’s honestly a tragic place to be because life is so brief.

There’s a story in Mark chapter 12 where Jesus was having a conversation with some guys and they wanted to know what they had to do to make sure that they’re in, that they’re good with God. And so, these guys are going through life, everything’s good, they’ve got a little bit of God, just enough to comfort their souls, to ease their consciences, but not really knowing him. And so, Jesus was having this conversation with these guys and the Bible tells us in verse 28,

“One of the teachers of the law came and…noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" (Mark 12:28).

Now consider for a moment just how important Jesus’ answer to this question really is; after all, he’s the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the God of all creation. And so, the answer to this question will tell us what’s the most important requirement for anyone who wants to have a personal relationship with God.

Jesus answered in verse 29, "The most important one is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:29-31).

And so, according to Jesus, the most important thing a person can do is love God. If you want to positively impact this world… if you want your spiritual life to be vibrant… if you want to have a personal relationship with God… the key is to love him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Jesus said this is the most important commandment in the Bible, the most crucial law in the universe, is simply loving God with all that you are. If you do that, all the rest will fall in place, because everything you do is motivated by your love for God. That will prevent you from doing the bad stuff and it will inspire you to do the good stuff. The man replied in verse 32,

"Well said teacher, you are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." (Mark 12:32-33).

When Jesus saw that the man had answered wisely, he said to him in verse 34, "You’re not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34).

Now, I’ll be honest with you, those words haunt me every time I read them. Jesus said, "You’re not far." In other words, you’re close, but you're not quite there. And so, Jesus said there’s only one point that you need to get and that’s to always pursue God. “To love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” That’s all that matters!

You see, Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost, to show us the Father, and to offer us a relationship with the God who loves us more than anything in the world. His greatest desire is that we would walk with him always, but listen to this statement, and feel the pain of these words recorded in Isaiah chapter 29, God says,

"These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Isaiah 29:13).

My greatest concern is that there may be some of you, you’re in church, but you’re not all in, you’re not living for the moment, you’re distracted and not fully engaged. You understand some things about Jesus, you’re close, but you’re not really there. Jesus said, “You’re not far” and that’s why the right time is now, that’s why you need to do what you know, and that’s why you need to pursue God with your whole heart and you need to do it now. You see, life is a mist, it's here for a little while and then vanishes.

Let's join our hearts together in prayer.

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