

A FAITH THAT WORKS

(A Study of the Book of James)

Christmas and The Will of God

TEXT: James 4:13-17

INTRODUCTION: You probably hear on Christian radio as I do Dr. Randy Carson talking about Intentional Living.

Fourteen years ago, Pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Baptist Church in Ca. wrote what I believe was one of his best books called The Purpose Driven Life.

Intentionality and Purpose-filled have become key words in the conversation of our culture and especially in the conversations of serious Christians. This is a good development, and if anyone should be committed to intentionality and living a purpose driven life, it should be those of us who follow Christ.

The entrance of the Son of God into the world as a baby born in a stable, wrapped in swaddling cloths, and laid in a manger, was an intentional event on the part of Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- **God the Father sent the Son.**
- **God the Son became a human being.**
- **God the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary to cause the Son to be born of a virgin.**

But not only was God intentional

- **God the Father**
- **God the Son**
- **God the Holy Spirit**

But also both Mary and Joseph

- **Mary and Joseph**

When Mary was confronted by the angel Gabriel, she did not have to say yes. As a young virgin already betrothed to Joseph, she knew exactly what was at risk. She knew her whole life would be changed by this decision. But she was intentional in saying, “Let it be to me according to your word.”

The same could be said for Joseph. His family, friends, and society in general would have supported him in turning away from Mary. But when the Word of the Lord came to him through the angel in a dream, he woke up and immediately did what the Lord commanded him to do and took Mary as his wife. His actions were filled with purpose.

Even the shepherds were intentional in their response to the angelic announcement.

- **Shepherds**

And remember that shepherds were not exactly known for their godliness or religiosity. Normally, they were rough and tumble kind of guys, far more prone to be found in the tavern than the synagogue. But after being overwhelmed by the appearance of the glory of God, nearly frightened to death at the voice of the Angel of the Lord telling them not to be afraid, and then seeing an innumerable company of the Heavenly Host praise God because the Savior of the World had come, they responded with intense intentionality.

The Bible says that as soon as the angels had spread their wings to go back to heaven, the shepherds said to one another “Let us go to Bethlehem and see what the Lord has done.” Forget the sheep! Forget our jobs! We have one thing that we must do! Friend, when you have one thing that you must do, that is intentionality!

And the Scriptures say, “they came with haste” to find Mary, Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

After they had seen the Christ Child, they still had purpose in their hearts. Because they did not rush back to the fields and the sheep, instead they went throughout Bethlehem sharing with others what the Lord had made known to them!

And at this point, we might all be tempted to say, “Well if an angel talked to me like He did to Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds, well I could get pretty intentional in my obedience too. But you know, I don’t have an angel. I’ve just got this bald, bearded, chubby preacher speaking the Word of God to me; and for sure, he ain’t no angel!”

Well, brother, or, sister, your point is well taken, I am certainly no angel. But you may be forgetting that we have something even better than an angel or a flock of angels. We have the Word of God in printed form that we can read for ourselves. And while God gives us teachers and preachers to help us understand and encourage our obedience, they are not a necessity. Any of us can read the Word of God and see what it says. And when we read something that God Himself commands us to do, it should have more importance than even the word of an angel. Amen?

So, in the Christmas story, let’s not forget the Magi.

- **Wise Men**

The Magi traveled more than 1,000 miles. In all probability they either walked or rode a camel. If you are thinking, I would rather ride a camel, that means you have never ridden a camel! Either way, it is a tough, rugged trip.

And what motivated these men of power and wealth to make such a difficult, unpleasant, even dangerous journey? No angel appeared to them. No angel spoke to them in a dream before they left the comforts of their home. So, why did they go?

Because as a part of the Magi whose origins went back to ancient Babylon but passed on to Persia, they were left with the testimony of the greatest of all the Magi, Daniel the Jewish Prophet. And they had a copy of at least some of the Holy Scripture Daniel had passed on, and in those sacred words they had read

Numbers 24:17 “I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel, ...

These men so believed the Word of God that without another man to spur them on or an angel to command them to go, with great purpose in their hearts, they set out on a rugged journey to find this One Who had been born King of the Jews, to bring Him gifts declaring their honor and their allegiance, and to worship Him.

Talk about being intentional. The Magi were!

What I want you to see in these Christmas events is that

- **When God intervenes in human affairs, He acts with intentionality and purpose.** His works are not happenstance or incidental.
- **And when God calls upon His people to join Him in some portion of His work, He desires them to also act with purpose and intentionality.**

It is out of this truth that I believe James writes the next words in his letter that we now call the Book of James.

James 4:13–17 13 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; 14 whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. 15 Instead you *ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” 16 But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17 Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin.

Now here is the setting in James. He is just talking about their everyday lives. He says, so, you see a business opportunity. You can cross the mountains to a foreign city and carry with you goods from your country that will fetch a very profitable price in the other town. Likewise, they make things there that are not readily available in your city, so you can buy some of those goods cheaply, bring them back and make a profit both ways.

Now there is nothing wrong with doing that kind of business. It is good, honest work. And God wants us to work, and He expects us to take care of our families. And James in no way condemns their business plan, but he says,

- something critical is missing in your consideration
- there are factors here you have not added to the equation

James says, “Here is what you ought to do.”

James 4:15 Instead you *ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.”

James is saying that,
No, the Holy Spirit Who gave these words to James, is saying that

I. GOD DOES HAVE A WILL FOR YOUR LIFE.

Now, you do not want me to take the time this morning to give you all the details on each part of His plan for you, because each of these main areas would not just be a sermon, but a series. However, most of you will be familiar with what I am going to tell you in summary today. If you are not familiar, and what I say is brand new to you, you keep coming here to SABC, and join us in studying the Word of God, and you too will learn the details. But let me just summarize what God's will is for every one of us.

- **It is the will of God for each of us to be saved.** (God is not willing that any should perish.)
- **It is the will of God for each of us to be a disciple and grow to be more like Jesus in character and action.** (For this is the will of God, your sanctification... 1 Thessalonians 4:3)
- **It is the will of God for us to help others be saved and grow to be like Jesus.** (Make disciples) Do you know how far ahead of someone you have to be to help them grow, to disciple them? One day!
- **It is the will of God for us to do this where we live, in other cities and states, and around the world.** (Jesus said, "Be a witness to me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth.)

There are other things that vary from person to person. I am called to be a pastor, but not everybody has that calling. But **these four things are the will of God for everybody!**

II. WE SHOULD TEST EVERYTHING WE PLAN TO DO AGAINST THE WILL OF GOD.

James 4:15 Instead you *ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."

III. WE SHOULD LIVE OUR LIVES FOR THE PURPOSE OF FULFILLING THE WILL OF GOD FOR US.

- Get saved if you are not saved.
- Be intentional in following Christ and growing to be more like Him in what you are on the inside and what you do on the outside.
- Help a relative or a friend get saved and then help them start to grow. If you don't know how to even start that,
 - Bring them to church and LCG with you.
 - Be intentional about learning how to share your faith.
- Be intentional in planning where you are going to be a witness and disciple maker for Christ.
 - Where and how are you going to do that in the next twelve months in Bay County?

- When are you going beyond Bay County to another city or state?
- When are you going to make plans to go to another country and fulfill God's will for your life?

The Holy Spirit explains one of His motivations for urging this upon us.

He says, because **every day, you are spending your life. You only have so many days and your opportunity to see the will of God fulfilled in your life on this earth will be over.** And those days pass by as quickly as a vapor from a candle, and then it is gone.

Don't waste a day!

CONCLUSION: The Holy Spirit ends this portion of the message with an admonition. He says, "I've told you what is right and good. Now if you do not do it, it is sin."

James 4:17 Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin.