



**THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE**  
**James 4:13-17**

In September 1991, the ruling government of the Soviet Union admitted something it had denied for nearly 60 years. During the Stalin era, officials once forgot to set the national clocks back one hour when they came off winter daylight savings time. They were so embarrassed by the oversight that the Soviet government stayed on the wrong time and denied the whole thing for nearly six decades.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to know what time it is. The nursing home that my son John works at gives the CNAs a \$50.00 bonus if they are on time for work for the entire month. Time is important to them. It is for us all.

The issue of time is at the center of our biblical text for today. We would do well to consider its vital importance in our sacred journey.

I remember once taking the A train subway line in New York City. Someone had erected a sign that said, “**Jesus is coming soon.**” However, some seasoned New Yorker wrote underneath it, “**Not if he takes the A train.**”

What James is sharing in these brief 5 verses is that we must be very careful not to lock out God’s will in our lives under the guise of human planning and scheming. James knew this reality of life quite well. He had resisted his half-brother Jesus’ teaching and ministry during the duration of his earthly ministry. However, when James yielded and surrendered his life to Christ – after the resurrection – he lived life with a new perspective and calendar.

Today, I want to talk about and probe for a few minutes this reality of life called time. How we use time – or how it uses us – depends on whether we are on the road to nowhere or going in the paths of righteousness.

William Penn, the founder of our Commonwealth, once shared, “Time is what we want most – but what we use worst.” I have a friend who, in his life’s journey, always seems to be the right person – at the right time – at the right place. It seems that the man and the moment always seem to be a marvelous match. I have always been struck by **Galatians 4:4**, which shares that, “In the fullness of time, Jesus came.” Every motor vehicle located on our parking lot today has an important piece of equipment known as a timing belt. Let that belt break or function improperly and that vehicle will either run poorly or not at all. That same principle is at work in our spiritual lives.

Yes, James is sharing with us that there is a big difference between the time that is recorded by the hands of wristwatches – and those events locked away in the mystery and providence of God. We live in that tension between our sense of timing and God’s timing. We know it is better to seek Kingdom time – but we often fall prey to clock time.

It is my belief and also a great comfort to me that God knows the human spirit and heart better than anyone else. God has known for a long time that we are not a patient people. God knows that most folks don’t wait very well (I think Adam and Eve first gave God this insight.) God recognizes that so often our understanding of time is limited to the clock and therefore, is fragmented and finite compared to God’s sense of time, which is eternal. We acknowledged that truth in our Opening Hymn today which teaches us, “Immortal, invisible, God only wise; Thy wisdom so boundless, Thy mercy so free; eternal Thy goodness, for naught changeth Thee.”

Dr. Menking – our Associate Dean at Drew Seminary – was the first to teach me the principle “Fail to plan – and you plan to fail.”

However, our lesson today clearly teaches us something may be the will of God – but if you step out ahead of his timing – you can ruin his blessing for your life.<sup>2</sup> It was in Chester, PA, - December, 1982 – that we could afford our first color television. The store delivered it – set it up – and then said, “You must wait 3 hours before you can turn it on or the picture tube will crack because of the cold.” That was the longest 3 hours in the history of the Ritz family.

James is teaching us in our lesson today, “One of the reasons we step out of God’s will – and out of fellowship with the Lord – is that we step out on our own without his blessing or guidance.”<sup>3</sup>

The Bible teaches us in this scripture lesson and in other places of sacred scripture, that because we are the ‘people of God,’ we are to view time from a different perspective. We are to use time – not have time use us. We are not at the mercy of a secular society – because we are to move to the beat of a different drummer. We seek wisdom from above. We learn to lean on the Creator for life’s purpose – not the offers of the tempter. We are a people dependent on God – we are not called to be self-sufficient – but rather to have the mind of Christ.

James is teaching us that when God’s purpose and wisdom becomes fully immersed in our lives – it gives a balance to this tension we all face and live with. It is like the man on the Pennsylvania Turnpike who said to the dispatcher “I’m lost – but I am making record time.” The stress and pressure of everyday life – does seem to lead us into a frantic pace.

My mentor Eugene Peterson points out that “every Christian man or woman who gets out of bed and goes to work on Monday morning walks into a world - in which idolatry is the major temptation for seducing him or her away from the new life of being

formed by the resurrection into the likeness of Christ. Our technology has squeezed all the sense of mystery and wonder and reverence out of our lives.<sup>4</sup> This is why the Sabbath seems out of place in our world today.<sup>5</sup>

Time has become the supreme idol and master in the modern era. However, as Eugene Peterson reminds us, “An idol is god – with all the God taken out. God depersonalized. A god we can use.”<sup>6</sup> This is why so many see work as a curse or dread it rather than delight in it. “Work – whether done in the church house or your house – is not supposed to take us away from God – it is to continue the work of God in us and through us.”<sup>7</sup>

Remember God wants us to walk in the paths of righteousness – to run the good race – to fight the good fight – never to just run in circles – even if we do it in record time.

Someone has written:

I have only just a minute.  
Only sixty seconds – in it.  
Didn't seek it – didn't choose it.  
But it's up to me – to use it.  
I must suffer – if I lose it.  
Give account – if I abuse it.  
Just a tiny little minute.  
But eternity is in it!

### **FIRST, WE DO MAKE TIME FOR THAT WHICH IS THE PRIORITY AND PURPOSE OF OUR LIVES.**

The theologian R. C. Sproul during a conference was asked, “What in your opinion is the greatest spiritual need in the world today for unsaved people?”

Dr. Sproul paused for a moment and replied, “**The greatest need in the world for unsaved people is to discover the true identity of God.**” He pointed out that most non-religious people do not really understand the God they are rejecting. If they did – they would call a truce to make sure the battle was worth fighting.

Someone then asked Dr. Sproul a follow-up question, “What in your opinion is the greatest spiritual need in the lives of church people?” To the surprise of many Dr. Sproul answered “**To discover the true identity of God.**” He said, “If believers really understood the character and nature of God – it would revolutionize their lives.” I agree 100%.

A colleague, Dr. John Piper, wrote a most convicting book a few years ago entitled, **THE SUPREMACY OF GOD PREACHING**. In this book – and another I am currently reading – he shares, “It is stunning how seldom God himself is proclaimed as the greatest gift of the gospel.”<sup>8</sup> Can we say with David, “O God, my soul thirsts for

God, for the living God?” Imagine what would happen if churches actually made room for God!

When our youngest granddaughter Arielle was recently hospitalized at St. Luke’s Hospital in Bethlehem, she said to me on the phone, “Grandpa, can you make some time for me and come and see me?” We went the very next morning. We do make time for that which is important in our lives. Can you tell me of anything more important than your relationship to God? What time do you have for God?

### **SECONDLY, TIME IS A TOOL EMPLOYED BY GOD FOR THE WELL-BEING OF THE BELIEVER.**

Our own Lowell Roth, when he retired from Superior Walls of America – made a list and schedule of all the things he wanted to accomplish in the next year.

He established goals and timetables for those goals. He shared them with me over lunch. By the time he met with me – he had scratched out the words “Lowell’s Plan and Schedule” and put the words “God’s Plan and Schedule.” Lowell knows the importance of planning – but also the importance of praying and asking for God’s discernment in the process. This is exactly what James is communicating to us in **verses 13 and 14.**

James knew that our walk with the Lord is to be more than a one-sided conversation. James and Lowell know that even our very best planning can be turned into a poor substitute for God’s perfect will.

Even something so insightful as management by goals and objectives could become destructive and counter-productive if not blessed by God. This is why James was so upset with the businessman with whom he was associated. The Christian begins each day acknowledging God as they plan – and live out their plans. James reminds them it is arrogant and not the right attitude to think that we control everything and know everything. Our technology – while a great asset – is minuscule before our awesome God. The future and its outcome is in the Lord’s hands and we must acknowledge that.

Joanne Forbes, who served on our staff at First Church – Schuylkill Haven, often said, “If you want to see God laugh – tell him your 10-year plan.” The great mystic St. Thomas a Kempis reminds us, “Man purposes – God disposes.” That is exactly what James is saying in **verse 14** when he writes, “For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.”

### **THIRDLY, ALL OF TIME IS ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD.**

Eugene Peterson is absolutely correct when he writes, “One of the bad habits that we pick up early in our lives is separating things and people into secular and sacred. We assume that the secular is what we are in charge of: our jobs – our time –

our entertainment – our government – our social relationships. The sacred is what God has charge of: worship and the Bible – heaven and hell – church and prayers. We then contrive to set aside a sacred place for God designed to honor God – but really intended to keep God in his place. Then our world tells us we are free to have the final say about everything else. The Bible will have none of this. **John 1:14** reminds us, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” God in Christ entered time and space as C. S. Lewis writes, “Nothing is hidden from the rule of God.”<sup>9</sup>

So we gather here week after week to be sure our time – and our work – is connected to God and his purposes. This is what James is teaching us today.

So the Sabbath is important because our world with its hectic pace almost desecrates time. The Psalmist said, “Be still and know that I am God.” Even then, almost 3,000 years ago, David knew without silence and stillness – it is difficult to be attentive and responsive to the God who calls and forms us to be his people.

Dr. Sproul was right. The deepest need of all – both in and outside the church house – is for people to know “the true identity of God.”

Only with God can you have the ‘time’ of your life – and know what time it is.

Amen and amen.

Reverend Eric S. Ritz  
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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> **“Proclaim Magazine, Illustration section,”** January-March, 1994 edition, page 39.

<sup>2</sup> Charles F. Stanley, **LIVING THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE**, Thomas Nelson Books, 2005, page 109.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, Stanley, page 109.

<sup>4</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, **CHRIST PLAYS IN TEN THOUSAND PLACES**, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005, page 126.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, page 126.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, page 325.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, page 115.

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<sup>8</sup> John Piper, **GOD IS THE GOSPEL**, Crossway Books, Wheaton, ILL, 2005, page 11.

<sup>9</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, **THE MESSAGE: The Old Testament Prophets in Contemporary Language.** NavPress: Colorado Springs, CO, 2000, page 9.