



(Today we rejoin our devotions on the book of James which were interrupted by the Christmas and Epiphany Seasons.)

13 Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: 14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. 15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. 16 But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. 17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. (James 4:13-17)

What wonderful and picturesque language our friend, James, uses in describing things both earthly and divine. As a little boy, I used to watch the vapours ascend from my mother's tea kettle. The steam was hot and formed a rapidly ascending cloud above the spout of the kettle. The cloud would not travel very far before it was no longer visible. I wondered, "Whatever happened to the steam?" Well, the steam still existed, but it had undergone a change in properties and nature. The hot moisture that created the visible cloud had cooled to room temperature and was no longer steam, but moisture which had been absorbed and saturated by the ambient air surrounding. James employs his wonderful descriptive nouns to picture for us the temporary condition of our lives on earth. Man is endowed with a spirit which is physically invisible. That spirit, given by our Maker, is implanted in our physical bodies at birth. Those bodies become the physical expression of the hidden spirit within. At the moment of death, the body begins to decay, but the spirit returns to God who gave it. The Preacher of Ecclesiastes says it best: *"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."* (Eccl 12:7)

The Service for the Dead in the Book of Common Prayer (1928) has a meaningful prayer for the moment of interment that includes this wonderful truth: *UNTO Almighty God we commend the soul of our brother departed, and we commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope*

*of the Resurrection unto eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ; at whose coming in glorious majesty to judge the world, the earth and the sea shall give up their dead; and the corruptible bodies of those who sleep in him shall be changed, and made like unto his own glorious body; according to the mighty working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself."* How sweet these words are to the surviving loved ones who know the Christian testimony of the deceased to be real!

13 "Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain." This verse has a particular parallel to the same example given by our Lord in parable. *"The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.* (Luke 12:16-19)

The circumstance which identifies both stories is the same, and the results are similar as well. See what Jesus says about the fate of the man who hoarded his goods: *"But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."* (Luke 12:20-21) We have such a short duration of existence on the time scale, yet we plan as if we have a million tomorrows when, in fact, there may be no more tomorrows at all. Our brother James echoes the meaning of our Lord: 14 "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow." The RMS Titanic was of such formidable construction that her captain, E.V. Smith, believed that the ship could not be sunk – even by God; yet she weighed anchor at Cobh, Ireland enroute to New York on 10 April 1912. Three days later she was quietly resting at the bottom of the sea in the frozen waters of the North Atlantic along with the perished tomorrows of more than 1,700 souls.

"For what is your life?" Excellent question! Have you ever stopped to assess what your life is all about today? Is your life doomed to the eternal death of the grave, or is it in the sure hands of the Lord who never loses or misplaces a single hair of your head? The French have a saying that seems to fit every circumstance of life for them: "C'est la vie!" (That is life!) This term may apply sufficiently while the body lives, but what about when the body dies? What of life in the eternal scope of reality? "It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." The morning mists and vapours that hover over the meadows are quickly dispersed by the rising of the sun. Where did they go? Their elemental composition still exists in unseen form just as the vapours above the tea kettle. And just so are the visible and formative moments of physical life changed at death. Every soul has an eternal existence – one to the doom of darkness and unquenchable fires; the other to the blissful companionship of Heavenly joy. The change is certain and immediate when we close our eyes in the sleep of death. The question facing us in this life is this: "What follows the sleep of death?"

So how should we live our vaporous existence? 15 "For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." Every Lord's Day, and in every Anglican or otherwise Reformed Church in the world, the Lord's Prayer is piously repeated. It is a 'communal prayer' for it begins – not with MY, but OUR – Father. In that prayer, we repeat the very serious petition: *"Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in Heaven."* Beware that you do not repeat this by vain repetition; else you will be taking the Lord's Name in vain. Do we sincerely pray for the will of the Lord to be done in our own lives, or do we pray that it be done in everyone else's life? "If the Lord will, we

*shall live*” Our very lives are, moment by moment, sustained by the loving hand of our Creator God. If He grants it to us moment-by-moment, should we not live it for Him and according to His will ‘moment-by-moment?’ Do we gauge our actions by His Word and Will, or do we indulge our carnal greed and appetite?

**16 “*But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.*” “*But NOW!*”**  
This is all that we have for certain, and it just passed away a milli-second ago. Do we boast and brag of our plans for a comfortable and plush retirement when that day may never come? Do we plan for our own desires to the exclusion of any concern at all for the will of God? Do we feather our beds with the soft down of the swan while our neighbors rest their heads on pillows of stone? Are you proud of your achievements and place in life? Do you not know that all such benefits and blessings come at the grant of God? Have you asked HIS will for your life – your next step – your next endeavor? Do you not believe that it is NOW time while time remains? All pride and boasting is evil because it rejects the blessing of God and takes personal credit for OUR accomplishments!

Our brother James is a man who wants to see evidence in our lives. The goodness of no man can save him; however, the good and new heart that God creates in us after salvation should be evidenced in our lives and works, should they not? **17 “*Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*”** There are many vibrant Christians who may disagree with us on points of Scripture. Their understanding may differ in what God intends in His Word. They may have understood wrongly, or WE may have understood wrongly. Please do not tell me that you had a perfect understanding of God’s Word at first reading. We must allow charity in the non-essentials of faith and practice; however, in the essentials of faith expressed in the creeds of the faith, and the clearly stated doctrines found in Holy Scripture, we must be united. If we KNOW God’s will, we must DO God’s will (forsaking our own). Of course, we will not need to forsake our own wills if we have “*taken on that mind which was in Christ Jesus.*” (Romans 15:6 & Philippians 2:5) Have you done?