

**TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH****SERIES TITLE: CHURCH ATTENDANCE | SERMON TITLE: THE LIFE OF A  
VANISHING MIST****DAVE WAGNER**

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James writes to the 12 tribes scattered abroad with a strong exhortation. He has all kinds of things to hit them on, from persevering in trial to helping the poor to maintaining good works.

One of James' favorite targets in this letter is the rich. He doesn't have a lot of nice things to say about them. He describes them as suing Christians, blaspheming Christ's name, and receiving sinful favoritism from people in the church.

He says the rich persecute their employees and even kill the righteous with impunity. As if this weren't enough, James even says God didn't choose rich people to inherit the kingdom!

As a quick qualifier, God did choose some rich people for salvation, though admittedly, Paul says God didn't choose many. Generally, God chose the poor.

And James rebukes the rich for one other thing. He accuses the rich of entrepreneurial pride. Here's what I mean:

He describes the rich as planning a business venture without taking God's will into account. He calls this arrogance, boasting, ignorance, evil and sin. Why does James think this is so bad?

Two reasons: First, we don't know what our life will be like in the future, even five minutes into the future. Second, we do know that, whatever happens, our life will be brief, uncertain, and vain.

Now this is not a sermon about rich people; they just happen to be James' target. Rather, this is a sermon about your life. Specifically, this is a sermon about the brevity, the uncertainty, and the vanity of your life. So let's take some time to look at each of these in turn.

**Your Life is Brief**

Ever noticed how the older you get, the faster time goes by? Doesn't seem fair! As we see the end approaching we almost would like for the train to slow down. But it doesn't. It speeds up.

It is a fact that however long you live, even if your life is long and full, your life is exceedingly brief. We've all heard of certain insects that live only a day, or even a few hours; everyone of us is like a day-old insect that perishes before midnight.

And that's if you live a full life. I'll never forget the 12 year old who died during a high school parade while I was in seminary. I remember thinking how strange it was that she should only live 12 short years.

Will most of us make it to the end of a full life? I don't know. I know not all of us will. Living in this world is like waking up each day to continue our journey along the edge of a cliff. There are a thousand things that threaten to launch us out into eternity before we've finished our three score and ten.

I've heard many people older than myself say how fast life seems to have gone by. Listen to the Psalmists saying this very thing:

**Psalm 90:10-12** <sup>10</sup> The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span<sup>1</sup> is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. <sup>11</sup> Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you? <sup>12</sup> So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

**Psalm 39:4-6** <sup>4</sup> "O LORD, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! <sup>5</sup> Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! Selah <sup>6</sup> Surely a man goes about as a shadow! Surely for nothing<sup>1</sup> they are in turmoil; man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather!

This truth is hardest for young people to grasp. They cannot convince themselves they will one day die. Everything seems so enjoyable, so exciting; so many possibilities lie before them. Or at least that's what they think. Actually, they don't know for sure what lies before them. That leads to our next point.

### **Your Life is Uncertain**

James says you don't know what tomorrow will bring. Actually, you don't know what the next five minutes will bring. Think of those who have suffered sudden threats to their life, say a heart attack. Do you think they knew what was coming five minutes before it struck?

Or think of someone who is mugged. How many of them had not the slightest clue what was coming in five minutes? Or think of someone in a fatal car accident. Five minutes before the crash they couldn't have dreamed they'd be leaving the world.

You have no idea what's coming. You've heard the old saying, "If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans." No mere man has ever made anything other than a tentative plan; no human plan has ever been set in stone since the beginning of creation. There is no such thing as a sure-fire plan. There are only potential plans.

When we envision our future the best we can do is set forth a rough approximation, but we don't know what unforeseen elements will redirect us. Some people are forced to have faith in God when life becomes obviously and undeniably uncertain, say a man with terminal cancer. But the reality is that everyone of us, all the time, is in just the same position as that man!

I am no more guaranteed the next few months to live than the terminal cancer patient! Don't you see?! We've been totally fooled! We've been lulled into a false confidence by health and strength and a car that works and a decent place to live and some money in the bank. We think things are going to be well because at present we're feeling well and things look well.

But the way we feel and the way things presently look tell us nothing about what's coming five months from now, five weeks from now, five days from now, even five minutes from now. We have been fooled.

Now we've taken measures to guard against eventualities, and that's good. What's not good is trusting in the measures we've taken and forgetting that all of these measures are no better than a potential defense. They are far from certain.

One pastor puts it this way: "20 locks on your door can't save you from a heart attack."

### **Your Life is Vain**

The third point is that your life is vain. This is to say our lives suffer from emptiness, worthlessness, and pointlessness.

Now that comes as a surprise to people, especially Christians. So I'll need to explain some and back up what I'm saying.

I mean to say that, because of God's curse on Adam and Eve at the beginning, our lives are shot through with vanity, futility, and meaninglessness. God punished Adam and all his children by cursing the most basic realms of life: Marriage, parenting and work. That curse remains to this day, and will not cease until this world has been baptized into death and resurrected anew in the coming of Christ.

What are the effects of that curse? Pain and futility in Marriage, pain and futility in parenting, pain and futility in vocation. In everything we do we are plagued with pain and pointlessness.

So, people bind themselves together in marriage, full of great hopes for the future, only to suffer marital misery and often end in divorce. Mothers and fathers invest decades into their children only to have them become estranged, to suffer relational strife with them, and to be disappointed by how they turn out. Christian parents often invest spiritually into their kids for decades only to have them turn from Christ and perish.

Men and women both invest many decades in their vocation, often to come to the end and lack the provision they need; often during their years of labor they wonder what the point of it all is. Why are they working so hard anyway, when it seems they can never get ahead? And even if they get ahead, does it really matter?

If all this weren't enough, there is always the Greatest Vanity of all waiting for us at the end of the road: Death. Death seems to crush any possible meaning we can find in our marriage, our children and our vocation. What does any of it matter if it's all destined to crumble in death?

Why am I working on a marriage that must be dissolved? Why am I raising these kids who will be parted from me, maybe forever? Why am I laboring for all this money just to lose it in death?

Now does this mean what we do doesn't matter? No, since the salvation of God has invested our lives with eternal meaning; our work in the Lord is not in vain, our loving service to God, in whatever we do, has eternal meaning.

But it does mean we live and move in the midst of a world cursed with futility. And we will suffer much futility from that curse before the end. In that sense our lives are vain. If anyone wonders whether this is a biblical truth or not, take some time to read through Ecclesiastes.

So, our lives are brief, uncertain, and vain.

Have you ever watched the sun burn off the last remnant of a fog? Or you take a cup of hot coffee or tea and watch the steam rise from the cup and disappear into the air? Brothers and Sisters: According to James, that is our life. A vanishing vapor.

Seeing that's the case, what should we do?

**Believe in Christ**

If you're not a Christian, you need to get to believing in Christ like yesterday. You need to be convinced of your depravity and miserable sinfulness, and then turn to Christ and rest forever in his finished work to redeem you.

The right day to believe in Christ is always today, never tomorrow. Tomorrow isn't guaranteed to you; ten minutes from now isn't guaranteed to you. Know for certain your life is short, uncertain and vain, and then rest in Jesus; he is ready to be your whole salvation, not tomorrow, but right now.

Look to Jesus as a Savior; look to him as the Incarnate Love of God, sent for you, the sinner. Look to his blood to wash you and his body to feed you. Look to his Spirit to make you new, and his father to adopt you into the family. You're a vapor; a thing of yesterday that won't be here tomorrow. Believe in the Lord while it's still called "today."

### **Don't be discouraged by Vanity**

Next, don't be surprised when things crumble before your eyes. Marriages, children, vocation, church and ministry. Don't be surprised when futility pays you a visit. This ain't heaven; this is a cursed world, destined for death by fire. Be ready for things to fall apart, and don't be discouraged.

Know for certain that while our lives in this world are going down to the grave, yet our life in the next world has already begun. We've already been raised and now we wait for the whole world to follow. This world, and our life in it, is Vain; the next world will not be.

### **Submit to the Will of God**

Last, hand yourself over to God's plan for your life. Say, "If the Lord wills, we will do this or that and live." Make decisions, make plans, create the best designs for your life possible, but let the Lord's Will stand as The Great Qualification over your future.

You want something. You plan to get it. Beware you don't want it more than God. Beware you only want it on condition that God wants it for you; what if God doesn't want it? Do you still want it?

"Not my will be done, but thine." Jesus said that when submitting to God's will meant unjust shame, torture and execution. "Not my will be done, but thine." "God, I want to escape unjust shame, torture, and execution; but I only want this if you want it. If you don't want me to escape

these things, THEN I DON'T WANT TO ESCAPE THESE THINGS." Brothers, that's quite a statement!

This requires us to humble ourselves. It's not easy to submit when God redirects our plans. We have to remember we are lowly creatures, not the exalted creator. We have to recall we are sinners, not the Savior. And we have to humbly and patiently submit to whatever plan God has for us.

The good news is his plan for us is eternal good. We're moving closer to it every day.