

Facing all kinds of natural disasters, one of the questions we are asking is “where is God”? We have been asking about God’s sovereignty and providence. God’s sovereignty means God is in control, and similarly his providence is that all things come from God. Nothing can happen without God’s knowing. We don’t know exactly why God permits all kinds of disasters to happen to us. But, we still trust in God’s providence and pray that he will show us his grace and mercy. As we read through James, we see that James doesn’t really talk about who God is or who Jesus is. Since he expects that we have faith in Jesus, his focus is on us, Christians. He is teaching us about how to live by faith.

There are several questions in our text, and two of them caught my eye” “*Who are you*”? (v.12) and “*What is your life*”? (v.14) Again, this is what James has been talking about since chapter 1. We are “*believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ*” (2:1). Therefore, we need to be humble before God. In our humility, we are to be quick to listen and slow to speak (1:19). We will show no favoritism to anyone else (2:1). And we will try to control our tongue (3:9). All those things are possible when we submit ourselves to God in our humility (4:7, 10). James explains in today’s text more about who we are and how we are supposed to live by faith.

He begins by repeating one of his commands, “*Brothers, do not slander one another*” (v.11a). The word “slander” (καταλαλέω, *katalaleō*) literally means to “speak against” or “speak evil.” It implies that he who speaks considers himself right and the person he slanders is always wrong. This is passing judgment. James presents three reasons why we should not slander one another.

The first reason is that we are brothers and sisters. James emphasizes brotherliness by repeating the word “brothers” several times. We become brothers and sisters when we are forgiven by the blood of Jesus, the Son of God. The Father called us His sons and daughters. We may not be biologically related, but we become God’s family through the most precious blood of Jesus. Since we are saved, not by our works, but by God’s grace, we are equally the members of God’s family. No one can claim to be better than the other. We are to be bound together in family love since we have the same Father.

The second reason is that slandering brothers is actually judging the law. “*Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it*” (v.11b). God has given us his ‘royal law’ that we should love our neighbors. So, when we slander one another, we are breaking the law that we are meant to obey. The law commands us to love, but we are responding with slanderous talk. Also, it means that we are judging the law because we act as if we know better than the law. We are trying to stand above the law. In effect, we are claiming that the law is mistakenly commanding love. When we try to be a judge, not a doer of the law, we are blaspheming.

This leads to the third reason: “*There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy*” (v.12a). God gave us the law for our sake. Only when we obey the law, can we find true freedom in God, who is able either to save or to destroy us. God’s law is the expression of who and what He is. Therefore, when we disobey the law, we are not only

doubting his authority, but we are also contradicting who He is. When we take up the position of judge, we are pushing God off his throne. We are battling with God. Certainly, there is no humility before God. Because of these reasons, we should not speak evil against one another.

Who are you? We are the family of God. We are the judge but we are the children of God who need to depend on Him. As we know who we are, we also need to understand what our life is. James explains there are three areas we mistakenly understand about our life.

First, we presume that we can be alive at will. We say we will do something “*today, tomorrow, and even the next year*”, but there is our ignorance. As James says, “*You do not even know what will happen tomorrow*” (v.14a). Who knows what will happen tomorrow? We thank God that we are alive, but we must admit that we live by his grace day by day. This fact alone should be enough to keep us humble before God who created, controls and apportions times.

Secondly, we misunderstand that we are masters of our own life. We say, “*we will go, spend a year there and carry on business.*” We just decide and, *lo and behold*, it will happen just like that. But, there is our frailty. “*You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes*” (v.14c). We are a mist. Life comes and goes. It can go without any trace. We are not masters of our life, but the Lord is.

Thirdly, we often presume that we have ability to do things by our own strength. We think we can carry on business and make money. People may encourage us, “Yes, you can succeed! You can do it!” but that is a false claim. “*You ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that’*” (v.15). We often hear the phrase, “Lord willing” or “God willing” out of this verse, but it should not be repeated mechanically for every future plan. It should not be used as a fetish or a protective talisman. Christianity is not a superstition. It is based on the fact that God actually is in control. We can live and do this or that only when the Lord wills. However, it doesn’t mean we just passively wait for things to happen. James is not trying to banish planning from our lives. We should plan our future. We should plan some things for the next generation, but in our every plan, there must be the Lord. We need to depend on God.

“*What is your life*”? Our life is to understand that we are ignorant. Our life is to understand the uncertainty and brevity of life. We should understand the frailty of man. When we are not ignorant, when we know what our life is, we will have to depend on the Lord for all things in our life. Some people may say, “the sun will rise again!” It may be true but we are not to take tomorrow for granted. If it is the Lord’s will, we will be there tomorrow, but today could be the last day. That is why we cannot waste our time. In order to have a blessed tomorrow, we should do our best today. What do we do? That is the law, isn’t it? Jesus taught us in numerous places, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself*” (Luke 10:27; Deut.6:5; Mark 12:30-31). We should do our best to love God and to love one another. If we don’t do it, we are sinning.

“*Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins*” (v.17). There are two kinds of sins – sins of omission and sins of commission. Doing evil is obviously a sin, but not doing the good we ought to do is also a sin. We are supposed to depend on God in our humility

so that we may obey his commandments. But when we are arrogant and boastful, we don't depend on Him, and consequently we will fail to do good. We will not obey the royal law. We will not treat our brothers and sisters as the true family. That is sin. A sin of omission is real. It is even more challenging. We may be able to avoid committing evil, but how can we be sure to do every good thing? This is why we need to depend on God every day and every moment.

As I said earlier, it is hard to understand God's sovereignty and providence. We have no clue when we look at hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires and mass shootings. But there is one way we can witness God's providence; it is through you. We Christians are called to spread His love to others and to care for one another. In His sovereignty, God has called you and He is changing you to use you as his servant. God wants to use you to show his mercy to those who are struggling with many reasons. You will be the hands and feet of God. It starts from you as you depend on God. By depending on the Lord, we can answer to the question, "who are you?" "I am a child of God. I am a person seeking to walk in humility with God, for I know that this is the way of blessing. I raise up my brothers and sisters because that is how I obey God's command. I humbly submit myself to the Lord." Amen.