

Living Beyond our Limitations
We Value Eternal Impact

4/4/99

Be seated but there is only one thing appropriate to be said after that and that is – Hallelujah! That’s right! I wanted to be sure you didn’t say amen because that is a hallelujah! That was wonderful! Thank you so much, Sonny, for all of the work and the preparation, and choir and orchestra for being a part of this marvelous Easter celebration which, in fact, is the last Easter celebration of the millennium and is the last Easter celebration of the 20th century. What an incredible thing it is to be standing here today recognizing what a threshold we are standing in as we look back 2,000 years and as we look ahead to the year 2000.

Now I have only had the opportunity to be a part of the last half of this century. I barely got my toes into the 1950’s but it was a wonderful time to be born. It was a wonderful time to grow and I am amazed at what I have seen simply in my lifetime, in the last half of this century, that has come and is now going.

I found it interesting recently to notice that many of the television shows that were in full bloom back in the 50’s and early 60’s are sort of having a revival today. Maybe you have noticed that if you are flipping stations on Friday evenings that you can now find, once again, Kids Say the Darndest Things. It was a great show about boys and girls and their perspective on life. You can find a remake of Candid Camera. In almost any city today you can find reruns of things like Dick VanDyke and I Love Lucy. I don’t know about you but I have always been one of Lucy’s fans. While Lucy was a very funny and a very interesting lady she did have a very wise and a very serious side. It was Lucille Ball who once made this statement: “Knowing what you cannot do is more important than knowing what you can do.” Knowing what you cannot do, knowing what the limitations are of your life or, even more important, than maybe knowing all of the opportunities.

Now, obviously, we are sitting at the threshold of opportunity and there is a wonderful future on the horizon. It is uncertain but it certainly is wonderful.

I found it interesting to do a little bit of study this week just to find out about the general curiosity that is going on in our world today about what is ahead and what is in store for us for the future. Of course, you know that there is a lot of hype and sensationalism that is going on about the upcoming calendar date of the year 2000. But moving beyond religious or spiritual sources or theological resources I just went into the mainstream of the press just to see what is available, what kind of information is out there in the news media today. I was interested to discover that there were 250 different news articles printed in the last 10 days on the subject of Y2K and what is going to happen in the future alone. I found that to be interesting as I was just looking at all these lists of articles and new releases from economics to politics to medicine to every arena of life and how today it seems as though we are standing at the threshold of a bright tomorrow but there is also a tremendous uncertainty about what lies ahead. While tomorrow is certainly a doorway that could be called opportunity it is also important that before we step in

tomorrow that we realize that there are some limitations. There are some obstacles. There are some things we need to come to terms with about where we are living and about what is ahead for us in the days to come. So, given the significance of this Easter, given the fact that the next Easter will be in the third millennium and that we are rapidly moving to the future, I want us just to take time today to look at where we stand today, at the limitations we do have today, and yet how we can get beyond the limitations of our life and embrace with hope what is ahead for us tomorrow.

We have been looking and studying together in our church family over the last few months in the Book of James in the New Testament. I just found that where I was in this study today was just appropriate for where we are in discussing this Easter season. I want to invite you, if you have a Bible with you this morning, to take it and open it to the New Testament to the Book of James and join me in the 4th chapter, beginning in the 13th verse. Just in case you do not have a Bible with you, or possibly your translation might be different from the one I am planning to read from this morning, I thought maybe it would be good for me to provide that for you on the screen. I have chosen a translation, the New Living Translation, because I believe this passage of scripture is so simple and so straightforward in the passage I want us to read from it together. So you can either read along in your Bible or you can look at the screen here with me.

This is what James says, standing here today and looking at tomorrow, here is what he says: “Look here you people who say today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and we will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit.” Let’s go to the next screen. “How do you know what will happen tomorrow? For your life is like a morning fog. It is here a little while and then it is gone. What you ought to say is if the Lord wants us to we will live and do this or that. Otherwise, you will be boasting about your own plans and all such boasting is evil.” Let’s go to the next screen. “Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not to do it.” Would you read that verse out loud with me just for a moment? “Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.” It is a sin to know you ought to do something and not do it. It is also a sin to try to do something that you are not able to do, especially if you are trying to do it without God. So James gives us a perspective on how we should look at our future. He also gives us an outline of some of the things that we need to be concerned about in our present and some things we need to look after if we are going to understand the limitations that we face today before we can enter into the opportunities of tomorrow.

Let’s look at some of these limitations. He immediately begins by painting a picture. He says there is a man, this man I take it, is a business man who is standing, as though it were, over a table with a map laid out in front of him. He is looking at that map and he is putting his finger on a spot and he saying, today or tomorrow I am going to go over here and here is what I am going to do, I am going to buy, I am going to sell, and I am going to make a profit. He begins to outline his business plan of what he is going to do in such a such a city.

In the ancient world the Jewish traders of that day were the great merchants. They were able to move and to travel and to make great profits many times because of their expertise

in this area. But James says for all the planning and all the prognostications that are going on for the future you need to stop and you need to step back and you need to ask yourself some serious questions about how you are living your life and what are the real limitations that you are facing. Then he begins to identify those limitations. He says to us here: You say we are going to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy, sell, and make a profit but what do you know? He says there is one limitation that you have to come to terms with in your life. It is the limitation of all human planning. It is that we are limited in our knowledge. We are limited in what we know. Every one of us has to understand that while planning is certainly a prudent thing to do planning, planning just for ourselves, planning all of our lives without God, is a very dangerous thing to do because we are so limited in what we really know. I want you to know that what you don't know can get you into trouble.

I heard about a thief who had been stalking out a neighborhood. He had been looking and carefully trying to plan the house he was going to make his break. As it would turn out, one day a large moving truck pulled up to the front door of one of the houses. He watched as they began to unload the goods off that truck. He thought this is too good to be true. He just took out a legal pad and began to make notes of all of the pieces of merchandise being moved into that house. There went a big screen TV. There went a big stereo system. He just watched all the things he thought he would like to take on his break when he went into the house. He made a list. Several days later he was there in that neighborhood, still looking, still thinking, trying to figure out what he was going to do and guess what! The couple who had just moved into the house came walking out the front door with their suitcases packed, loaded their car, got into the car, and drove off as though they were going off on a long trip. The guy said, man, this is great! I know what is in the house and I know they are gone! So he decided that that night he would try to make his break into the house.

Well, he went up and he shattered a window. He got into the house and began to tiptoe through the house and began to try to identify some things but he only got to the doorway of the first room when suddenly he heard a voice that said I see you and Jesus sees you. He stopped and looked around for just a moment. He took just a few more steps and then suddenly, again, he heard this voice out of the darkness saying, I see you and Jesus sees you. He reached for the flashlight he had on his belt. He took it and he turned it on and began to flash it around the room when suddenly there, upon a perch, was large parrot sitting right there. He smiled, put down his flashlight, reached over and flipped on the light, and when he did he looked back at that parrot only to notice there was a big Doberman Pinscher sitting right there next to the parrot on the floor. He looked up at the bird and the bird simply said, sic em Jesus!

I want you to know that what you don't know can get you into trouble. Many times we go through life just like the man in this plan. We are making our plans, we are pushing our agenda, we are plotting our course, but the Bible tells us that we need to be careful because there are so many things that we don't know. When you try to plan your life and especially plan your life without God that is the most dangerous way in all of the world in

which you can live because you are limited and I am limited by knowledge, by what we know and by what we do not know. You see this man was planning.

There is nothing wrong with planning. The Bible tells us that we should plan. Jesus said, what man goes out and builds a building without first counting the cost? The Book of Proverbs says, look at the ant, how he plans and prepares and stores for the future. We ought to be like the ant. But what the Bible warns against, ladies and gentlemen, is making plans, projecting the future, and moving ahead without any thought of God. You see that is exactly what is happening here. This man is laying it all out but the problem is he is trying to make his plans based on his knowledge rather than on the knowledge of God.

I want you to know that I have confidence this morning that I am speaking to a group of people many of who are practical atheists. Oh, I don't mean that you are totally an atheist. You wouldn't be in church this morning if you were that. I believe there are many people though who are practicing atheists. They come to church for one hour on Sunday mornings and then they leave assuming they can run their lives the way they choose the rest of the week. I want you to know that I think that is a very serious thing because every one of us is so limited by what we know and what we do not know and we try to live our lives apart from God.

I know it is typical when you go to Easter services on a day like this for a pastor to stand up and to try to somehow bring arguments as to the evidence of the resurrection. I believe that is a valid thing to do but I want you to know I have far less concern about those who are here this morning and who may believe nothing about the resurrection, though that is important. If you study it, I believe you will find it to be consequential in human history and inexplicable in its power and its altering of the course of history. At the same time, what I am really concerned about are people who come but who simply believe they can live the rest of their lives without God. While it is true, the old axiom we have heard, that to fail to plan is to plan to fail, the axiom I want you to leave with this morning is this; to fail to plan without God is to ultimately plan to fail in life. Because, you see, we are limited in our knowledge. Limited by what we know. When we live our lives without God we tend to give life to something that is not worthwhile or we may, even worse, gain something in life that is of little to no value. So we are limited by our knowledge.

There is another limitation that James points to here. That is that we are limited by our resource. That is, by how much we have. Now this guy is talking about his resources. He says, I am going to go to such and such a city, I am going to buy, I am going to sell, I am going to make a profit. Buy, sell, make a profit. He is already counting on the profit and what he buys he is going to buy based on what he thinks he is going to profit. What he is going to sell he hopes will be able to turn that profit but the realization is is that no matter who you are or what you have you are going to find in life that whatever you have it will never be enough. Have you learned that to be true? Have you discovered that maybe today you are making more money than you ever thought you would make? That you have more money in a bank account than possibly you ever thought that you would

have? But what you have discovered in life is that the money you make and the money you have it still doesn't seem like it is enough? Have you discovered in life that it doesn't seem to matter how much you get or how much you have that somehow you still have to worry about what you might lose or what you might waste or what someone might take? You see we are limited by our resources. Because all human resources, no matter how plentiful they may seem to be, are ultimately limiting in our lives because no one really can and no one ever really will have it all.

There is another limitation. It is not only the limitation of knowledge and the limitation of resource but James points out very clearly and very poignantly here that we are limited by our time. Limited by our time. That is how long we have got. You see this guy is saying I am going to go today and tomorrow to such and such a city, I am going to spend a year there, he has already defined the amount of time, and I am going to make a profit. But then he says you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life, James says, but a vapor. Here you are talking about all you are going to do tomorrow but listen, you need to understand that you are limited in your time and that the time you have, in many ways, is like a vapor, like a mist, like a fog in the morning. Have you ever been up early driving on a roadway in Florida to notice how fog will lay down on the low-lying areas but how it is just a matter of hours before the sun comes and dispels the fog? The Bible says our lives are like that fog, like that mist.

It is interesting the Greek word that is used there that is translated fog or vapor. It is the word *atmos*. It is the word we get our word atmosphere from. He says your life is fragile, it is just like thin air. It is here but it is gone so quickly and you have to be so careful about living today presuming on tomorrow. You see that is what this man was doing. He was presuming on tomorrow. He was presuming on his time and James is simply saying you cannot presume on tomorrow because you have only so many todays.

Someone said that life can be defined in three stages: Youth, middle age, and my you sure look good. It is amazing how quick life passes by. Amazing how quick the pages of the calendar turn. Yet while we desire to measure our life in length of years, birthdays, the Bible says teach us to number our days. Not our birthdays, not our years, but our days because we need to understand that we cannot live presuming upon tomorrow. Presumption will get you into trouble. That is why the Bible says in Proverbs 27, "Do not boast yourself of tomorrow for you do not know what a day may bring forth." Ladies and gentlemen, we are limited in our time and it is a foolish thing to live life wasting the energies of today, the worries of today, and the anxieties of today on tomorrow. We need to be living for today and we need to understand that life is unpredictable and that life is brief. Take the word life and lift the two middle letters out of it and you have "if." Life is just kind of ify isn't it?

So much of life is something we don't know and we really cannot take charge of. You know, today we call it daylight savings time. But you really can't save time. You really can't. You can spend time, you can waste time, you can use time but you cannot stop time and you cannot save time. You see we are limited by our time. So the Bible tells us

we need to be careful about how we have come to tomorrow because we are limited in knowledge, we are limited in resource, and we are limited in time.

There is another way in which we are limited. He says, is your life not like a vapor that appears a little time and then vanishes away? Instead you ought to say if the Lord wills we will live and do this or that. But now you boast in your arrogance and all such boasting is evil. James says your problem is not only are you counting on knowledge, counting on resource, and counting on time, all of which are limited, but the worst thing is you think you are in control of it all. You boast. He said what I want you to know is that you are limited in your control. You really are limited in life as to what you can do and what you cannot do. Yet, so many times we go through life wanting to stand at the bow of the ship and to say I am the king of the world. You see, ladies and gentleman, we don't have control. The sooner we realize how out of control we are the sooner we will be able to get life back into control.

You see James warns about someone who is boasting about what they are going to do and he calls that boasting evil. The word boast is the word that was used in the ancient world to describe someone who was like a "quack." You know in the frontier of American History we had all these medicine men who would go around and basically they had these concoctions and most of them were of no use or of no value and they were called "quacks." What the Bible is saying here is that when we go through life boasting and assuming we are in charge and that we are in control then all we are doing is we are just "quacking" because we are not really in control. You get in trouble when you become overconfident and arrogant and boasting.

There were three preachers that went out in a boat fishing one day. They got just a certain distance away from the shore and one of the preachers in the boat looked at the other two and said, you know I think I left my lunch back over there on the shore. With that he just lifted his leg out of the boat, stepped up, and just walked right across the water back to the shore. The other two preachers sat there. He came back, got back in the boat. The preacher sitting in the middle seat looked at the other two and said you know I left my hat and he got out of the boat and he walked right over there. By now the guy sitting at the end of the boat, the third preacher, is thinking, man, I don't want to act like I don't have faith. I mean these two guys did it why don't I. With that he said, you know I forgot something and dropped his leg over the edge of the boat. Splash! He went completely under all the way over his head! The other two looked at each other and said, do you think we ought to show him where the stepping stones are?

You know, so many times in life we just want to look like we are in charge. We just want to look like we are in control. We just want to look like we can hang it like everybody else. What we haven't learned so many times is how little control we really have. You see we are limited, ladies and gentlemen, by our control. We really do not have control.

There is something else that James says is a limitation in life. That is in verse 17. He says, "to him that knows to do good, that is knows and knows it today and does not do it

to him it is a sin.” What James is saying there is that we need to understand that not only are we limited in knowledge, limited in resources, limited in time, and limited in control but listen, we are limited to today. All that we have is today. We have to understand that it is this day that we have in which we must live. We can’t go through life trying to live in tomorrowland. We can only live today. The wisdom of living today is as Dr. J. Stuart Holden said, “Live a moment at a time and live that moment with God.” That is really how you have to live life. But you see this man had assumed that he could put off a lot of things today because of what he was planning to do tomorrow. He was procrastinating the good of today for the profits of tomorrow.

A lot of us are prone to procrastination aren’t we? Many of us have become accustomed to daily finding a way to put off to tomorrow what we really need to do today. Someone said it this way, procrastination is my sin it only causes me sorrow. I know I ought to change my ways and, in fact, I will, tomorrow. That is how many of us live isn’t it? We are constantly procrastinating. We are constantly counting on a tomorrow and yet the Bible says it is such a dangerous thing to live life as though we have those tomorrows. You see we are limited. We are limited. We are limited. So the question is, how do we get beyond our limitations? How is it that we break through these limitations in life and how is it that we can begin to lay hold of the opportunities of tomorrow and release the limitations of today?

Let me just suggest several things and we will be finished:

1. Understand this. Understand that God is interested in involvement in your daily life. God doesn’t want you to live as a practicing atheist. God wants you to live every day understanding that he wants to be involved and engaged in your life. This book that I am speaking to you from this morning, the Bible, is nothing but a record of God working in the lives of men and women and people everywhere who have turned to him and have invited him into their lives. God is interested in your life. God wants to be engaged with you. He doesn’t want you trying to live at the point of your limitations. He wants to break through those limitations and he wants to break into your life and begin to make a difference in your life day in and day out. You see God has always worked and moved in the lives of men and women of faith. When you begin to understand, when you begin to hear that God is interested in involvement in your life, suddenly life changes because life isn’t limited to your knowledge. Life isn’t limited to your resource. Life isn’t limited to your time and to your control and to your day. It suddenly becomes God’s day. God wants to be involved in you.
2. This morning I want you to believe this, that not only is it true that God is interested in being involved in your life but I want you to believe, clearly based on this text this morning, that God has a custom plan for your life. He says here, we ought to live saying, if the Lord wills. Literally, the whole goal of life is finding and living in the will of God. It is not living from my will and my purpose, it is living in God’s will and God’s purpose. Suddenly life is transformed when I begin to believe that just as God custom designed me God has a custom plan for my life. God wants to make my life something of value and something of profit not just in time but for eternity.

3. There is something else I want you to see and understand this morning. That is that I want you to remember this; God is not confined by your limitations but that you and I are limited without him. You see he is not confined by our limitations. My limitation of knowledge – he knows everything. My limitation of resource – he owns the cattle on a thousand hills. My limitation of time – he dwells in the past, present, and future. My limitation of control – he is the sovereign God over all things. My limitation to today – he is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

You see, God is not limited by my limitations but I am limited if I do not have him and if my life is not linked with him. As we stand at the threshold of a new millennium I want you to know that it will not matter how much you have of all the other things we have mentioned today. If you do not have him, then your life is missing the most important ingredient. Your life is a puzzle with too many pieces to figure out and only God can put it together.

The greatest need that every person has in this world is the need to know God through his Son our Savior, Jesus Christ, and Christ's coming was that he might come that he might dwell among us, that he might go to the most confining place of all, the grave. But he went into the grave, he broke through the grave, he arose on that first Easter Sunday and we don't have to fear the past, we don't have to fear death, and we don't have to fear sin. We don't have to fear anything because all of our limitations have been removed through the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, it is all about Jesus. That is what it is all about.

A number of years ago a man lost his wife and he and his son drew close through a common interest they had in art. It seemed they began to use the vast resources they had to travel the world and to begin to collect wonderful pieces of art – Renoir, Monet, and all of the finest pieces they added to their gallery and to their collection. But a war broke out. This young son was drafted into the war. He went away from his father and after several months a message came back that would be the worst message anyone could get – missing in action. For days he wondered and he worried until finally one day the report came that his son, while trying to rescue a fellow soldier, took a fatal bullet to his heart and he died there on the battlefield.

In the months that followed the anguish and the loneliness of the older man only increased until one day a soldier in uniform showed up at the doorway of his home with a large package and said, sir, I wanted to come and to meet you because I got to know your son in our training and I served beside him on the battlefield. We found we had a common love for art. He said, I have made something for you. When he opened the package there was this beautiful portrait of his son. The man went to the fireplace mantle area and removed the other paintings that were there and he hung this treasured picture of his son right there in the center place of the fireplace. It became his favorite, his most treasured of all of his paintings.

As years went by the old man began to wane and to wither. Finally came the time of his death. He had made a provision in his will that the paintings he owned would be auctioned and so people gathered from all over the world to come and make bids at the

auction and try to buy the valuable paintings in the collection. But as the auctioneer opened the bidding that day he placed the portrait of the man's son there at the front. He said, before we sell anything else we are going to begin with portrait. An older man sitting at the back opened the bidding with \$10 because he knew the man and his son. The auctioneer said, alright sir, I hear your bid for \$10 is there another bid? Is there another? No one began to bid so he said, alright, going once, going twice, sold for \$10. Finally, someone in the back of the room yelled, okay, let's get to the good stuff to which the auctioneer quickly said, the bidding is over. The will said, whoever gets the son gets the entire collection. In that moment the collection was transferred to that little old man who paid \$10 for the son.

You know, that is really what it is in life, ladies and gentlemen, he who has the Son has life. If you have Jesus Christ, he will take away the limitations that you face in life. But if you don't have Jesus then everything else you have is ultimately an obstacle and a limitation to what God wants to do in your life.

I pray that on this Easter Sunday that you would know what it is to know Christ, to know the Son of God, to know life in him, and to know the resurrection power that destroys the limitations of knowledge, resource, time, control, and even today because Christ transforms life both in time and for eternity.

Would you bow your heads with me in prayer.

I want to ask that every head be bowed and every eye be closed.

It has been so wonderful to be a part of this gathering in celebration today. I appreciate so much your coming but I want you to know that I don't believe you just came out of habit or tradition, I really do believe you are here because of a divine appointment. I believe there are some in this room who came here today because they needed to hear this message, they needed to be reminded of their own limitation, and they also needed to be reminded of God's plan and his love for their lives. So this morning I just simply want to take a moment and invite anyone who needs or wants to receive Christ to have the opportunity to do that right now.

In just a moment I am going to lead us in prayer and that prayer is just going to be an expression, a confession of faith, and if you have never prayed and invited Christ into your life, if you have never received the Son of God, then I want to encourage you to do that this morning because to receive the Son is to get all that life has and all that God provides by receiving him. I know there are many others who could probably explain it better than I have today and certainly there are people all around who could tell what Christ has done in their lives but I want you to know friend, that no matter what else you have, if you don't have him, you are missing the most important piece in life. Christ came and died and rose that you might have life in him. So, right now, in the tenderness of this moment, if have never done so, I want to encourage you just to pray:

Dear Lord Jesus (not out loud but in your heart) I know that I am a sinner. Lord I know that I need to be forgiven, to be cleansed, and to be saved. Come into my heart, dear Jesus. I open the door of my heart. I receive you, Jesus, as my Savior and my Lord. Take control of my life, Jesus. Make me the person that you want me to be.

As heads are bowed and eyes are closed, if you prayed that prayer this morning and just want to let that be known in expression of thanks to God, I want to ask you just to lift your hand and put it down. Let me just see that as a moment of celebration. Thank you. Just lift it up and put it down. Up and then down. Thank you. Up and then down. All over the building, up and then down.

Oh, Lord, thank you this morning. Thank you for speaking to hearts and to lives in this place. Father, thank you for the work that you do of salvation that no man and no church can do but is only done of you. Lord, I pray for others who are here this morning and who know you and who have confessed you but who maybe have been just trying to go in life and leave you out. Maybe we have tried to carve a space for you and to give you a Sunday slot. Father, I pray that we not be content to live that way and that, Father, what we would do is, even today, we would just again purpose in our heart if the Lord wills, we will do whatever it is that is his will in our life, to live for him. Father, I pray today that people who know you would serve you and honor you and invest in your work and would live for you because of the fact that they know Jesus Christ. Lord, I thank you for these moments of commitment and decision. We pray it together in Jesus' name. Amen.

I want you to look up here. We are not going to extend a long invitation but I am not going to leave and go away today without giving people who are here, who may have just received Christ, or who may still have questions, or who need to settle a spiritual matter in their life, by just turning them away and saying, God bless you. I believe it is important that we give an invitation to invite people to Christ and to celebrate what Christ is doing in their lives. We have people who are here – pastors who will be available to greet you and trained counselors who are here to take a moment to share with you about your spiritual commitment. While we don't want to embarrass anyone or point out anyone, we do want to touch people with the love of Christ today. I don't know what this Sunday is about if it is not about people's lives being changed. So I am going to ask that you do this – I am going to ask that you all not get up and walk away when we begin the invitation. I am going to ask you to give us just long enough to sing this chorus through one time. But this morning, if you are here and in your heart you have received Christ, in your life today, you want a fresh start with Christ, you need someone to help you to know what is the next step spiritually, how can I become a part of God's church, whatever that decision may be, I want to invite you to come.

Would you stand with me together? Would you sing with me this invitation, Come Just as You Are. We are praying, preparing, and waiting to receive those who come. Please pray with us. Share with us. Extend this invitation with us. We are here waiting to receive you. Come right now.

Would you come? Come just as you are and receive Christ today and trust him today.
Let this be not just your moment but God's moment in your life.

Here is the gift – the gift of eternal life

Sermon by David McKinley
4/4/99