

Untamable

Introduction:

How many of you remember these two sayings from when you were growing up: "I'm rubber, you're glue, your words bounce off me and stick to you." OR "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me?" These were classic lines to use when being picked on, and they were so catchy that it would actually back any bully into the corner and have them shaking. Right? Um.....no. Actually, not only did they not work but they were completely wrong! I personally have been hit with sticks by people who had intended to harm me. I'm thankful they did not break my bones. I'm sure it was because I was a good boy and listened to my mom and always finished my milk. Just because they did not break my bones doesn't mean that they did not hurt. They did! I don't remember anyone pelting me with stones, however, I do remember being pelted with words and many of them did stick to me and did cause me great hurt. I also remember hurling many hurtful words towards a great number of people in my own time.

This should not surprise us because we live in a world of words, and the words we choose to use and in the manner we choose to use them matters greatly. That is why James said back in Chapter 1 Verse 26 that if *"If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless."* Our words and the things we say and don't say matter greatly because they are an indicator of genuine faith that either works or doesn't work. So, let's jump into the text and see what the Word of God has for us today.

James 3:1-2; *3 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. ² For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.*

The tongue is small, but **mighty**, and **directs** one's life.

We start off with a small warning that *"Not many of you should be teachers"* because we will be judged more strictly and teachers have a greater potential to cause exponentially more damage to the church. The preaching and teaching that comes from those called to do so have the potential to build up the church into love and good works or to lead God's people astray by denying, obscuring, and/or even twisting the truth. This is why we must anchor ourselves to the Bible and teach what it says and not what we want it to say. We will be judged with greater strictness for the things we say and for the things we choose not to say.

This is why we must keep a tight rein on our speech. None of us will do this perfectly, which is why James is quick to point out that *"we all stumble in many ways"* Right? I mean, yes. Think about it. Who here has not been out walking in the woods, or heck even on a sidewalk, at some point in their life and not slipped or stumbled? In the same way, we all have slipped in the things we say. Who here has never sinned with his or her tongue?

If that person is here, then you, my friend, are a perfect man or woman and able to perfectly control yourself in every other way. Are there ANY perfect men or women in here today? If so, we need to get you up here and teaching. None? I didn't think so.

Certainly, this man before you is not perfect by any stretch of the imagination. I love that James throws himself right into the mess with us when he says, "*we all stumble in many ways.*" The tongue is small but mighty, which is why James is like a doctor here and is asking us to open up and say "awe." He is asking us to stick out our tongues in order to give us a good exam, because there are many things we need to see and understand about our tongues. To show us how powerful our tongues are, James gives us two illustrations - horses and ships. Let's look at the verses together.

James 3:3-5a; ³ *If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well.* ⁴ *Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.* ^{5a} *So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.*

Ok, so true confession time. I really don't like horses. I mean, I think they are beautiful to look at, but I have never had any real success in riding one. Three times on one and three times off one quicker than I would have preferred to come crashing down to the ground. I did, however, have a neighbor who I loved spending time with, and he had horses. I remember this one time when my buddy was attempting to break in a young colt, so he was leading it around the ring and that horse decided to take off like a bolt of lightning. My friend was young, but determined, so like a fool, he didn't let go of the strap. So, this horse drug him for quite some ways until he crashed into a dog box pretty severally. Then, Casey got up and did his thing to this horse and eventually broke him down and got him to the point where he could be used on the farm.

Part of the breaking down and training process required they used what is called a "bit," which is a small piece of metal that goes into the mouth of the horse. What that device does is actually allows the rider control that behemoth of an animal and makes it go where the rider is trying to go. It really is impressive because the whole animal can be controlled by something so small.

I'm not up- to-date on nautical terms, however, the small rudder works in the same fashion. Rudders are small in comparison to the size of a huge ship, and yet that little device can direct ships that are the size of cities on the ocean. Just think of aircraft carriers. The point is the same. Something so small is able to direct something so huge.

James is saying the same thing about the tongue. It is small, but mighty, and directs one's life. Look at the first part of verse 5, "*the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.*" So, get this. Just like horses and ships that are guided and directed by something so small, so are you and I. We can either work to direct our tongues, or we can let our tongues control us. I know that we all could look back throughout our lives and think of things we've said or have not said that have changed the direction of our lives, sometimes for the good, BUT chances are, that is not the norm. Many times our tongues make great boasts that are generally not good, and that is where James goes next.

James 3:5b-6 ^{5b}*How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!* ⁶*And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.* ⁷*For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind,* ⁸*but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.*

The tongue is **small**, but has the **potential** for great **destruction**.

The tongue is a fire! If you have ever had the opportunity to go to California, then you understand how it is that they have huge fires about every year. It is so dry out there that if someone just flicks a cigarette out of the window of their car while driving down the road, it has the potential to wipe out a wide area of forest and homes along with it. This one act of carelessness has the potential to do a ton of damage and the same is true about our tongue. Just look at some of the language that is used to describe it and all the nastiness that can follow it.

We see in verse 6 that it is a *"world of unrighteousness."* The tongue has the capacity for evil like no other part of the body, to the point that it is *"staining the whole body,"* and we know this, right? Jesus himself had said that, *"what comes out of the mouth"* is what defiles someone. Then, in Romans, we hear this delightful description, that *"Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asp is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."* AND so, from birth to our burial we see that the tongue is, *"setting on fire the entire course of life"*

We know this, right? We all have felt its scorching effects and we all have torched people in our lives. Just like the careless person who flicks a cigarette out of the window of a moving car can ruin the lives of people, we can or have said careless things that can hurt and destroy those we love. We all have spoken harsh words to those we love. We all have said things to our parents, children, spouses, those we work with, those we live besides, those in the church, and the list goes on and on. We've all set people a blaze with our words through some gossip that was passed on, OR maybe someone has scorched you with some slander when they had falsely spoken a statement that was damaging to your reputation.

You can think of relationships, whether between a husband and a wife, a parent or child or between two close friends or coworkers that have been destroyed because of one little spark that set the whole thing a blaze because of some careless words. Look at the end of verse 6 to see how it is that something so small can cause so much destruction. So, where does this tremendously destructive potential come from? It comes straight from the pit of hell. Remember that we do not fight against flesh and blood, but against Satan and all his demonic host. And let's not forget that he is a roaring lion who is seeking someone to devour, and many times he devours relationships through the words that flow from our tongue.

James is alot like the Proverbs of the New Testament, so it shouldn't be a surprise that proverbs are rich with wisdom on our tongues. Let's look at a few.

Chattering.....

Proverbs 18:6-7: *A fool's lips walk into a fight, and his mouth invites a beating. A fool's mouth is his ruin, and his lips are a snare to his soul.*

Lying.....

Proverbs 12:19: *Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment.*

Arrogant Boasting.....

Proverbs 18:12: *Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor.*

Gossiping.....

Proverbs 10:18: *The one who conceals hatred has lying lips, and whoever utters slander is a fool.*

The things that are said do hurt. The silly sayings that we used to repeat and/or that we may even encourage children to recite now cause great damage because our tongues are small and satanic apart from God's grace. James continues by taking us on some National Geographic tour in order to give us some bad news. Just listen.

James 3:7-8: ⁷ *For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind,⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.*

Ok, so this section is a challenge for me personally because I had a dog that I could never train and that little demon dog brought out some poison from my tongue on many occasions, I am sad to say. I, however, have witnessed people train their pets to do some amazing things, and we all have seen people train elephants to do all sorts of crazy things. Or, how about Shammoo from SeaWorld? We all have watched all sorts of crazy animal tricks while watching Funniest Home Videos, and yet even though we are able to accomplish so much, we cannot do this little thing of taming the tongue.

Don't miss this point, or you will miss what James is teaching us in these verses. James is not giving us the 5 step program in order to tame the tongue so that we can have our best life now. NO! He is saying the complete opposite of that. What he is saying is that we have absolutely zero chance of taming this thing called the tongue. It is impossible.

This is bad news because right at the end of verse 8 we see that the tongue *is a restless evil, full of deadly poison*. And there is no amount of Dawn dish soap that will clean it up. No, James is not talking about reforming this nasty forked tongue, for that is impossible. NO HUMAN BEING CAN TAME THE TONGUE! That thought alone can be very deflating and demoralizing, but if we think about it, then we shouldn't be surprised.

James is now going to teach us that the reason that we cannot tame the tongue is because it is ultimately the sewage that comes from the septic tank, which is our heart. The tongue really is just revealing what is going on in the heart. In the end we don't have a tongue problem, even though it is a great problem, it is much more a symptom of a heart problem.

James 3:9-10; ⁹ *With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.* ¹⁰ *From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.*

The tongue is **revealing** and has the **power** of death and **life** in it.

James is saying that we've got some real problems that are deeper than our tongue. To expose us all, he gives this cutting sentence in verse 9. I want to read it again so that we may feel the weight of what is being said here.....*With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.*

Have you been there? You're on the way home from church and you swing into Wal-Mart to grab a few items, all the while you are loudly singing "holy.....holy.....holy" and then someone pulls right in front of you and into the parking spot that you had claimed with your turn signal. Then, you start another rendition of "holy, holy, holy," followed by some explicatives. Then, you sing that out the window so they can hear your lovely voice and finish it off with a one finger salute in the form of a wave. You then pull away sloooooowly in case they want some, and they see your Jesus fish and Harvest Community Church sticker. Have you been there? Don't answer. I know you have, because we all have been there in the heat of the moment. This is obviously not an OK thing. This is revealing an area of our life that needs some serious sanctifying work done by the Spirit. I think we'd all agree.

This, however, doesn't touch the severity of what James is saying. This blessing and cursing is at polar ends of the spectrum. James is, in a sense, saying that we're talking out both sides of our mouth, and that is a problem. We are blessing or praising our Lord Jesus with the same mouth that we are cursing or demonizing those who are made in His image. This cursing is much worse than cussing. Now, I'm not saying we should cuss. We should not, so please don't hear me wrong. We should not let any unwholesome come from our mouths.

Church, we must be on guard against being critical of people and saying unfair comments in the heat of the battle. We must also not give into the temptation to gossip or entertain this from others. To cut people down with our words is slander. Our words have great power to cause great harm. I always envision the picture of the mother who has hurtful words coming from her mouth that shows itself as an arm with a hand going on top of her child's head, and the little girl has tears strolling down her face. Christian, these things are horrible and we probably all have been on each side of this at some point in our lives. This ought not be, yet there is an evil even worse than this. The cursing that is being mentioned here is evil. It is wishing a person to be cut off from God and damned to hell.

Now, before we think that we could never do such a thing, I'd be careful. Just last week when I was preparing this sermon, and in prayer, I heard of some unspeakable and horrific things

that involved some sweet children and some evil and wicked thing that were committed against these young children in the news. This one hit close to home, and the people involved will be going to jail for no less than 30 years. The one police officer even mentioned that he has seen much depravity in his life, but that this was something that will require a miracle for him to be able to not be haunted by for the rest of his life.

Now, I must confess that when I heard of this, I was filled with such hurt and anger that if it had not been for God's grace, then I would have wished them off to Hell and maybe been in line to help send them there.

Thanks be to God because His grace did show up at the moment I needed it most. Then, I sat there thinking how no matter how far it seems as though this person has fallen from God's plan for them, they were still made in His image. Then, I was filled with sadness, and so I began to think upon the Gospel and God's grace in my own life. I began to think of my own depravity and the fact that if it had not been for God saving me, I would be capable of this type of heinous sin or worse. Yet, God in His kindness saved me, and so I wept and prayed for them to come to know the saving grace of Jesus Christ. This is the work of the Spirit and I can take no credit, but I share this because this is where James goes next.

James 3:11-12: ¹¹ *Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?* ¹² *Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.*

Do you see the problem? To bless God and curse those made in His image is really problematic because it exposes the main problem, which is a heart problem. To say we love God and to understand the depths of the Gospel and what it is that Jesus saved us from, for no other reason than He delights to save sinners, and then to wish that other fractured sinners experience the wrath of God should not exist in the same person. The two are incompatible and ought not be. This is what James is teaching here with these word pictures. It is easy to see what is being said here. The point is that no tree or plant can produce fruit that belongs to a different tree or plant. The same is true for the water. Water that comes from the purest of springs cannot transform into sewage and still be pure. In the same way, our tongues which are full deadly poison and evil since the fall of mankind, cannot produce good on their own.

Matthew 12:33-35: *"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings evil.*

What James, and now Jesus, are saying is clear. To praise God and then speak evil against those made in His image shows what our hearts are really like. Here is the question though. If no human being can tame the tongue, then how should we respond? Well, remember that what is impossible for man is not a thing for God. He can do it! Those who trust in Jesus for their salvation get a new heart, and we also have a Helper in the Holy Spirit who can change our speech.

Remember that James himself has said that we all stumble in many ways, so we are not talking about perfection. However, we should certainly see and hear a difference in the life of a believer, because the faith that works also works on the tongue. Now that you're a son or daughter of God in Heaven, you are not to keep your mouth shut, but instead you are to loosen that baby and use it! We know from.....

Proverbs 18:21: *Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.*

Christian, remember that *"faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ."* So, if you have come to know Jesus, it is because someone spoke the Gospel to you. They used their lips to tell you about this God who is Holy and perfect in every way and that you and I have greatly sinned against this wonderful God in our rebellion. Because of this, He has every right to crush us under the weight of His wrath. Instead, however, He chose to crush His Son in our place. Yet, because Jesus was and is perfect, the grave could not hold Him. So, on the Third Day, He rose from the grave eternally triumphant and defeated Satan, sin, and death! All who place their faith or trust in the work that Jesus accomplished in His life, death, and resurrection will be made new and given a new heart, so that they can sing the praises of our Savior and tell other of His glories.

Church, one of the many ways we glorify Him is in our speech, whether that be verbally, on Facebook, Twitter, and/or any other platform where communication is spoken. If we have received grace in the Gospel, then it is in our hearts and then, as a fruit of that, it should naturally come out of our mouths. Let's be a church whose speech is *"always gracious and seasoned with salt"* AND *"always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who ask you for a reason for the hope that is in you."* Those who have been loved much will love much because in the Gospel we have been infinitely loved. So, let's be a people who use our words to build up and not to tear down. Let's give grace to those who hear so that they may in turn praise our Lord, Jesus!

Remember, Church, that as you get ready to partake in Communion today, or already did, you taste with your tongue the juice that represents Jesus's blood which was spilled for and as you taste the bread which represents his body that was broken on the cross. Remember that this is what was required to save a wretch like you and me. Taste and see that the Lord is good.