

“The Power of Silence”
James 3:1-12
WBC Jerry Grey 10-21-18

Introduction: James has brought us back to the tongue again. Evidently the folks to whom he wrote had a huge problem with their tongues. We have already been told to be swift to hear and slow to speak and slow to be angry, but now James tells us of the power of this most evil member of society. I would say we have the same problem today.

James 3:1-12

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. 2 We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.

3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. 4 Or take ships as an example.

Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.

5 Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, 8 but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. 11 Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same

spring? 12 My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

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No other living entity has the ability to do what we can do... speak! The mountains speak like the stars but not a word of praise has ever been acoustically heard. Animals speak, but they have no ability to carry the conversation. To think and express ourselves with an appendage called a thumb has made us different from all other creatures,, not to mention the living soul and conscience we have.

We have the ability to speak as we:

- Pray
- Worship
- Share the gospel
- Remember
- Pass on traditions
- Pass on knowledge
- Warn and protect
- Preach
- Sing
- Build up and encourage
- Love

But likewise we:

- Gossip
- Lie
- Curse
- Deceive
- Teach falsehood and error
- Start wars
- Slander

- Complain
- Backbite
- Tear down and destroy
- Hate

I want you to know that the last five or six weeks in James have been quite revealing to me. I want you to know that I have learned more than anyone else about my tongue and its power. I want to share this with you because I have been greatly helped by something.

Do You Know What It Is? “SILENCE”

The power of silence can say more than you can ever say with words. Don't believe me? You will have try it yourself. I am not saying that there is never a time to speak because there is a time to speak **if God calls you to speak. Just remember time, turf, and terms. Make sure you are called to speak.**

Eccl 3:1-11

3 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:

2 A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, 3 a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, 4 a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, 5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain, 6 a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, 7 a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, 8 a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

9 What does the worker gain from his toil? **10 I have seen the burden God has laid on men. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time.**

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May I say there is a time to speak and a time to be silent.

Prov 17:28

28 Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent,
and discerning if he holds his tongue.

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Prov 21:23

23 He who guards his mouth and his tongue
keeps himself from calamity.

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Prov 25:15

15 Through patience a ruler can be persuaded,
and a gentle tongue can break a bone.

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If a gentle tongue can break a bone, what can a silent one do?

I. The Power of a Silent Tongue

1. **To the speaker-** If you learn to keep quiet when you should, you will gain enormous power.
 - You avoid unnecessary quarrels.
 - Unnecessary stress.
 - Silence puts you in control.
 - Silence does speak. Louder than words!

Illustration: Two friends talking. Hey did I tell you who I am dating now? (They are dating an unbeliever) Really? They pause and wait for you to attack them. You just look at them. They start making excuses for their behavior. You continue to refrain. They can almost not stand it that you are not jumping them. Now this is not a parent and child now cause that's a slam dunk... no you will not date a nonbeliever. Period. If you respond will it do any good?

2. To the listener-

- Conviction gets the best of them.
- Silence makes them think.
- When you are in justification mode, silence is overwhelming.
- After their fall, and the results of sin sets in, they will remember.
- Your silence is unavoidable.

Now, if the Lord tells you to speak, or you are a mentor that has the right to do so, you should weigh it and speak, but just don't forget there is another weapon; and that weapon is silence. Not every time, but a lot of the time.

II. The Power of a Harnessed Tongue: Verse 1-4

- James is not trying to discourage people from teaching the bible. There was obviously a problem with these folks that made many of them want to teach. James lets them know that there is a lot of responsibility in teaching the word.
- Teachers that control their tongues are teachers that practice holiness. If you can control your tongue you can control your entire body. That is an enormous word from James.

- A controlled tongue allows the teacher to live out the teachings he teaches. That's a great witness. To see one who is a teacher not live up to the teachings of the word is damaging. **We have all seen the opposite.**
- The teacher must be prepared and live out the truth.
- It would be obvious that one who knows a lot about the word is more responsible for his actions.
- James makes sure to say that we are all human and stumble in many ways- **ptaio- to fall or err, offend or stumble... to fall. Teachers will stumble too.**
- James makes a pretty amazing statement. **If you can control your tongue you can control your whole body.**

Verse 3-4: A Few Examples of Power:

1. The first example is the **hippos**. That's the river horse. The horse here in our text. We put a bit in the mouth of the horse and we turn the entire horse. This is a natural example. The strength of the horse reminds us of our natural beastly actions. The flesh is very strong. We are all naturally predisposed to evil. **“In my flesh dwells no good thing.”** We come that way at birth. Totally depraved and we fight it until we go to heaven.
- When we teach a horse to yield, he never loses his power, strength, or dignity. He becomes more useful. All that power unused is a waste. A unyielded Christian is also a waste. He has power and influence that are never used for the kingdom. We become 2000 pound grass eaters. God wants obedience.

Illustration: Monty Roberts. *Joining up*. The horse whisperer.

There is a girl on my street that has a horse that is so tame and gentle that she rides him without a bit in his mouth. He's that obedient.

2. The big ships have a little rudder. The Navy has some pretty big ships and they are all steered with a small rudder. The bit and the rudder both fight contrary forces that want to take the horse and ship in the wrong direction. Our job is to fight those forces and control our tongues. We all have **red hot poker**s in our lives. A red-hot poker is something or someone that gets your goat. The red-hot poker can be a person or a job or a circumstance, e.g., a spouse, boss, or child. That poker pushes your buttons and creates anger in your life and harsh words to spill from your lips.

Obey the pilot not the poker. Let Jesus guide your rudder. Lots of spiritual application here.

III. The Power of an Evil Tongue: Verses 5-8

- The tongue is a spark. A spark is but a small thing, but the tongue has the potential to do great damage. A small spark becomes a small fire, and a small fire can burn thousands of acres. Just think of the power in a small match.
- A tongue can boast of great things and start wars. Gossip can ruin lives. **The tongue is greater than an atomic bomb.**
- The tongue is a world of evil. Good grief what a statement. The tongue can be holy but likewise a world of evil.
- The tongue even has the ultimate power of life and death.

These passages are some of the most powerful in scripture:

Prov 18:21

21 The tongue has the power of life and death,
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Prov 10:19-20

19 When words are many, sin is not absent,
but he who holds his tongue is wise.
20 The tongue of the righteous is choice silver,
but the heart of the wicked is of little value.
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Prov 11:12

12 A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor,
but a man of understanding holds his tongue.
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Prov 12:18-19

18 Reckless words pierce like a sword,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.
19 Truthful lips endure forever,
but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.
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Prov 15:4

4 The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life,
but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.
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Prov 17:4

4 A wicked man listens to evil lips;
a liar pays attention to a malicious tongue.
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Prov 25:23

23 As a north wind brings rain,
so a sly tongue brings angry looks.
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Prov 13:3

3 He who guards his lips guards his life,
but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.
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Prov 18:6-7

6 A fool's lips bring him strife,
and his mouth invites a beating.
7 A fool's mouth is his undoing,
and his lips are a snare to his soul.
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Prov 20:15

15 Gold there is, and rubies in abundance, but lips that speak
knowledge are a rare jewel.

- Among the parts of the body, the tongue reigns supreme for evil. Most sin starts with a thought that grows with the mouth. A cruel remark ends in a fist fight.
- James says the tongue can corrupt the whole body. Think about that. ***Spiloo- to defile or spoil. To corrupt. To stain or spot. Its root refers to the disgrace that comes from sin. A defect or blemish.***

Verse 7: Note the irony of the word *beasts* in this passage. The wild beasts are being tamed. The creatures without a conscience are being tamed by a man, who cannot for the life of himself, tame himself or his tongue. He has no chance of taming himself because he can't even tame the smallest member of his own body.

Verse 8: We can tame a lizard, an elephant, and even a snake, but not our tongues. The tongue is so evil, James says that no man can tame it.

- It's a **restless evil**. **Akataschetos- (alpha privative) to be unrestrainable. The opposite of stay, keep or hold down. It can't be seized; it is unruly.**
- The tongue is full of **deadly poison** or venom. The word is **ios- rust or poison. The venom of a snake**. The tongue bites and injects poison in the hearts and minds of others and corrupts the messengers whole body.

IV. The Hypocrisy of the Tongue: Verses 9-12

- We praise God and curse men who are made in his likeness. The irony of this is amazing. We praise God for his goodness, and for his creation and blessings, and then curse those we are supposed to love that are created in his image. That's equivalent to saying I love my wife but hate my children.

Verse 10: Here is what we need to harvest from this. To curse men is also cursing God. It's the **eulogy (eulogia)** vs. the **curse (katara)**. A good word with an imprecation. It ought not to be.

Verse 11: Can you get fresh water and salt water from the same spring? Impossible.

Illustration: The brownies have a little poop in them. Not much, just a little. Would you eat them if it had only a little poop in them. Like the movie had just a little cursing in it.

~ Maybe just a little septic tank water in your well? Would that be okay.

Verse 12: A tree can only bear the fruit of its intrinsic nature. So maybe James is saying that if you have an evil tongue, maybe you don't know Jesus. Maybe the spring is full of salt. Maybe the tree can only bear bad fruit. Maybe your tongue is a hypocrite.

Matt 7:15-20

15 "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? 17 Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, **and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.** 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

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Closing:

So Pastor what are we going to do about our tongues if we have no hope of man not taming it? **I didn't say that the Holy Spirit can't tame it; I said that man can't tame it.**

Last Point.... The Power of the Holy Spirit.

- Surrender your tongue to Christ. Yield its fruit to Christ. Ask the Holy Spirit to catch your words before they are spoken and make sure you speak as God speaks.