

“The Theology of The Tongue”
James 3:1-12
WBC Jerry Grey 10-18; 11-23

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 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.

NIV

No other living creature 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 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 that we have within us.

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

But likewise we:

- Gossip
- Lie
- Curse
- Deceive
- Teach falsehood and error
- Start wars
- Slander
- Complain
- Backbite
- Tear down and destroy

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 powerful than anything you can ever say with words. Don't believe me? You will have to 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.**

NIV

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.

NIV

Prov 21:23

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

NIV

Prov 25:15

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

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I. The Power of a Righteous and Silent Tongue: Verse 1-2

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 10:17

19 When words are many, sin is not absent,
but he who holds his tongue is wise.

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Prov 11:10

12 A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor,
but a man of understanding holds his tongue.

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Prov 17:27

27 A man of knowledge uses words with restraint,
and a man of understanding is even-tempered.

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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.

Illustration: Hey, did I tell you who I am dating now? (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, 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 it's silence. Not every time, but a lot of the time.

Remember that we must earn the right to speak into another's life. When the word of rebuke is given, and it causes division, it is usually because we have not earned the right to correct. Yet,

many times those we have earned the right to correct will also get angry with us. That's when the responsibility falls on them, however. If I have earned the right to speak, you should at least weigh what I have said without anger.

In verse 3:1, James makes it clear that a teacher, or mature Christian, will be judged much stricter. What James is revealing is that those who are our mentors must live a life worthy of respect so that they can speak into our lives.

Teachers, preachers, and mature lay leaders in the body are our mentors. They speak the truth in love to us.

In verse 1 James uses the word *didaskalos* for teacher. This is the word for masters. This is a master teacher or doctor. The instructor is always held to a higher standard. So, if you speak openly in a critical way, you put a target on your back in the family. You better be living for Jesus. James says the leaders have a stricter condemnation.

James is aware that we all stumble (**ptaio, offend**) in many ways. No one is perfect, but you can bet that as a teacher of the Word you will be watched to see if you live the Word.

One of the greatest statements in all of the bible is now spoken:

“If any man does not stumble in what he says, he is a mature man who is able to control his whole body.”

- 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 the tongue you can control the entire body. Think about that.***
- 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 would be more responsible for their actions.
- James makes sure to say that we are all human and stumble in many ways. ***ptatio- to fall or err, offend or stumble... to fall. Teachers will also stumble too.***
- James makes a pretty amazing statement. ***If you can control your tongue you can control your whole body.*** Peter lost his control on the night Jesus was betrayed and began to curse. His cursing was a sign that he was out of control. When we lose our discipline the first sin to show up is curding. I challenge you to disagree with me. As soon as anger shows up, out comes the bad words. Physical control is accompanied by clear cut language that is piercing and godly.

A loose tongue reveals a body that is out of control.

II. The Power of a Harnessed Tongue: Verses 3-4

Verse 3-4: A Few Examples of Power:

1. The first example is the ***hippos, ἵππος.*** 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 are born that way. Totally depraved and we fight it until we go to heaven. The entire horde is controlled by a bit in the mouth.

The **chalinos** or **headstall**. This is the harness or bit that controls the big animal. **If only we had a bit in our mouths.** Think about what I just said. We do have a bit and it's called The Holy Spirit.

The entire horse is controlled by one tiny bit.

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.

- Some horse are so tame you can ride them without a bit in their mouths. They are that trust worthy. We should be so tame as to be allowed to walk with God without the Holy Spirit constantly correcting and preventing us from speaking rebellion.

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. It is our job to fight those forces and control our tongues. We all have **red hot pokers**

in our lives. There are people and circumstances in our lives that are red hot pokers in our lives. We get poked until we explode.

We have to learn to allow the harsh wind, red hot pokers, and agitation, to be turned into a useful power to push us along. The sail boat uses the wind to push it along instead of fighting the wind.

I desire to be lead wherever the pilot leads me. The rudder guides the ship as it goes in the desired direction of the pilot.

A controlled tongue reveals a healthy body and mature believer.

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 15:2

The tongue of the wise commands knowledge,
but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.

NIV

Prov 15:2

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

NIV

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

- The tongue is a spark. A spark is but a small thing but has the potential to do great damage. A small spark becomes a small fire and a small fire can burn thousands of acres.

- A tongue can boast of great things and start wars. Gossip can ruin lives. **The tongue can be 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.

Prov 18:21

21 The tongue has the power of life and death,
and those who love it will eat its fruit.
NIV

Prov 18:21

21 The tongue can speak words that bring life or death. Those who love to talk must be ready to accept what it brings.
Holy Bible: Easy-to-Read Version,

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.
NIV

Prov 11:12

12 A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor,
but a man of understanding holds his tongue.
NIV

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.
NIV

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.
NIV

Prov 13:3

3 He who guards his lips guards his life,
but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.
NIV

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 get exposed 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.***

James describes the tongue, vividly!

- Small but powerful. A small part of the body.
- Boasts great swelling words.
- A fire.
- Unrighteous.
- Pollutes.
- Sets the course of life on fire. Can ruin your life.
- Set on fire by hell itself.
- Untamable.
- A restless evil. Good grief what a description. The tongue does not rest.
- Full of evil.
- Filled with poison. Venomous!
- Unruly, unrestrainable.

Verse 7: 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. 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 and 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 His creation, and His 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." "I love God, but Jesus I don't care for."

Verse 10: Here is what we need to gather from this. To curse men is also cursing God. It's the eulogy vs. the curse. The Greek text uses the word for **eulogy** and the word **imprecation**. A good word with a curse. It ought not to be. All this from the same mouth. No!

Verse 11: Can you get fresh water and salt water from the same spring? Impossible. At some point in this analogy we must consider if the person with this cursing tongue is saved at all. James says you can't get fresh water and salt water at the same time.

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. You can fool me with leaves. I may not identify a tree by its leaves but I can't be fooled by the fruit.

Maybe your tongue is a hypocrite. Maybe your heart is void of Jesus.

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 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.

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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Ps 15:1-4

Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary?
Who may live on your holy hill?
2 He whose walk is blameless
and who does what is righteous,
who speaks the truth from his heart
3 **and has no slander on his tongue,**
who does his neighbor no wrong
and casts no slur on his fellowman,
4 who despises a vile man
but honors those who fear the Lord,
who keeps his oath
even when it hurts,
NIV

Ps 34:13

13 Keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from speaking lies.
NIV

Ps 52:1-3

Why do you boast of evil, you mighty man?
Why do you boast all day long,
you who are a disgrace in the eyes of God?
2 Your tongue plots destruction;
it is like a sharpened razor,
you who practice deceit.
3 You love evil rather than good,
falsehood rather than speaking the truth.
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