

The Power of The Tongue

- James 3:1-12

- **We have been studying the book of James & going over some very practical illustrations of how we as Christians are to live in a manner not only to bring honor to God, but to have the best witness among our brethren here.**
 - In Chapter 1 we have talked about:
 - Testings vs. Temptations
 - Power of God's Word
 - In Chapter 2 we discussed:
 - Making sure our walk exemplifies our talk.
 - Proving, or living out, our faith.
 - Now in chapter 3, James tackles what many believe is the toughest of all when it comes to honoring God with our WHOLE life.
 - If we are going to be mature Christians, if we are going to have an effective witness, and if we are going to completely submit ourselves to God, it will require complete power over our tongues.
- **James has opened up his ministry to us here in the book of James as he delves into some very personal issues that were affecting not only the believer's lives, but it was also affecting the ministry.**
 - Do you understand tonight that your personal lives will ultimately affect this ministry?
 - Your testimony affects this ministry.
 - Your attendance affects this ministry.
 - Your personal walk with the Lord affects this ministry.
 - The way you live your life & how you present yourselves to others affects this ministry.
 - And the use of our tongues, whether for good or for evil, affects this ministry.
- **The Christians that James wrote to were apparently having serious problems with their tongues. James had already told them in chapter 1 to be, "swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (1:19). He even goes as far as to describe our conversation as acting as though we were already facing Christ in judgment (2:12).**
- **The power of speech is one of the greatest powers God has given us. With the tongue, man can praise God, pray, preach the Word, and lead the lost to Christ. What a privilege! But with that same tongue he can tell lies that could ruin a man's reputation or break a person's heart. The ability to speak words is the ability to influence others and accomplish tremendous tasks; and yet we take this ability for granted.**
- **So James gave us six pictures of the tongue and reveals the power that each has:**
 1. **Power to Direct: the Bit and Rudder (3:1-4)**
 - a. **Warning to the Teachers.**
 - i. One of the issues James was dealing with is found in v.1.
 - ii. While it is a good thing to have folks rise up & be willing to teach & lead others spiritually, not everyone can be teachers & if they do, they must make sure they are doing it for the right reason.
 1. Some during this time were more concerned about the position & the authority than they were the responsibility of the position.
 2. Those who teach the Word face the stricter judgment not only from God, but also from others. Why?
 - a. James 4:17 – "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."
 3. Pastors, Deacons, Teachers must practice what they teach; otherwise, their teaching is hypocrisy & will lead others away from the Truth.

b. Warning about the power of the tongue. (v.2-4)

- i. Every single one of us tonight can admit that we have failed God & others in many ways. But I guarantee you that one of the ways is through the use or the lack of use in our tongues.
- ii. James even goes as far as to say that if you can learn to bridle your tongue, you will be able to bridle your whole body. As I thought about this I ask myself the question, “Do the sins of my tongue affect the sins of my entire body?” Is it true that words often lead to ... deeds, right?
 1. You ever know someone who is always getting in fights because they cant control their mouth? There’s an example of the sins of the tongue affecting the sins of the body.
- iii. You see, we rarely think that the tongue, such a small member of our body, has such power & influence in our lives, don’t we?
- iv. And perhaps that is the very reason that James gives us 2 illustrations of how something small controls a much larger vessel.
 1. A small bit enables the rider to control the great horse.
 - a. The bit must overcome the wild nature of the horse.
 - b. And b/c of this small piece of metal, an experienced horseman will control an animal that weighs 4-5 times more than him simply by controlling the bit.
 2. A small rudder enables the pilot to steer the huge ship.
 - a. The rudder must fight the winds and currents that would drive the ship off its course.
 - b. Yet in the hands of an experienced Captain, he can guide the ship through the storms of the sea as long as the rudder in in his complete control.
 3. In the same manner, our tongues are small & it too must overcome some difficult forces.
 - a. Our sinful, human nature.
 - b. Circumstances & sin around us.
 - c. Pressures of this world.
 - d. But when our tongues are being controlled by our Savior, we never have to fear it getting out of hand.
 - i. Its important to give God our sins.
 - ii. We ought to give him our hearts.
 - iii. But we need to make sure we give every part of our being to Him, whether great or small, including even our tongues so that we might bring honor to Him with ALL that we have.
 - iv. Psalm 141:3 – “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.”
 - v. The bit and rudder have the power to affect people’s lives ... and so does our tongue. We need to understand the power that our words have on the lives of others.
 1. On April 21, 1855, Edward Kimball went into a Boston shoe store and led young Dwight L. Moody to Christ. The result: one of history's greatest evangelists, a man whose ministry still continues. The tongue has the power to direct others to the right choices.
 2. Testimony of Useph

2. Power to Destroy: the Fire and Animal (3:5-8)

a. Our words can start fires.

- i. A fire reportedly started in the O'Leary barn in Chicago at 8:30 p.m., October 8, 1871; and because that fire spread, over 100,000 people were left homeless, 17,500 buildings were destroyed, and 300 people died. It cost the city over \$400 million.
- ii. It has been said, "As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife" ([Prov. 26:20-21](#)).
- iii. If a Christian cannot control his tongue, what is the result? Complete destruction!
- iv. If a church cannot control their tongue what will be the end result? Complete destruction!
 - 1. Ever said something in the heat of the moment at home that you wished you had never said?
 - a. Psalm 39:1,3
 - b. David had a hot temper, he knew it, and he cried out to God to help him bridle his tongue so he would not sin further with his tongue.
 - 2. Solomon wrote, "He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit."(Prov. 17:27)
 - 3. James states in v.6 that the tongue "setteth on fire the course of nature".
 - a. In other words, a person's entire life can be injured or destroyed by the tongue.
 - 4. You can almost hear the words of James ringing out, "Be slow to speak ..."

b. Our words can leave a mark.

- i. We have all said things that we did not mean, and the result has led to scars in our relationships, a marriage, a home, a Sunday School class, and even a church.
- ii. What's the one thing that can take away that dirtiness? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. He died so that we might not have to live with a defiled life.
 - 1. Oh, we have consequences to bear b/c of our words.
 - 2. But through the blood of Christ, we can be cleansed of all our sins & be restored in our relationship with God.

c. Our words are like an untamed animal.

- i. One of the things that my kids love to do is go to the zoo and look at the animals. And each of the animals are different and have different types of personality; but they all have one thing in common, they are wild animals & no matter how much you try, you can never completely tame them.
 - 1. Some of those animals can rip you apart with their claws,
 - 2. Others may harm you with their poison,
 - 3. And yet there are those that will seek to consume you.
- ii. Words in many ways affect others in the exact same way.
 - 1. In the heat of the moment, if our tongue is left un-bridled, we can literally rip others apart by the words we speak.
 - 2. Unfortunately, there are those who seek to destroy people by intentionally injecting a bit of poison into the conversation, hoping it would spread and finally get to the person he or she wanted to hurt.
- iii. As a Christian and as a Pastor, I have seen the effect that words have on family, friends, and even other church members.
- iv. Just as you would never allow a roaring lion to be turned loose in your home, neither should we do the same by not controlling our tongues.
 - o Here is the beauty of the power of God in our lives though. In the hands of the Master, you can take a wild animal & turn him into a faithful worker who accomplishes much for the Master. And a fire, under the control of the Master, can be turned into a productive source of energy that will impact & be a blessing to others.

3. Power to Delight: the Fountain and Tree (3:9-12)

a. Our words should be as a fountain.

- i. As Bro. Carlisle mentioned this morning, the source of water is a great blessing when we can't get it. Man needs water not only for drinking, but also for washing, cooking, farming, and a host of other activities so necessary to life.
- ii. If water is life giving, then so too are our words. Yet left uncontrolled, waters can bring about death & destruction.
 - 1. Tsunami of 2011
 - a. On March 11, 2011, a magnitude-9 earthquake shook northeastern Japan, unleashing a savage tsunami.
 - b. The effects of the great earthquake were felt around the world, from Norway's fjords to Antarctica's ice sheet.
 - c. More than 18,000 people were killed in the disaster. Most died by drowning.
 - d. Less than an hour after the earthquake, the first of many tsunami waves hit Japan's coastline. The tsunami waves reached run-up heights of up to 128 feet at Miyako city and traveled inland as far as 6 miles. The tsunami flooded an estimated area of approximately 217 square miles in Japan.
 - e. Tsunami debris continues to wash up on North American beaches two years later.
 - 2. Proverbs 18:4 – “The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters, and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook.”

b. The tongue is also like a tree.

- i. Trees have many different functions as they relate to our world.
 - 1. They help to hold down the soil;
 - 2. they provide beauty and shade;
 - 3. they bear fruit,
 - 4. And they can ever be a source of income.
 - ii. But, the most important thing about a tree is the root system. If the roots do not go down deep, the tree will not grow in a healthy manner & they will not stand long.
 - iii. If we are rooted in Christ, then we will be able to stand during the storms of life & our words will be like fruit to others.
 - 1. Have you ever run into a stranger & through your conversation was able to give them the Gospel?
 - 2. Have you ever been in a difficult or tragic circumstance & God gave you the right words to speak comfort & truth to a family in need?
 - iv. That's God, but it doesn't just come by accident. If our words are going to bring encouragement & strength to others, it will require walking daily with the Lord, “and in the power of His might.”
 - v. But James issued a warning: a fountain cannot give forth two kinds of water, and a tree cannot bear two different kinds of fruit.
 - 1. If the tongue is inconsistent, there is something radically wrong with the heart.
 - 2. When Peter was out of fellowship with Christ, he uttered some horrible words; but he went out and wept bitterly and confessed his sins.
 - vi. The tongue that praises God on Sunday, and then turns around and curses men made in God's image, is in desperate need of a touch from God.
- **So is the source of the problem the tongue? No, the source of the problem is the heart.**
 - Proverbs 4:23 – “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”
 - **As we close out this year & begin a new year, let's all put in to practice some words that can change not only our lives, but the lives of others & in the process bring honor to God.**