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A0735 – September 2, 2007 – Jas 3:7-8 – The Tongue: Untamable

James 3:7-10a Πᾶσα γὰρ φύσις θηρίων τε καὶ πετεινῶν, ἑρπετῶν τε καὶ ἑναλίων, δαμάζεται καὶ δεδάμασται τῇ φύσει τῇ ἀνθρωπίνῃ · ὁ τὴν δὲ γλῶσσαν οὐδεὶς δύναται ἀνθρώπων δαμάσαι · ἀκατάσχετον κακόν, μεστὴ ἰοῦ θανατηφόρου. (BYZ)

James 3:7-10a For every kind of beasts and birds, reptiles and sea creatures, are tamed and have been tamed by man-kind; ⁸but the tongue no one can tame; a restless evil, full of death-bringing poison. (Author's Translation)

James 3:7-10a For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. ⁸But no one can tame the tongue; *it is* a restless evil *and* full of deadly poison. (NASB95)

Okay, we return to the tongue and the fact that ultimately it's an enigma. It can build up and it can tear down. It can bless and it can curse. And one of the big issues is the heart, what's in the heart, Jesus said, that which fills the heart comes out through the mouth. The heart, *kardia*, is a mind word, it refers to the very center of your being, what is at the deepest level of your mentality. So if we want a tongue that glorifies God the mind has got to have content in it. Biblical content, we call it Doctrine. James is going to get to this down in verse 14, 16 and 4:8. If you look at those verses you'll see that he's lining up with Jesus on this. Whatever is in your heart/mind is going to come out of your mouth. So, let's see how this works. First, you hear a clear gospel message, that Christ died for your sins and rose from the dead, then you believe in Christ, at which point you are justified, once for all declared righteous in the high court of heaven and you are regenerated, given eternal life. This assures entrance into heaven and it's what we call Phase 1: Salvation, deliverance from the penalty of sin which is eternal death in

gehenna, hell. Then we enter into Phase 2: Salvation, deliverance from the power of sin. Maturity is the long-term dimension of salvation. It is a process. It's when the believer is supposed to advance to maturity. So, we have to fill the mind with Bible doctrine. It requires years of sitting under sound Bible doctrine to mature. So, the first step is finding the best pastor-teacher in your area who studies and teaches from the original languages so you will be able to advance toward maturity at the fastest pace. Just like a newborn baby a newborn believer needs the pure milk of the word taught consistently from the pulpit in a systematic and organized way. That means basic Bible doctrine. You don't need all the hoopla that stirs the emotions, the modern contemporary worship movement and all that. You need to settle down and engage your mind with sound Bible doctrine; constant intake of the word, digestion of the word through repetition and meditation on the word, and application of the word in daily life circumstances. This results in spiritual advancement. Maturity is reached when you have mastered the fundamentals of the faith and are able to communicate them and apply them consistently. Paul assumed maturity should be reached within 5 years of the conversion experience. At that point you should be mature enough to use the tongue to build others up and not tear down. However, a second requirement must also be met, not only do you have to reach spiritual maturity but you also have to be spiritual. Spirituality means being filled by the Spirit so you are walking by the Spirit. If you are mature but not walking by the Spirit you will not use the tongue properly. So, spirituality is the existential dimension of sanctification. Either you're walking by the Spirit or not. It's an absolute condition. For those in fellowship, abiding in Him we say they are in a state of spirituality at which point they are applying the Bible doctrine resident in their mind to life circumstances which is almost always related to the tongue. When you sin you lose fellowship and are not walking by the Spirit. So, you want to confess your known sin to God at which point you are restored to fellowship with God. So, two basic things are required for proper use of the tongue: maturity and spirituality. You can imagine then how the tongue is a very dangerous part of our body. James says it's "the very world of iniquity".

Let's get our bearings so we can further develop the tongue. The context is becoming teachers, "Do not many of you become teachers". Now, he's not warning about teaching your children or teaching Sunday School. He's talking about teaching professionally, teaching openly to male and female believers in the congregation. To understand why James is so concerned

about this you have to understand the historical context. These were Jewish so their culture was Jewish and James would never even conceive of a woman wanting to become a professional teacher. So, throughout he's really addressing the men just like Paul did in 1 Tim 2:11-15. At least that's the primary interpretation. I think the general principles of the use of the tongue are for all of us; men, women and children. But the primary interpretation is directed against men rushing into the authoritative position of teaching the word of God because of the tongue, this part of our body which is an enigma and which causes us to sin so often because it speaks out from that which fills the heart and the heart is desperately wicked, who can know it. The teacher uses the tongue as his primary instrument to interact with the word of God and people but it stumbles so easily and every word is going to come into judgment at the judgment seat of Christ and for the teacher it's a stricter, narrower, tighter judgment, no wiggle room, very tight because the word of God is very tight, very precise.

The Jewish culture at this time generated a strong power lust among Jewish men. Everyone wanted to become a teacher because of the high esteem, power, and influence that position held. The professional teacher in their culture was the rabbi. "rabbi" simply means "my teacher" and James is saying "Don't rush into that position. Be patient, mature first, learn to walk by the Spirit." The "rabbi's" were highly trained exegetes of the OT, especially Torah. They were known as "the wise". They were usually from the upper echelon's of society. They were the leaders and they were very influential. The people looked to the rabbi's for direction and answers. They were akin to big time politicians and celebrities in our culture. Bible teachers used to be held in high regard. So, you had these men striving and fighting among one another to get into the position of teacher but James is warning against that because of the dangers of the tongue. A man must reach spiritual maturity if he's going to instruct others.

So, by the end of this section in v 11-12 we find out that the tongue is an enigma. It has the Power to Direct and the Power to Destroy. Last week we looked at its Power to Direct and we learned about two pedagogical tools. What are they? What are the teaching devices out there in our daily experience which we can utilize as daily reminders and teaching tools? The Horses Bit and the Ships Rudder. Small but effective, both able to direct a much larger body to a destination. So, you want to pick up these illustrations,

really pay attention as you go out in the world and utilize them. You want to constantly be reminded when you see a horse or a ship about the tongue. What am I saying to others? Does it conform to the standard which is the word of God? Or am I promoting my own autonomous agenda? How am I speaking to others? Content is not the only important thing, manner is just as important. We can say the right thing the wrong way. And you really need to be cognizant of what your saying because what you're showing people is really what's in your heart/mind. We get so accustomed to hearing ourselves we don't stop to ask, "What do I sound like? What's my tone?" We all forget to do this and before we've realized it we've blazed a path of destruction. So, we really need to think before we speak. It's so vital to our lives and the lives of others. Not only does the tongue have the Power to Direct it also has the Power to Destroy. And what is the pedagogical tool we can use here. Fire, a spark, a campfire. Remember how Smokey the Bear used to say "Only you can prevent forest fires". Well, he had a point there with the tongue too. It's up to you with the tongue. Are you going to walk by the Spirit or are you going to let the world, the flesh and the devil take over, piss you off and send you into a storming frenzy. So, I'm positing that you have got to start taking advantage of every day situations, paying attention to your surroundings, utilizing what God brings into your experience as teaching tools. Not just for yourself but for your children, your grandchildren. You will never influence anyone more than your own children and next to that your grandchildren and we have a real unfortunate break between the older and younger generation in our day. And young Christians, in their teens, 20's and 30's are doing a great disservice to the church by pushing the older people out. Making the same mistake Solomon's son Rehoboam made centuries ago. He became King and he said, "Get the old fogies out and bring in the young, dumb idiots to run this joint." Well, they ran it all right, right into the ground. There needs to be a closer connection, dialogue across these generational divides among Christians if we're going to hold this thing together and not run it into the ground. Because the new kids on the block don't have all the good ideas. Basically if you're around long enough and you'll learn to listen you'll see that the older people have been there, done that and just who do you think you are that you're going to make it work. So, this has to start with families. Families need to stick together closer so grandparents can have a larger influence on their grandchildren's lives. Now, I know that is just slapping parents in the face right now because we're always trying to push them out, trying to get some breathing room, "Hey, back off, they're our kids and we're responsible

for them.” Well, it’s not biblical. Large sections of the Scripture are devoted to grandparents teaching grandchildren and you know what you’ve probably never heard, a sermon on grandparents. There’s something vital there that needs to be resurrected if things are going to hold together across generations. I’m not saying grandparents should run their lives or anything, there’s a balance, but what I am saying is they have a lot to offer and here are three wisdom devices if you want to call them that; the Horses Bit, the Ships Rudder and the Fire’s Spark and there are a whole host of others used in other portions of Scripture and we need to start capitalizing on these, using them every day to remind ourselves and teach our young people. Leave behind a legacy of biblical training.

Now, let’s finish off verse 6, we said last time the tongue is not the source of the fire. It’s the fuse but the source is “hell itself”. That Greek word is *gehenna* not *sheol*. Sheol is the temporary place for all unbelieving dead before they go to the Great White Throne judgment and are cast in *gehenna*, also known as the lake of fire. Hell, Gehenna and the Lake of Fire all refer to the same place, the place of eternal destruction for all unbelievers. Here the word is Gehenna, it comes from the Hebrew *hinnom*. The Hinnom Valley was a deep ravine south and southwest of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem where the sons of Israel offered their infants as sacrifices to the god Molech.

Before and up to Jesus’ day the Hinnom Valley was a garbage dump that burned continually with fire. Dead animals, dead criminals and all kinds of human filth were thrown in the fires of *gehenna*. Jesus used it 11 times as a figure referring to the lake of fire, the final place of everlasting destruction for all unbelieving dead. According to Jesus *gehenna* was created for the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41) so for James *gehenna* conjures up not only the place but the devil and his angels who will one day be cast into it. Satan can put words in the believer’s mouth by infiltrating our thinking patterns. That’s why we were developing a Biblical Framework in Sunday School. Satan is slick and he’s the ruler of this world system and he uses the education system, the media, the government, the whole system to infiltrate your thinking so you don’t think according to God’s word. The world system is not neutral, it’s totally opposed to God. And there is a war going on and the best of men, the most godly men can get totally taken in by this thing. Let me show you one over in Mark 8. Here’s the situation. Jesus is prophesying of His future and guess who is compelled to call Jesus aside and rebuke Him.

Who's the big mouth in the gospels? Who just can't control himself? He was always the guy we see piping in at the wrong times and making these catastrophic mistakes. I think we can all identify with him, Peter. Always acting before thinking. Mark 8:31-33

Mark 8:31-33 And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. ³³But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

Now, what I want you to notice is how Jesus detected that Satan had infiltrated Peter's mind. He detected it through Peter's tongue! What's also interesting is that Jesus made two attacks here, he attacked two people, not just one. It's not just Peter that's involved. Notice how He directly goes after Satan "Get behind Me, Satan". Now, he's not saying Satan is indwelling Peter but Satan is the one who has implanted this thought there in Peter's mind. But not without Peter's consent. Peter has a volition and Peter could have rejected this false thought but he didn't so Jesus goes after him too, "you [Peter] are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." So, Satan infiltrates our thinking and we entertain these notions and we buy into them and before you know it we're voicing them, we're voicing the opposition, we're vocalizing Satan's thoughts and plans and that is what James is warning about. The tongue is **set on fire by hell**, its set on fire by the devil and his angels who will ultimately inhabit that place. Be careful, believers can and are influenced by demons. That's why the word of God is so important. We have got to have a steady diet of the word of God, all the time, every day, that's why these little illustrations like the Horse, the Ship and the Fire are so *apropos* for daily living, they remind you to ask, "Hey, what's in my heart/mind?" Because whatever is there is going to come out of your mouth and it has the power to direct your life and those around you.

So, I want to go into verse 7-8 now and a new illustration, a fourth tool to put in your pedagogical toolbox and that is Animals.

James 3:7-8 For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. ⁸But no one can tame the tongue; *it is* a restless evil *and* full of deadly poison.

This one you're going to encounter every day because James covers a lot of ground; beasts, birds, reptiles, sea creatures, the whole nine yards, days 5 and 6 of creation week. God spent two whole days making all these different kinds of animals to fill the land, air and sea and we all come into contact with these animals every day somewhere, sometime and what you want to remember is that somewhere, sometime, these animals have been tamed. Maybe you've been to the circus and seen elephants, lions, tigers, bears, mice, fleas all tamed and trained to do what the master wants. If you stop and think about it that's really amazing. Lots of these animals are bigger than us and stronger than us and yet we tame them? How is that? You can't make sense of that in an evolutionary scheme. If the fittest survive shouldn't lions, tigers and bears be at the top of the food chain? Gen 9:2 is the Christian answer. After the flood God put the fear of men in animals. "The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given." So, they are afraid of man and that's the prerequisite for taming them. A non-Christian does not have an answer for this. But no man can tame the tongue. Let's go into the details.

For every species, that word **species** is in the title of Darwin's book, *Origin of the Species*. Did you know there's another title of that book. You don't see it any more. But it was given two titles and the second title was "Preservation of the Favored Races in the Struggle for Life". Do you know what that document is? It's a racist document. Every evolutionist in the 19th century was a racist. They believed white Arian peoples were farther along in evolutionary development than Jews and Blacks. They had a whole scale and you can see where Hitler took this in the 1930-s-40's, to its logical conclusion, exterminate the throwbacks of evolution. That document is a racist pagan document. Now, most modern scientists are not but the early one's were across the board. So, anyway, we're looking at this word **species** and Carolus Linnaeus used this word in his famous Taxonomic scheme we all learned in biology class: Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Family, Order, Genus, Species. The species referred to a single organism with distinct characteristics so we don't want to translate it that way in James because he's referring to a variety of

organisms not a single organism. In the Biblical sense we'd translate it "kinds". The word *phusis* (nature, essence, birth) refers to that which an animal is by birth and emphasizes the biblical teaching that animals reproduce after their kind. All flesh is not the same flesh as evolution teaches but there is a flesh of beasts and a flesh of birds and a flesh of fish (1 Cor 15:39). These did not evolve from a common ancestor. They are different kinds or species that God created. There is variety within the kind (lots of dogs, horses, etc...) but there are boundaries to the kind of changes that can occur within the kind (they are still dogs, horses, etc...). Then he lists the kinds that man has tamed; **beasts** (*therion*), same word used on day 6 of "beasts" (LXX Gen 1:24), **birds** (*pteinon*) the same word used on day 5 of "birds" (LXX Gen 1:21), **reptiles** (*erpeton*) the same word used on day 6 of "creeping things" (LXX Gen 1:24, 25, 26) and **creatures of the sea** (*enalion*) a word used only here.

These have been **tamed**, (*damazo*) a Greek word meaning "to subdue, to control". It's used in Mark 5:4 of the demon-possessed man who lived in Gerasa among the tombs and men had tried to shackle him with chains but he would tear the chains apart and no one could "subdue him". Then Jesus cast out the demon named Legion into the swine and they ran into the Sea of Galilee and drowned themselves. Well, this is an insightful text because if the tongue is set on fire by demons and no human could subdue that demon-possessed man then it follows that no one can tame the tongue and that is precisely what James is teaching in verse 8. So, the picture of the tongue is that demon-possessed man who couldn't be subdued and unless some greater power, some power greater than demons subdues the situation then the tongue is going to act like a wild animal. It's going to destroy. We should be grateful that He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). So, under the filling of the Spirit the tongue can be tamed, not by us but by Him. But if you don't walk by the Spirit your tongue will be just like that wild man of Gerasa who could not be subdued by men.

Verse 8, **but no one can tame the tongue**, by this he means no man. Just as no man could subdue that demon possessed man so no man can subdue the tongue. No mention of the Holy Spirit is made here as the one who can but I think it's safe to say from other passages that is the key. Regardless this truth stands. A man, you in your own strength cannot tame the tongue. It's not a matter of will or volition, it's a matter of ability, we simply don't have it

in us to tame it. Men had the will to subdue that demon-possessed man but they had not the ability to do it! Nor do we with the tongue. It requires the ability of another, one greater than Satan and his angels. Why? First because **it is a restless evil**. The Greek word **restless** is *akatastatis* and it was used in James 1:8 of the double-minded man. He's the man who is tossed to and fro by the waves of a storm, taken wherever the storm wants to take him so it was translated there "unstable". That kind of man is unstable in all his ways and here it's translated as "restless". It's related to another word "cannot be restrained" (*akataschetos*) and that's the idea here. The tongue is this thing that can't be restrained, it's vacillating, it wavers, it fluctuates. James is continually exhorting believers to advance to maturity through trials. And one measure of maturity is the tongue, this restless evil. Evil, the Greek word *kakos* here referring to something that is harmful, injurious. The tongue harms others, it injures others. Turn to Mark 7:21-22, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts (there's the word), fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, ²²deeds of coveting *and* wickedness, *as well as* deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride *and* foolishness." And Jesus' point is that all this starts in the heart, the mind of man and what he conjures up in his mind is this evil. The heart is desperately wicked. Turn over to Col 3:5, "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire (there's the word again), and greed, which amounts to idolatry." And here since we are alive in Christ we are to consider our earthly bodies as dead to that old man, that old way of life and to live according to the new man that we are. Finally, turn to 1 Cor 15:33, I just want to take you to some practical advice here from Paul. In this key chapter, what's this chapter about, 1 Cor 15. Everyone ought to know, it's the key chapter on resurrection and in the midst of this doctrinal discussion on resurrection he gives a warning, "Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."" See, what Paul is getting at is hanging out with people who reject Bible doctrine. A lot of young Christians, typically the more popular types among their peers, they want to be accepted, they want to be cool, so they hang with the popular kids, quite frankly, usually they are the jocks and all that, spoiled brats who don't have an ounce of Bible doctrine, are into the party scene and all that, drugs alcohol, sex and that's what Paul's addressing here. Don't be deceived Christian, they're going to corrupt you. The next verse says they have "no knowledge of God" and that word doesn't mean they haven't been acquainted with some Bible doctrine but that they are willfully ignorant of it. They don't want that. Paul's saying they've got a moral default

here. Don't be deceived, if you spend all your time with bad people, those who reject Bible doctrine they are going to corrupt you, The Scriptures say they are "bad company", that's our word again for "evil". Don't think that you can hold the high ground if you spend all your time with people who are trying to pull you down. And you know why they do that. Romans 1-2 talk about this. It's a technique of the sin nature to get acceptance and approval. But they make the grounds of it guilt. You commit the same crime I do, whether it be sex, destruction of property, murder, drugs, it doesn't matter, we all do it together and the guilt we all share becomes the basis of unity. For example, among the Nazi death camp doctors, the unity of the group was sealed with "blood cement" (*Blutkitt*). Everybody participated and this is a policy that criminal groups throughout the world have followed for centuries. That's why they want to pull you in. They don't want you to tolerate their activities. They're not satisfied with tolerance. They want your approval. That's why they propagandize, recruit and convert. Don't be deceived, the homosexual movement in America is not about tolerance. They don't want tolerance, they want approval and if they can't convert you by their arguments, you know what they'll do, they're doing it right now, they'll make it the law so they can say, "Well, my course is the course of the country, you're the bigot." So, you watch out, they are out there and they want to convert you into their mortal sins. It is always, ALWAYS more difficult to stand against the tide than to go with it. So, you need to get some new friends if that's you. Don't be deceived, don't think you are going to win them to Christ and all that. In the long run if that's your main company I assure you you're going to go down baby. You will get caught up in immorality. You need fellowship within the body so you can get established in doctrine and advance to maturity. So, James says the tongue is this restless evil and I assure you, evil company will turn your tongue and life into a nasty thing. Second reason we can't tame the tongue, according to James, it's **full of deadly poison**. The word **full** (*mestos*) means "to fill up a space". When Peter and the disciples cast their net on the other side it says the net was **full** (John 21:11). And the tongue is like that net, except it's not full of fish, it's full of **deadly poison**. Really, this should be translated "death-bringing" or "death-dealing poison". If the tongue was a card dealer in a casino it deals out death. Some poisons don't bring death but this one does. The tongue brings death. It brings death to you and to others. Why because it deals in **poison** (*ios*), a chemical that when ingested kills. Turn to Romans 3:13. In this famous passage on sin, Paul concludes with a section summarizing the fact that everyone is under the sin nature and he

begins to draw that out by a series of quotations from the OT. We're all under sin he says in verse 9 and then he starts quoting and you get down to the middle of verse 13, "THE POISON OF ASPES IS UNDER THEIR LIPS" and you see that's a quote from where, look in your margin on verse 13b, Psalm 140:3. Turn there and we'll conclude with this Psalm. This is a Psalm of David. Here's the King and you've got to imagine, he's got evil men all around him trying to influence him, trying to trip him up and let's read verses 1-5,

Psalm 140:1-5 Rescue me, O LORD, from evil men; (I don't want to hang out with them, I want to be rescued from them, they're pressing in on all sides) Preserve me from violent men ²Who devise evil things in *their* hearts; They continually stir up wars. ³They sharpen their tongues as a serpent; Poison of a viper is under their lips (there's the quote). Selah. ⁴Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; Preserve me from violent men Who have purposed to trip up my feet. ⁵The proud have hidden a trap for me, and cords; They have spread a net by the wayside; They have set snares for me. Selah.

So, I just wanted you to see that there are two sides to this thing and the world is not sitting out there in neutrality. They want to destroy you, they want to stop you from advancing to spiritual maturity, they want to stop you from walking by the Spirit and if you keep bad company it's going to corrupt your heart/mind. It's going to come right off your tongue. It's deadly, full of poison and that's why you can't tame it, that's why you can watch men tame all kinds of animals but when you see a man with a tame tongue you're not seeing him but what the Holy Spirit does when a man is mature and walking by the Spirit. With our heads bowed and our eyes closed

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