

Good evening, it is good to be with you tonight in this capacity – thank you for being here and I look forward to sharing some of God’s word with you. It has been a constant source of joy for us this last year and a half to be a part of this local assembly and to hear week after week the faithful teaching from this pulpit, from the Word of God. It is the Word that makes us alive, it is the Word that changes us, and it is the Word of God that truly has the power to bring to fruition God’s purposes in the world, and we are so thankful for that. And as I have had an opportunity these last few months to teach in the Bible Education hour and at a few men’s gatherings, and have seen what the women are doing at their meetings, I have come to know how much work these men (and women) put into the preparation, and so that makes me even more grateful to God for His love for us being displayed as he works through them to bring us His Word. It is a kindness and grace of God that He has preserved

His words for us and that we can hold them in our hands. And so we want to take some time tonight to look into His Word and to draw from it, what I hope will be beneficial for us. Let's pray before we do that.

-Prayer-

Open your Bibles if you would to the book of James. We are going to be spending our time here tonight, and I want to look specifically at the first 12 verses of Chapter 3. But before we get to that text, let's talk about this book in general.

The author of James is James, the half-brother of Jesus. He was one of the leaders in the early church in Jerusalem, according to Galatians, and was present at the Jerusalem council, where the apostle Paul met with them as recorded in Acts chapter 15. The gospels call him one of the sons of Mary, and like Jesus' other siblings, was skeptical of Jesus' claims during his ministry on earth. Recorded in

John 7:2-5 are these words, **“2Now the Jews’ Feast of Booths was at hand. 3So his brothers^b said to him, “Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. 4For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.” 5For not even his brothers believed in him.”** He was converted sometime after Jesus’ resurrection and appearance to him, as noted in 1 Cor 15 - **“3For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.”**

So he started off like most of the people in the region, not believing in Jesus, but in the end, he was one of the leaders and ‘pillars’ of this new group of Christians and was ultimately martyred for his faith, sometime around 62 AD. Historians Eusebius and Hegesippus both record that he was thrown from the top of the temple, and Eusebius also writes that he was subsequently beaten to death with a club.

In the book of James, which has been called “Proverbs of the New Testament”, we see much wisdom literature and exhortation to godly living. A few major themes of this book are:

1. Practical Christian Living

James is not so concerned with what people **say** they believe, but rather with what actions those beliefs engender. We are not to be “merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word.”

(James 1:22-24) It is sometimes common for people to contrast sharply the teaching of James about faith and works with that of Paul, since Paul

talks of faith and grace over and against works as the path to salvation. I think this is fairly easily rectified when we look at James statements about works in chapter 2 within the context of what it means to be a true believer. He is emphasizing that real salvation always results in observable works – namely that a true faith from the heart is something that God produces, so is not faulty in it's practice but will necessarily be seen in the outworking of a Christian's life.

2. **Perseverance in the midst of trials** – James certainly knew about this, as evidenced by his own death and no doubt his suffering in the years prior to that. He had some real world knowledge of that about which he spoke and wrote. He has much to say about how to withstand suffering and also about all of the benefits accrued to believers who join with Jesus in His sufferings.
3. James also spends some time discussing both directly and indirectly **the final judgment**. Much

of his book is written with the view of standing before God, thus the exhortation to godly living and perseverance, and also to prayer and good works.

4.The Tongue

James mentions the tongue in every chapter of this book, and that really is not a huge surprise, since the tongue is the window into the heart, and his thrust is to help believers examine their own hearts to see if they have a true faith.

We see recorded in Matthew and Luke the words of Jesus saying “out of the abundance (overflow) of the heart, the mouth speaks.” This is an aphorism, or direct statement of fact, that also characterizes much of the book of James. So let’s pick it up in chapter 3, verses 1 -12.

1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. 2For 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. 3If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. 4Look 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. 5So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! 6And 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. 7For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10From the same mouth come blessing and

cursing, My brothers, these things ought not to be so. 11Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? 12Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.”

If you notice a parallel thought at the end there between what James is saying and what Jesus taught in the sermon on the mount, you are correct. There are many parallels in the book of James with Jesus sermon. That could be a whole other study, and would be interesting.

What I want to do is to walk through these verses and pull out some of the principles and warnings that James is giving to us, and to see if there are areas where we need to shore up or completely renovate our speech. As time allows, I also want to encourage us with a few words from the Bible about what good speech looks like.

I have assembled 6 main points from these verses as follows, and they are certainly not exhaustive:

1. Your tongue brings judgment
2. Your tongue reveals your maturity
3. Your tongue is small, but powerful
4. Your tongue is wild and deadly
5. Your tongue can be inconsistent
6. Your tongue reveals your heart

Your tongue reveals who you are in a unique way. James spends a great deal of time in this book talking about our speech and how it is a test of living faith. He mentions the tongue not only in these verses in Chapter 3, but in every chapter of this book. The whole book could be a series of tests of living faith, with the tongue being just one of these and as he points out very clearly throughout, the genuineness of a person's faith inevitably will be demonstrated by his speech.

The first principle we want to see from our study is that (1) your tongue brings judgment. Verses 1 and 2 say **“Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many ways.”** There is a cautious reluctance that is necessary to being a teacher. In those days, teachers, or didaskaloi, was a term used of rabbis and any others who officially functioned in the preaching or teaching role. These rabbis were afforded great respect and prestige, often prioritized over or treated better in many cases by people than they treated their own parents. This became a source of dangerous pride for them and so James is cautioning his readers to examine their motives and their heart attitudes, to make sure they are seeking such a position of using their tongues to teach for the right reasons. There were also opportunities for respected Jewish men to speak in synagogues – we see this in the life of Jesus in

Luke 4:15-21 where Jesus goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath and reads from the book (or scroll) of Isaiah Chapter 61. Also, Paul and Barnabas spoke frequently when visiting cities as documented throughout the book of Acts. So using your tongue as a means to proclaim the Gospel and to explain the scriptures is a good thing, but there is, as James says, a stricter judgment, since one is teaching the very words of God and must be careful. God **does** want us to share the truth, and we are in fact commanded to do so (cf. Matt 28). Using the early church as an example, (1 Corinthians 14), John MacArthur adds, "Throughout the history of the church, and certainly in churches today, there are many people, such as counselors, Teachers, Bible study leaders, and such, who are not called and ordained to ministry, but who have a rightful contribution to make in teaching God's Word."

So the warning applies to us all – we should never undertake the task of teaching God's word without

an understanding of the seriousness of the responsibility. And this must be done humbly, understanding our sinfulness and the fact that ‘we all stumble in many ways.’ We don’t use this as an excuse to avoid the hard work necessary, but we do understand our need for the Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts and words on His behalf as we teach His truth.

Takeaway #1 – Carefully consider your heart before sharing God’s word, then do so humbly with much prayer.

The next principle is that (2) your tongue reveals your maturity. James continues in the latter part of verse 2 to say “**And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.**” This is closely tied to another passage earlier in the book in Chapter 1 verse 26 – **“If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless”**. Our tongues

tell on us, in more ways than one. It is said that people speak around 20-30 thousand words a day. In one year, that is enough to fill between 65 and 70 800 page volumes. And that is just an average, some of us talk a lot more. If our tongues are not controlled by God, it is an indicator for us that our hearts need some attention. Jesus tells the Pharisees in Matthew 12 that **“by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”** Any religion that does not transform the heart, and thereby the tongue, is a false religion that God does not accept. I had the opportunity recently to take a look at my own speech as it relates to maturity. As most of you know, if you have known me for more than 5 minutes, I like to interact with people and get to know them. One way of building relationships and comraderie is to have fun and “try” to be humorous, and there is certainly a time for that. There are times, however, that being sober minded and serious are called for,

and I was reminded of that in a loving and gentle way here recently in my own life. I was using my tongue in a way that I shouldn't have, and I needed to be made aware and take corrective action. Not easy, but necessary and I'm thankful for the way I was made aware of this and for the chance to think about the way my speech affects those around me. If we had time and were in a different setting, you would probably be able to share something from your life in this regard as well – we all stumble in many ways. But there is a positive side of this verse as well – when we think back and remember how we used to speak, what we used to talk about, and we compare that with what we say now, we can certainly see a marked change – this is because we have had a change of heart. As we grow in Christ and yield ourselves to the power of the Spirit, we will continue to see ourselves comforting others, spreading the gospel, encouraging our brothers and sisters, praying to and praising God, exhorting,

singing, etc. Our speech helps us to see our maturity and can be a pretty reliable indicator of our progress in sanctification. You know I've heard it said that you can tell what you care about by looking at your calendar and your checkbook – where you spend your time and where you spend your money. I would also put what you talk about in that category. Takeaway #2 – Examine Your speech to see how God is maturing you and where you need work.

Okay, moving on to number 3. Your tongue is small but powerful. James now turns to a number of analogies to help us see how something so small can have so much control over us. He says, **“3If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. 4Look 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. 5So also the tongue is a small member, yet**

it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!” Two different examples here, pretty straightforward. In order to control a horse while riding it, we put bits in their mouths, attached to the bridle and reins, which control the direction of the head, which in turn controls the direction of the entire horse. In comparison to the horse, the bit is very small, but the horse responds accordingly. Similarly, the ships of those days would hold somewhere near 300 people, which may not seem all that large to us, but nevertheless, still bigger than a john boat. And the ships had a relatively small rudder that, when turned, caused the big ship to go wherever the pilot wanted. The direct correlation is that our tongues are very small, yet they have a very large influence over us. The things that come out of our mouths come from within us and move us in a direction. Give you an example. If you have ever had a ‘how shall I say...serious’ discussion with your spouse

about something, it doesn't help all that much when your words turn up the heat on the discussion. "A calm answer turns away wrath" is a good proverb to remember. I can remember times that I have done well in this area, and also times where I didn't control my tongue and the outcomes were distinctly different. Men, self-control in this area is absolutely essential to obey the command we find in Colossians 3:19 **"love your wives, and do not be harsh with them."** It is also essential for wives in order to fulfill the command of Ephesians 5:33 **"let the wife see that she respects her husband."** We can say the exact same words in many different ways that will present different outcomes. What we do with our speech and how we control these little members will have very big ramifications.

Takeaway #3 – Does my speech accomplish what it should or do I need to adjust how I speak?

Fourth, we see James describe the tongue as wild and deadly. Verses 6 through 8 say **“6And 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. 7For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.”** James here uses fire to describe our tongues, which is an interesting analogy. Fire is unique in that it replicates itself easily, consuming more and more in its path until it runs out of fuel. Our speech over time is what tells people who we are, and it can either be good or bad. James here is only considering the damage that the tongue can do, and he says it stains our whole body. If you have ever had a house fire, you can understand what he is talking about here. Try as you may, you are likely not able to completely get the smell of smoke out once it is there. Similarly, your speech can leave a lasting impression over the long haul, or as he puts it, the entire

course of your life. James also says that this type of negative speech is actually set on fire by hell, which is to say is controlled by hell or Satan. The word for hell used here is the word Gehenna, which is used only here and in the Gospels, and it describes that deep gorge on the southwest side of Jerusalem that was a vast garbage heap, always burning, full of terrible smells and fumes and nastiness. It was where Canaanite and some Israelite worshipers sacrificed their babies to the god Molech, and even after that was stopped, the place was deemed unfit for any good use, so it was used to burn garbage. It came to be known as a synonym for hell itself, and that is the word being used here to indicate that the tongue is a tool of the devil himself to corrupt, destroy, and damage. Even believers with new natures live in bodies of flesh, and we have to be careful because our tongues still hold the power to do harm – therefore we must keep ourselves under the Spirit’s control so that we don’t become agents of evil. In addition to this, we are told that it is easier to tame the beasts and birds, reptiles and sea creatures than to tame our own tongues.

Moreover, the tongue is compared to a restless evil, full of deadly poison. Romans 3:10-18 says **“None is righteous, no, not one; 11no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”**

13“Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.”

“The venom of asps is under their lips.”

14“Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”

15“Their feet are swift to shed blood;

16in their paths are ruin and misery,

17and the way of peace they have not known.”

18“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Notice in verse 13 how it starts down in the throat and works its way all the way to the lips and mouth. Our whole pattern of speech is described as corrupted here, and although we have been redeemed, we do well to be reminded that the tongue is hard to control.

Takeaway #4 – Walking in the Spirit is essential to not fulfilling the desire of the flesh in the area of speech.

Fifth, our tongues can be inconsistent. Verses 9 and 10 tell us **“9With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10From the same mouth come blessing and cursing, My brothers, these things ought not to be so.”** We have all been created, both believer and non-believer, in God’s image. Our tongues can be used for good or bad, for virtue or vice, and we often see contradictory things coming out of our mouths. James says this shouldn’t be true of us, and he’s right. Being created in his image, and now even more so being born again, our speech should be modeled after His speech. That is to say, we should speak in the ways that Jesus spoke. To be sure, he wasn’t always speaking in ways that people liked, but He also was never sinning when He spoke. So the subject

matter may at times take on difficult topics, and there are times when what we say won't be considered quote unquote 'nice', but it must always be loving. I don't know of anyone who likes to hear criticism, but when it is loving and constructive, it can be healing to the bones. When our speech is not loving, however, nothing we say is worth our breath.

Takeaway #5 – Integrity in our speech is essential, both in the content and motive.

Finally, our tongues reveal our hearts. Verses 11 and 12 – **“11Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? 12Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.”** Without mincing too many words here, James reiterates the idea of Jesus in the sermon on the mount by using 3 examples in the form of rhetorical questions, with the obvious answer of no. First, can a spring give two different kinds of water? No, you only get fresh or salt, not both. How about

a fig tree, can it bear olives? Of course not. Well, what about a grapevine, can I get figs from that? No way. In the same way, you can't have corrupted speech continuously pouring from a heart that has been regenerated. Does this mean that your speech is always perfect? No, but as a pattern of life, your speech will represent what you value. It also means that a heart that is bound in sin and darkness does not produce loving words.

Moreover, a new heart that has been given to a believer by God does not exhibit darkness and unrighteousness, as it's fruit flows outward through the speech of the one it which it resides. As Jesus says in Matthew 7, **15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut**

down and thrown into the fire. 20Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.”

Takeaway #6 – Our speech is a fruit, either of righteousness or unrighteousness.

Now I don't want to leave us in this condition, but want to share just a few examples of uplifting speech and hopefully we can be spurred on.

Psalm 35:27-28 **“27Let those who delight in my righteousness shout for joy and be glad and say evermore, “Great is the Lord, who delights in the welfare of his servant!”
28Then my tongue shall tell of your righteousness and of your praise all the day long.”**

Isaiah 25:1 **“O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you; I will praise your name, for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure.”**

I Thess 5:16-18 **“16Rejoice always, 17pray without ceasing, 18give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”**

And one final one – listen for all of the beautiful ways that Paul describes the tongue being used for God’s glory in these verses...

Col 1:3-12 **“3We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, 5because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, 6which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, 7just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant.^b He is a faithful minister of Christ on your^c behalf 8and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.**

9And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him:

bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; 12giving thanks^d to the Father, who has qualified you^e to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”

My prayer for us as believers is that we will as a body of believers apply the scriptures to our speech and may we say agree with James,

“13Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. 14Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

Let's pray together.