

# THE UNTAMABLE TONGUE

**TEXT:** James 3:1-12

## INTRODUCTION:

In 1899 four newspaper reporters in Denver, CO, USA tried to tear down the great wall of China. The four met by chance on a Saturday night in a Denver railway depot. Al Stevens, Jack Tournay, John Lewis, Hal Wilshire. They represented the four Denver papers: the Post, the Times, the Republican and Rocky Mountain News. Each had been send by their editors to dig up a story for their respective papers. With nothing exciting happening, Al Stevens suggested that they each make up a story, John Lewis said Al was thinking too small, they should make up a huge story and all of them report the same one. A phony domestic story would soon be discovered, they needed to report on someplace far away - China! Over beers, John suggested this story: A Group of American engineers, stopping over in Denver en route to China. The Chinese government is making plans to demolish the Great Wall; our engineers are bidding on the job. Why would China do this? As a sign of international good will and to open trade with other countries.

By 11:00 p.m. the four reporters had worked out the details of their preposterous story. After leaving the Oxford Bar, they would go over to the Windsor Hotel. They would sign four fictitious names to the hotel register. They would instruct the desk clerk to tell anyone who asked that four New Yorkers had arrived that evening, had been interviewed by reporters, had left early the next morning for California.

The Denver newspapers carried the story. All four of them. Front page.

In fact, the Times headline that Sunday read: GREAT CHINESE WALL DOOMED!  
PEKING SEEKS WORLD TRADE!

Their stories where picked up by other outlets around the world. The Chinese were not happy to hear of this plan. Particularly incensed were the members of a secret society, a volatile group of Chinese patriots who were already wary of foreign intervention.

They, inspired by the story, exploded, rampaged against the foreign embassies in Peking, and slaughtered hundreds of missionaries.

In two months, twelve thousand troops from six countries joined forces, invaded China with the purpose of protecting their own countrymen.

The bloodshed which followed, sparked by a journalistic hoax invented in a barroom in Denver, became the white-hot international conflagration known to every high school history student ... as the Boxer Rebellion.<sup>1</sup> In this period 189 protestant missionaries were killed and over 32,000 Chinese Christians. The tongue is extremely powerful!

There are troublemakers in every church. I've been in the ministry for nearly 30 years and I have seen this to be consistently true. If you would like, I can help you spot them by pointing out those troublemakers for you this morning. Point to TONGUE!

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<sup>1</sup> Illustration in James Commentary, Preach The Word

These ancient Christians were clearly like you and me! They were having a problem with their tongues.

- James warned them in 1:19 to “be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”
- If a Christian does not learn to bridle his tongue he is not truly religious (1:26).
- And we must speak and act as those who are going to be judged by Christ! (2:12)

Someone told me one time that we must always be on guard because the tongue was in a wet place and can easily slip! Oh I sadly confess that my tongue has slipped too many times to count.

We all must confess that we need help! Even David, the man God called “the friend of God” understood that we desperately need help when it comes to controlling the tongue. Listen to what he wrote, “*Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!*” (Ps. 141:3)

When I was a little boy in primary school on the playground I would say to the mean boy who was being unkind, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me.” I found later that little kids saying is false. Broken bones and bruises will heal and be forgotten, but words cut like a knife to the deepest part of our being. Many of you today bear painful scars and open wounds inflicted by a sharp tongue.

Three truths about the tongue:

## **OUTLINE:**

### **I. TONGUE HAS THE POWER TO DIRECT THE COURSE OF LIFE (1-4)**

#### **A. Illustration:**

1. A bit guides the direction of the horse. A full grown horse can easily weigh 450kg, but with a bit, a little girl weighing 25 kg can control the direction the animal goes. A bit is a small piece of metal that is placed in the horse’s mouth that presses on the soft cartilage or the tongue.
2. A rudder controls the direction of a massive ship. When the helmsman turns the **rudder**, the water strikes it with increased force on one side, decreased force on the other. The **rudder** moves in the direction of lower pressure.

#### **B. Lesson**

1. Tongue is a very small member but so strategically placed in the body that it can alter the direction of life!
2. There were many in the church who wished to be teachers in the assembly (1) - those to use the tongue to teach others will have a stricter accountability! If they teach something but don’t practice it, they will be judged a hypocrite!
3. James is warning against destructive speech, To stumble - in v2, to be ruined, destroyed. (Prov.18:6-7) If you control your tongue you are able also to control all other members of your body. You look at a person who is a fighter, he cannot control his tongue. Look at a drunkard, he cannot control his tongue.

### C. Application:

1. To whom much is given much is required - when God sets you up as a leader, it is even more important what you say! Do you use your tongue to heal? To speak encouragement? To bless?
2. Spiritual maturity is evidenced by your ability to control your tongue. If you can control your tongue, you have the self-control for everything else. This self-control is a fruit produced by the indwelling Spirit of God!

## II. TONGUE HAS POWER TO DESTROY IN WAYS THAT CANNOT BE RESTORED (5-8)

### A. Illustration

1. A forest fire that destroys everything in its path. ILL: Australia's deadliest wild fire, and the nation's worst natural disaster, was the Black Saturday Fire of February 7-March 14, 2009. A swarm of fires burned 1.1 million acres (1720 square miles) and killed 173, many victims died in their automobiles trying to outrun the flames. 3,500 structures burned across the state of Victoria. The exact cause of the fires (aside from drought, heat, and wind) has never been determined although arson is suspected.
2. A poison that destroys the body that comes in contact with it. King Cobra can grow to 5.5m and is extremely venomous. The **venom** functions as a specialized cell toxin that targets the prey's red blood cells and destroys blood vessels. The animal then dies of internal and external bleeding.

### B. Lesson

1. The tongue of man is often set on fire by hell - a controlled tongue is what heaven produces, a destructive tongue is a tool of hell. Satanic and sinful use of the tongue. (Prov 26:18-22)
2. Words from angry men do not produce righteousness in others. (1:20)
3. Like a fire the tongue sets other fires, it spreads and quickly gets out of control. *Prov. 16:27 An ungodly man digs up evil, And it is on his lips like a burning fire.*

### C. Application:

1. The tongue is a small member of our body but it has the power to make great boasts. The Christian is to have his tongue under control!
2. James is saying that those who misuse the tongue are guilty of spiritual arson. The tongue contains and conveys all the wickedness of the world system. Hell = Gehenna - the perpetually burning garbage dump outside Jerusalem (Mark 9:48). The uncontrolled tongue is a direct pipe-line to hell!
  - Gossip, Flattery, Innuendo, Criticism, Sarcasm, Boasting, Blasphemy
3. Who have you destroyed by your sinful speech? *Prov. 6:17 A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood,*

4. Your tongue must be controlled by the Holy Spirit, our mind must be filled with the Word of God - out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Lk. 6:45).

*Ps. 34:13 Keep your tongue from evil, And your lips from speaking deceit.*

*Ps. 20:2 Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips And from a deceitful tongue.*

*Prov. 21:23 Whoever guards his mouth and tongue Keeps his soul from troubles.*

### **III. TONGUE HAS POWER TO BLESS GOD AND OTHERS (9-12)**

#### **A. Illustration**

1. A fountain that pours forth water.
2. A fig tree that bears delicious fruit.

#### **B. Lesson**

1. It is not possible for sweet and bitter to spring up from the same source. The issue is that what is in our heart/mind will come out of the exit point - what is in our heart will bubble out of our mouth.

*Mat. 15:18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. 19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, **false witness, blasphemies.***

2. The fruit is consistent with the nature of the tree. Fig trees bear figs.

*Prov 31:26 She opens her mouth with wisdom, And on her tongue is the law of kindness.*

*Prov. 12:18 ...the tongue of the wise promotes health.*

*Prov. 15:4 A wholesome tongue is a tree of life...*

#### **C. Application:**

1. Recognize that unclean lips reveal an unclean heart! Is 6:5 - I am a man of unclean lips, God forgive me! Purify my heart.
2. Request God to guard your lips. *Set a watch O Lord over my lips!* (Ps. 141:3)
3. Discipline yourself - don't let every thought that comes into your head flow out of your lips! Think, evaluate and pray!

### **CONCLUSION:**

What about us? Do we appear holy and good at church, saying all the right things but at home we are sarcastic with our family and critical of others?

Do we enjoy the gossipy tidbits that come our way at the office, or with our ladies group and even pass on a few ourselves? How do we respond to others around us?

Would the answers to these questions reveal that we love God the way we say we do?

A transformed heart produces a transformed tongue. True religion is evidenced by a controlled tongue. (James 1:26)