

BOOK OF JAMES
THE POWER OF THE TONGUE
JAMES 3:1-12

Introduction

Last Sunday evening we began to look at **this tiny member of our body that can wreak all kinds of problems for us and others—THE TONGUE!**

We said that each of us at some time or another has wished that we could take back something we said!

In this chapter, James reminds us that **our words can be some of the most powerful forces in the world! Words can set the course of individuals or even nations for that matter!**

We need to realize that words have the power either to do great harm or to do great good!

WE SAW THE WARNING! (Vs 1)

The person that desires to be a *teacher* or that becomes a *teacher* must realize that there is also GREAT RESPONSIBILITY that comes with *teaching*!

That's because **the words of the *teacher* can affect folks lives, especially their "*spiritual lives*"!**

WE SAW THE WISDOM! (Vs 2)

A. We Have A Common Problem!

In many things that we find that we "*offend*" or transgress against others don't we! We saw how that a person that has learned to control his mouth shows his spiritual maturity by that control!

B. We Should Have A Common Goal

We should all be working to become a perfect or mature person, who is able to bridle not only our tongue, but our whole body. All of us should be aiming for that maturity in our lives of having a tamed tongue!

Through God's power we must learn to "*bridle*" or control our words.

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Tonight I want us to see THE POWER OF THE TONGUE:

I. WE SEE THAT THE TONGUE HAS GREAT INFLUENCE FOR EITHER GOOD OR EVIL!

A. The Tongue Has Great Influence Because Of The Direction It Sets! (Vs. 3-4)

James gives us two illustrations of the power of the tongue to direct the course of events!

1. The Tongue Is Like A Bit In A Horses Mouth! (Vs 3)

I've read where some horses can grow up to a ton or more! That's a lot of horse. And yet, even though a man is only a fraction of the size of a horse, he can control a horse with a bit in its mouth!

James is saying that the tongue is like that: Small, but very powerful. **The tongue is a small part of the body but it can exert great influence on the direction of one's life!**

2. The Tongue Is Like A Rudder On A Ship! (Vs 4)

A tiny rudder controls the course of even the greatest of ships. Consider the Nimitz Class Aircraft Carriers and the new Gerald R. Ford Class Aircraft Carriers. They are among some the largest military ships in the world. They are literally floating cities able to house over 5000 men and women and carry more than 60 aircraft. The flight deck is just under 5 acres. They tower 20 stories above the water with a full load displacement of 97,000 tons and are able to travel at speeds up to 30 knots. Yet the rudder that turns that mammoth of a ship is only 1/1000th the size of the ship!

Likewise, the tongue has the power to control the course of one's body! **Vs 5a**

Life changing events can turn upon the smallest of words of man.

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In *1 Samuel 15:10-35*, King Saul used his words to blame Israel for his disobedience to God, instead of repenting of his sin and so lost the kingdom as a result!

In *1 Samuel 8*, it was Israel's words that made Saul their king in the first place! Because of the words of Israel and then King Saul, Israel saw great misery and missed out on God's best for that nation! **Words have enormous power to change the direction of lives!**

It Has Great Influence Because Of The Direction It Sets!

B. The Tongue Has Great Influence Because Of The Destruction It Causes! (Vs 5b-6a)

The second sentence there in *Verse 5* begins with the word "**Behold**" which means "**but really pay attention to this!**"

James is trying to get our attention! The tongue, he says, is like **a little fire!** **Fire has the amazing and virtually unique capacity to reproduce itself in an almost unlimited way as long as it has fuel to burn!** (e.g. The fires out west!)

The tongue is a fire that can set a whole forest of lives and relationships on fire, consuming and destroying all that lies in its path. Just think about the great and terrible damage that has been done by **the fire of words, rumors, tale bearing, and sharp or cutting remarks.**

With the fire of the tongue, marriages have been destroyed; friendships have been damaged; reputations have been ruined; jobs and careers have been lost; Churches have been split or damaged; and even wars fought.

(e.g. *Papa John's Pizza founder and spokesperson this week; Almost EVERY DAY someone is getting in trouble over the words that come out of their mouths!*)

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(e.g. *Jimmy the Greek years ago on The NFL Today!*)

Remember The Great Chicago fire?

On October 8, 1871, at about eight-thirty in the evening, a lantern in Mrs. O'Leary's barn, presumably kicked over by her cow, ignited the great Chicago fire. The woman was milking her cow; and there was a little lamp of oil, a little flickering flame. The cow kicked over the lamp; and the flame kindled a wisp of hay, and another wisp, until all the hay in the stable was on fire, and then the next building was on fire, and the next and the next! The fire spread over the river to the main part of Chicago and swept on until within a territory one mile wide and three miles long, there were only two buildings standing. The little flame from that lamp had laid over one half of Chicago in ashes!

There is a similar story I've found out about the city of Jacksonville, Florida!

In 1901, Jacksonville was a city which consisted mainly of wooden buildings with wood shingled roofs. The city itself had been suffering under a prolonged drought, leaving the building exteriors across the city dry and fire-prone. At around noon on Friday, May 3, 1901, workers at the Cleaveland Fibre Factory, located on the corner of Beaver and Davis Streets, left for lunch. Several minutes later, it is believed that sparks from the chimney of a nearby building started a fire in a pile of Spanish moss that had been laid out to dry. First, factory workers tried to put it out with a few buckets of water, as they had frequently done on similar occasions. However, the blaze was soon out of control due to the wind picking up out of the east. A brisk northwest wind fanned the flames, which "spread from house to house, seemingly with the rapidity that a man could walk". In eight hours, the fire burned 146 city blocks, destroyed more than 2,368 buildings, and left almost 10,000 residents homeless. It is said the glow from the flames could be seen in Savannah, GA, and the smoke plumes in Raleigh, NC.

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Fire will burn until it either runs out of fuel or is extinguished by some other source.

To stop the fires of gossip and slander and malice we have to remove the fuel of wrongly used words.

Proverbs 26:20-21—“Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife”

It Has Great Influence Because Of The Direction It Sets!

It Has Great Influence Because Of The Destruction It Causes!

C. The Tongue Has Great Influence Because of the Defilement It Produces! (Vs. 6b-8)

The tongue defiles because it is a “world of iniquity!”(Vs 6b)

It is part of this sin cursed flesh that we dwell in!

There is NOTHING good about our flesh!

Galatians 5:19-21 19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, 20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, 21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

The tongue defiles or contaminates the whole body!
(vs. 6c “...it defileth the whole body...”)

The tongue is like smoke that **penetrates and permanently contaminates everything that is exposed to it!**

The destructive effects of evil speech expand, **not only contaminating ourselves but also everything we influence throughout the course of our life.**

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Worst of all, these kinds of destructive words are part of Satan’s plan! (*Vs 6 “...it is set on fire of hell.”*)

Romans 3:13-14 13 Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: 14 Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:

That’s why we, as Spirit indwelt believers, are to walk in the SPIRIT so that we do not fulfill the lusts of the FLESH!

D. The Tongue Has Great Influence Because It Is An Unruly Evil! (Vs 7-8b)

1. All Kinds Of Things In This World Can Be Tamed Of Mankind—But Not The Tongue! (Vs 7)

The tongue is the only creature that cannot be tamed! Men have tamed every kind of creature there is: some beasts, birds, serpents, and some creatures of the sea. (e.g. Circus, Sea World, etc.)

2. The Tongue Cannot Be Tamed By Any Man—Not Completely And Fully! (Vs 8a)

Man cannot tame the tongue, only God can!

Matthew Henry wrote “*No man can tame the tongue without supernatural grace and assistance. The apostle does not intend to represent it as a thing impossible, but as a thing extremely difficult, which therefore will require great watchfulness, and pains, and prayer*” (Matthew Henry’s Commentary, Vol. 6, p. 985).

Only Christ can control a man’s tongue so that it can please God!

3. The Tongue Is “An Unruly Evil!” (Vs 8b)

That word “*unruly*” means “*unrestrainable.*”

Another way of saying that it cannot be tamed by man!

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That word “*evil*” means “*depraved*” and “*injurious.*”

4. The Tongue Is Full Of Deadly Poison! (Vs 8c)

Just like a snake’s fangs that are ready to strike when stirred the wrong way!

That is why Scripture warns us about the way we speak. *Colossians 3:8-10* 8 *But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. 9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; 10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:*

1 Peter 2:1-3 1 *Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, 2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: 3 If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*

There are **two kinds of poisons** but both are equally deadly. First, there are **fast acting poisons**. Take a few drops and you are dead. Some words are quick and decisive in the way they destroy the witness of a person or mar the reputation of another.

Secondly, there are **slow acting poisons**. They take a long time but still can kill. Subtle words and innuendos about other people work slowly but are still deadly! Omissions of the whole truth lead to the gradual destruction of people's faith. Fast or slow, both kinds of poisonous words kill.

5. The Tongue Is Inconsistent! (Vs 9-12)

Note how inconsistent the tongue is. Imagine! The very same tongue that blesses is the same tongue that curses.

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How many sit in church on Sunday or at meals blessing God and then turn around on Monday and curse or use foul and off-colored language?

It is the same tongue that does both. When it speaks, it is just as liable to speak some curse word as it is to speak some blessing.

The Apostle Peter is a great illustration of this! In ***Matthew 16:13-20*** he made a great affirmation of faith that was pleasing to Christ! In the next breath he was speaking the very words of Satan that were not pleasing to Christ! (***Matthew 16:21-23***)

Conclusion

The Tongue Must Be Submitted To God’s Control!

Too often our tongues deny the faith that we say we have and James says these things ought not to be so.

It is an unacceptable and intolerable compromise of righteous, holy living. When God transformed us, He gave us the capacity for new, redeemed, holy speech, and He expects us to speak only that which is holy and right

This problem with our words just shows us all how much we are in the need of the grace of God.

We are all in need of a work of God and our words reveal it to us daily!

Psalm 19:14 *Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.*

The ability for our words to be acceptable in the sight of the LORD begins with salvation! Do you really know Him? If not, come to know Him today! Then draw as near to God as you can get and stay there!