

- Read James 3:1-12
- Pray:
 - o Break our hearts...convict us of sins we commit with our tongues
 - o Heal our hurts...help us Lord to look to You for salvation, and not unto any approving or unapproving words that may have caused great pain and anguish in our lives
 - o Help our tongues...help us to use them for good...for Your glory, and not our own, and certainly not to hurt other people, people whom you have created, created, in fact, in your own image.
 - o May we be as you command us through your apostle Paul, and, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."
- TITLE: "The Power of the Tongue"
- It's been said that "Sticks and Stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me."
 - o The person who came up with that silly little saying either never had anything negative said about them...or they had way too much negative said about them so they went into some sort of defensive state of denial, pretending that what really hurt them badly didn't affect them at all.
 - o Runs rather counter to what Scripture has to say about the tongue...and about the words it produces...In fact, its very unbiblical
 - Prov. 18:21—"Death and Life are in the power of the tongue."
 - Prov. 13:3—"He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction."
 - Matt. 12:37—"For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."
- Quote from MacArthur: *James*, p. 144
 - o "The tongue is you in a unique way. It is a tattletale that tells on the heart and discloses the real person. Not only that, but misuse of the tongue is perhaps the easiest way to sin. There are some sins which an individual may not be able to commit simply because he does not have the opportunity. But there are no limits to what one can say, no built-in restraints or boundaries. In Scripture the tongue is variously described as wicked, deceitful, perverse, filthy, corrupt, flattering, slanderous, gossiping, blasphemous, foolish, boasting, complaining, cursing, contentious, sensual, and vile. And that list is not exhaustive. No wonder God put the tongue in a cage behind the teeth, walled in by the mouth! Using another figure, someone has observed that because the tongue is in a wet place, it can easily slip."
- This morning's passage speaks entirely about the tongue. It speaks about its power. It speaks about its effect.
 - o It will speak about what it is. About what it is like or what it can be compared to. It will describe what it can do. About what you can do with it. It will speak also about what it should not do. And also what you can't do with it.
 - o Perhaps more than anything else, though, this morning's passage will teach us the great truth that we are what we say. What we say has a firm and definitive grasp on everything else in our lives.

- In describing the power of the tongue, James will use two headings: 1) what the tongue can do, and 2) what the tongue cannot do.

I. The Power to Condemn (vv. 1-2)

- a. Teachers in particular (1)
 - i. “Be not many masters”
 - 1. “master” means teacher—specifically teacher of the things of God. It implies that one is fit to teach (lifestyle, giftedness), and perhaps even in a negative sense, that one things of themselves that they are fitted to teach.
 - a. It’s a term that implies authority, notoriety (at least among the people of God), responsibility, and even spirituality.
 - 2. Paul warned against this: I Tim. 1:6-7—“From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.”
 - ii. “Knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation”
 - 1. “stricter judgment”
 - 2. That is, be careful you who desire to be a leader, a public figure, a respected teacher in the church—b/c your responsibility to the people of God before God is such that it requires a stricter judgment.
 - a. The nature of your position means that what you say affects more people than what other people say. And it affects them in a different way. Because you’re seen as an authority.
 - b. A great preacher was once asked, “Do you get nervous?” (MacArthur)
 - iii. B/c the tongue is the easiest and most readily available means of sinning and as a general rule it is the hardest thing in our lives to control.
- b. Everyone else in general
 - i. B/c the tongue is the easiest and most readily available means of sinning
 - ii. and as a general rule it is the hardest thing in our lives to control.
 - iii. The tongue, then, is to be seen as a measure of godliness.

II. The Power to Control (vv. 3-5a)

- a. Three illustrations:
 - i. Horses and bits (3)
 - ii. Ships and rudders (4)
 - iii. Tongues and the rest of our lives (5a, and 6 too)
 - 1. “boasteth great things”-- It indicates any kind of haughty speech which stirs up strife or provokes others (Vines).
 - 2. Vs. 6 says that the tongue is set among the rest of our bodies in such a way that, “it defileth the whole body.”
 - iv. So what’s the point here:
 - 1. The point is that though it may seem like a small thing, your tongue and what you say can wreak huge effects.

2. Bit's, rudders, and the tongue...they control, but they're not the ultimate controller. They're instead the means by which the controller (rider, captain, and person) expresses and acts out his desires and impulses.
 - a. Does the bit tell the horse where to go? Does the rudder a ship? Does the tongue speak on its own? No. But it expresses what the operator really wants.

III. The Power to Consume (vv. 5b-6)

- a. The tongue starts the fire (5b)
 - i. Fire, wind, water, earth...fire is unique. It only takes a small spark, a tiny cigarette butt, to light ablaze a forest fire that leave thousands homeless
 - ii. The tongue is similar. It only takes a small word.
- b. The tongue keeps the fire going (6)
 - i. Prov. 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."
 - ii. "world of iniquity"
 1. Its its own little system within which all sorts of things take place
 - a. Imagine a business, a school, a workplace, a household... ("system")
 2. And note that it's a system of sin
 - iii. "so is the tongue among our members that it defileth the whole body"
 1. "defile, spot"—like a huge stain our brand new favorite shirt.
 2. Over and over again James makes the point that what we say is a HUGE deal, not a small one. This sort of argument assumes that these people were struggling with their tongues in such a way that they considered what they said to be of little import. But James emphatically and in very graphic, illustrative pictures, seeks to tell them otherwise.
 - iv. "setteth on fire the whole course of nature"
 1. The "wheel of life/the circle of life"
 - a. Two pictures here:
 - i. Chariot wheel that spins so fast it cathe on fire
 - ii. Representative of our entire lives
 2. Either way, the point is clear: what we say effects us completely and pervasively. And when what we say is evil and sinful, it builds and builds and builds until it bursts into destructive flames, flames that we'll learn in the next verse are from the very pits of hell.
 - v. "set on fire of hell"
 1. Just adds to the severity of the issue. Hell itself sets it on fire. It's the work and product and likeness and influence of Satan, sin, and hell.

IV. The Tongue Cannot Be Tamed (vv. 7-8)

- a. This helps me as a pastor to know that this sermon is perfectly dialed up for every single one of us. Everyone in this building (probably) struggles with their tongues. Why? B/c God's Word says so.

- b. Vs. 2 said that if you don't struggle with your tongue, then you're perfect.
- c. All sorts of animals have been tamed.
 - i. One commentator noted that when going to the circus one might see the world's most ferocious animals tamed and made to serve the will of their masters, and yet be sitting with a circus-tent full of people who have said the nastiest and most self-serving things to one another.
- d. "unruly evil" (8)—wild, untamed, unpredictable, fickle, dangerous
 - i. Picture Steve Irwin (The Crocodile Hunter) with a croc...and he's talking...and out of nowhere...the croc jumps out unexpectable and tries to sink its teeth into him....why? It feels threatened. It feels like its territory is invaded. It's trying to show him who's boss... We're like that with our tongues.
- e. "full of deadly poison"
 - i. Here is a picture of death and poison...a picture of fangs and venom
 - ii. The ancients believed that the poison of snakes resided in their tongues. It's no surprise then that James would employ such a vivid picture here when speaking about the sin of the tongue.

V. The Christian Tongue is Supposed to be Different (vv. 9-12)

- a. Vs. 9-10a—description of vile hypocrisy
- b. Vs. 9's "after the similitude of God" serves to point out the utter inconsistency...
- c. "these things ought not so to be"
 - i. Exclamation of disagreement.
 - ii. It's the strongest way to say "No!" in the entire NT.
 - iii. It's as if we witness a pedophile walk out of a courtroom on a technicality and we exclaim, "It's not right!"
- d. Vs. 10's "It's not right"—the extreme and sincere danger of the tongue, what it is about it that makes it 'untameable' seems to be that we know of the power it has, and yet we pretend that its not that big of a deal, or that we're justified in using it
- e. Vv. 11-12 points out how unnatural it is for a Christian to speak ugly.
 - i. Christian—do better
 - ii. Deceived non-Christian—get saved!