

Lead-in

Today we continue a series in the book of James called a faith that works. We boldly believe as a church that Jesus is the Way, Truth, and Life, and that faith in Jesus the Messiah works, it will change your life. The book of James is found toward the end of the NT and penned by the half-brother of Jesus. One of the reasons I believe that Jesus is God is because only the Messiah could convince his brother that he was divine. Today we discuss a topic that **affects** every single person on the planet, your **mouth!**

The average person spends 1/5 of their life speaking. One day's worth of words = a 50 page book, 130 books/ year. **860,341,500 words** spoken in a lifetime. However, getting our heads around that number requires some perspective. Here it goes: In one lifetime, the average person speaks the equivalent of the entire text of the complete 20-volume Oxford English Dictionary (OED) more than **14.5** times.

Today we reflect on the biblical perspective of our mouth. No word you speak is **neutral or idle**. It is either (**healthy**) building the kingdom of God, or it is **harmful**, tearing down others in the process.

Watch Yo Mouv- James 3:1-12 (page #1072)

A Good Word (3:2) *James begins with a good word to the very ones who use words to communicate the gospel, teachers in the church. The leader of the church in Jerusalem cautions that not many should become teachers. In the early church the charismatic office of teacher was valued and in high esteem. It's possible that some saw these positions as a way to overcome their social status.*

*James' good word is to be **content with your position**. Those who teach will be judged with a stricter judgment by the Lord. Why? Because **nothing** is more damaging to the kingdom than **bickering and mutual verbal abuse**, especially from **leadership** within the church. One of my great joys as pastor today, and in the future as we affirm **new deacons**, is that they work hard at keeping and making peace within the church and see this as their spiritual act of service. What a great joy to serve with these dear brothers!*

Your tongue holds a key place in holy living. *If you don't stumble in what you say, you are fully mature. This maturity is what we should, what we must strive! Reality is that we all have days when words escape our mouths before they are carefully considered, and in that moment, they reveal our lack of spiritual maturity.*

James is reminding us that sticks and stones break bones, and words will hurt or they can be a source of health for the Kingdom. Your tongue holds a key place in holy living. If your holiness was only judged by what you said this week, are you mature in the faith?

A Clear Warning (3:3) Consider today the power of your tongue. The Scriptures compare one of the smallest muscles in your body to a horse's bit, a ship's rudder, and forest fire. Think **of the power of bit that can control a 1,000 lb animal (Camel pics).** *Or a small rudder which can steer a ship like the CSCL Globe that has a gross tonnage of 186,000 GT. Or a small spark that resulted in the Black Friday Bushfire in Australia that destroyed 5 mil. Acres.*

Your words have power (3:2) Pilots retain order over their ships because they control the rudders. If the pilot loses control, the entire ship can veer wholly out of control. *It is a lie to sing, sticks and stones can break my bones but words will never hurt me."* **An uncontrolled tongue = an uncontrolled life.** No, your tongue has tremendous power in your life and the life of others! I learned this lesson the hard way when our daughter, the sensitive one, was younger. *She made a mess, most likely spilled her cereal, and as I rounded the corner I said in a loud voice, "what are you doing!" That was all it took for her to lose it.* I'll never forget the look upon her face, and the power of my words crushed her soul in that moment. Your words are powerful, and my uncontrolled tongue hurt her deeply. **Every word you speak has meaning and impact,** because your words have power.

Your tongue is wild (3:7-8) Some of you are saying right now I am in control! I can tame a wild boar and train a fish (is that possible?) and I can tame my tongue. **To domesticate animals was a sense of pride in the Greek-speaking world.** For many, the ability to control an animal demonstrated superiority for their culture, even more than strength or speed. **Tame = not dangerous or frightened of people.** You have to tame that which is wild. James is saying your tongue is wild and you **can never rest** keeping it under control.

Your tongue is a thermometer to your soul (3:6) Your tongue has the power to stain your entire body, set the course of your life on fire, and ultimately be set on fire by hell! The term hell literally refers to the **Gehenna valley (Aramaic) south of the old city in Jerusalem. It was viewed as hell because child sacrifice to the god Molech occurred in this valley.** Also, it was the trash dump that would continually smolder. Figuratively, it meant hell, the place where fire is never quenched. **Your tongue reveals your core spiritual temp.**

It's possible that the very first outworking of sin was the abuse of speech: **Gen. 3:12** - The man replied, "The woman you gave to be with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate." The first feature of the tongue is that it is anti-god, the final feature is that it is pro-Satan.

From our very mouths, we bless God and curse others (3:9). The ancient **curse** was far more than abusive language; it called on God to cut a person off from any possible blessings and to consign that person to hell. We still hear many say to others, "go to hell." Think about the gravity of this curse! More than we want to recognize, your tongue, is a spotlight upon your heart.

About 20% of students ages 12-18 experienced bullying. Research indicates that persistent bullying can lead to or worsen feelings of isolation, rejection, exclusion, and despair, as well as depression and anxiety, which can contribute to suicidal behavior. Bullying is a curse of the mouth. Using angry words? Your heart is angry. Bitter heart? Cursing heart? Critical heart? Hear the warning of James brother and sister, your words matter and reveal your heart!

A Better Way (3:11) **So what is our hope?** As much as James warns us about the danger of our tongue and words, it won't always be this way. One day the heavens will open and the world will see a white horse (**Revelation 19:15**). And its rider is called Faithfull and True. He eyes are like a fiery flame, and many crowns were on his head. When Jesus returns, he will return with a sword. But this sword is different. It's not attached to his hip or on his holster. This sharp sword comes from his mouth.

Those in the army of Jesus Christ won't be doing battle, we will only be observing His victory. The battle will **begin and ends with the spoken word** of Jesus at which His opposition will be destroyed. The same mouth that **exclaimed "it is finished" in John 19:30, is the same mouth that comes the testimony of victory.** This is the better way.

From the beginning, Satan has used words to destroy and to question the faithfulness of Yahweh's word. **Gen. 3:1** Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You can't eat from any tree in the garden'?"

And yet, it's the faithful and true **Word of Jesus that will make everything right.** It's no accident that the first act in the new creation was the renewal of the power of speech. Do you remember how the Holy Spirit descended? They saw **tongues like flames** of fire, a tongue intelligibly declaring the wonderful works of God (Acts 2:11)!

What is the only hope for your mouth? The true and testimony of Jesus Christ. **Romans 10:9** If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Response- So what?

Do you understand the weight and the eternal significance of your words? Boast (3:5) whether the informal teaching of a parent to a child or the formal instruction of a professor in the classroom, the opportunity to mold the lives of others for kingdom values is an enormous privilege and as rewarding a vocation as any on earth. **What would it look like if the entire Christian community had supernatural mastery over its mouth?**

*Are you carrying wounds today from what others say or have said about you? Listen, the words of others will never save, heal, or complete you. Would you listen to the words of Jesus, the true testimony today? **Eph 3:17** and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, **18** may be able to **comprehend** with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love.*

When was the last time you audibly thanked God? With your mouth, out loud, so your ears can hear it, thank God?

When was the last time you encouraged someone?

Have you asked the Lord for supernatural strength to control your tongue?

When was the last time you prayed for someone, out loud, with your mouth?

Boast

Unloving speech issues from a heart where the love of Jesus is a stranger --Motyer

As I pray, maybe you feel led to pray with someone, or at the altar. We will have prayer partners and pastors at the front who would love to encourage you. To talk with you about seeking Jesus.

You come. For those who need to begin the journey today, give them the courage to believe and come.

Notes

Nothing could be more distressing to a community or more divisive than bickering and mutual verbal abuse, especially if the teachers of the community are those doing the sniping (NIGTC, 135).

According to Genesis 3:12 the first actual sin following the fall was a sin of speech (Motyer, 119).

Your tongue holds a key place in holy living (Motyer, 119).

James 3:1 Not many should become teachers, my brothers, because you know that we will receive a stricter judgment.

In the early church the charismatic office of teacher was valued and thus high in status (NIGTC, 136).

Perhaps many in James's congregations were trying to attain that status, possibly as a way to overcome their social oppressions (ECNT, 150).

Teachers use of their tongue means they can sin very easily, leading others astray at the same time (ECNT, 152).

2 For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is mature, able also to control the whole body.

The whole expression is not so much a humble confession as a proverbial observation which should warn the teacher to take care in the face of the coming judgment (NIGTC, 137).

As we all know to our chagrin, words have a way of escaping our mouths before they are carefully considered—sometimes with unfortunate results (Moo, 151).

Control, keep in check, literally means to bridle (Moo, 151).

3 Now if we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we direct their whole bodies.

4 And consider ships: Though very large and driven by fierce winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.

Pilots retain their power over ships because they control the rudders. If a rudder does not work properly, the ship can veer wholly out of control (ECNT, 156).

Fierce winds

Strong means hard, rough, or cruel.

5 So too, though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts great things. Consider how a small fire sets ablaze a large forest.

The negative tone is evident. This is not so much a pessimistic change in usage, but a slow shift in thought from the power of the tongue to the evil of the tone to the need for proper control (NIGTC, 140).

James's point is that people can either control their tongues or let their tongues control them (ECNT, 156).

Boast

It is the content of the boast that determines whether it is good or evil (ECNT, 156).

Positive: whether the informal teaching of a parent to a child or the formal instruction of a professor in the classroom, the opportunity to mold the lives of others for kingdom values is an enormous privilege and as a rewarding a vocation as any on earth (ECNT, 164).

With freedom of speech comes responsibility.

Here the concept of boasting is neutral with dependency on its intention.

6 And the tongue is a fire. The tongue, a world of unrighteousness, is placed among our members. It stains the whole body, sets the course of life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

As a small spark can ravish an entire forest, one careless statement can ruin careers and destroy lives.

So widespread were the images of horse, ship, and fire in the literature that they must have been common sources for illustrations in the everyday world of James's environment (Moo, 154).

Hell

The term Gehenna literally refers to the valley of Gehinnom in Aramaic, outside of Jerusalem, stigmatized because of child sacrifices to Molech previously practiced there. Figuratively it means hell. It follows the principle of the crime fitting the punishment (the tongue that starts a fire ends up being punished by fire) and finds a close parallel in Psalms of Solomon 12:1-4 (ECNT, 158).

The first feature of the tongue is that it is anti-god, the final feature is that it is pro-Satan (Motyer, 123).

If we must say that the outworking of sin first appeared in the abuse of speech (Gen. 3:12), we must also say that the first act in the new creation was the renewal of the power of speech, a tongue intelligibly declaring the wonderful works of God (Acts 2:11). (Motyer, 125).

7 Every kind of animal, bird, reptile, and fish is tamed and has been tamed by humankind, 8 but no one can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

Pride in the ability of humans to tame animals was quite common in the Greek-speaking world. The ability proved to many ancients the superiority of human reason over strength or speed (NIGTC, 144).

9 With the tongue we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in God's likeness. 10 Blessing and cursing come out of the same mouth. My brothers and sisters, these things should not be this way.

People turn deceitful when they speak with forked tongues (ECNT, 161).

James brings his critique of the tongue to a conclusion by attributing to it the doubleness that he so frequently deplores in his letter (Moo, 162).

Bless/Curse

The ancient curse was far more than abusive language; it called on God, in effect, to cut a person off from any possible blessing and to consign that person to Hell. What makes cursing so evil is that the one who we pronounce damned has been made in God's likeness (Moo, 163).

11 Does a spring pour out sweet and bitter water from the same opening? 12 Can a fig tree produce olives, my brothers and sisters, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a saltwater spring yield fresh water.

James illustrates his point with a series of three pictures from nature that only clarify his meaning, but also show how monstrous a thing such instability of the tongue must be (NIGTC, 147).

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life (Pro. 10:11).

The importance of the spring in dry Palestine can hardly be overestimated. Many a village owed its origins to the discovery of a spring, and depended on its reliable production of potable water for its continuing existence (Moo, 165).

Unloving speech issues from a heart where the love of Jesus is a stranger –Motyer, 127.

Integrity is easily broken by the tongue.

Matt. 12:36 I tell you that on the day of judgment people will have to account for every careless word they speak. **37** For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Illustrations

A woman confessed her sins of slander to her pastor and desired his help and affirmation in seeking forgiveness. The clergyman told the woman to go place chicken feathers on every doorstep in the community. When she returned, she asked, “now what?” He told her to go and collect the feathers. She exclaimed, “this is impossible for the wind blew them everywhere!” Exactly said the wise pastor. In the same way, you seek forgiveness but the seeds of slander are scattered. –Alistair Begg

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The bullying epidemic, a disease of the tongue

Power of Words

Martin Luther King

Adolf Hitler

The dehumanization of abortion

Words reveal the progress of our faith --Chandler