

## **"JAMES" SERIES**

### **#6: "Taming the Tongue"**

**SCRIPTURE: James 3:1-18**

*<sup>1</sup>Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. <sup>2</sup>For 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. <sup>3</sup>If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. <sup>4</sup>Look 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. <sup>5</sup>So 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! <sup>6</sup>And 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. <sup>7</sup>For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, <sup>8</sup>but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup>With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. <sup>10</sup>From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. <sup>11</sup>Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? <sup>12</sup>Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.*

*<sup>13</sup>Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. <sup>14</sup>But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. <sup>15</sup>This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. <sup>16</sup>For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. <sup>17</sup>But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. <sup>18</sup>And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

**INTRO:**

**Wow! How's that for telling it like it is?**

I have read that the average person says about 3,000 words a day. (I have met some people over the years who probably exceed that number!) In a lifetime, many of us could fill a library!

Freedom of speech is a hot topic today, even though, as far as the U.S. Constitution is concerned, it's been around for many, many years. It's a freedom that millions around the world do not have. The Chinese don't have it. The North Koreans don't have it. It is squashed in most Muslim-ruled countries today. Why? Because the leaders of these

countries realize the power of the tongue! They know that the power of the tongue is a threat to their control over the people.

The late J. Vernon McGee tells the story of a man who'd been fishing from a pier for several hours without catching anything. Just as two ladies walked past him on the pier, he finally hooked a fish. It was a rather small one. One of the two ladies rebuked him: "Aren't you ashamed of yourself for catching such a poor little fish?" And the man, without even looking up, because he was a little discouraged anyway, said, "Maybe you're right, lady, but if he'd have kept his mouth shut, he wouldn't have been caught."

It has been said that the tongue is the mightiest force in the world. Do you agree with that? So, let's see what James has to say about it...

***NOT MANY OF YOU SHOULD BE TEACHERS BECAUSE OF THE POWER OF THE TONGUE (V.1).***

Now, why would God tell us that? What Jesus said in Luke 6:40 – "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher" – sheds some light on this, I believe. It's like a computer: garbage in – garbage out. If you learn from a teacher of false doctrine, you become a believer of false doctrine and maybe a teacher of false doctrine. And, believe me, there're plenty of false doctrine teachers, on tv and other media.

When I consider the length of time I've been here at Village Christian and the twenty years I preached in Round Rock, TX, I realize that I'll be held responsible for the beliefs and convictions of many, many people, and that's a little scary. I'd better make sure that I get it right.

Something I've had to contend with is something that the Farthing side of my heritage is known for: degrading use of the tongue. I remember my grandmother on my dad's side tongue-lashing my step-grandfather, who was the kindest, gentlest man you'd ever want to meet. Bless her heart, she would berate him something terrible. And my father took after her. More times than I could count, I saw my mother in tears because of my father's berating. And through the years, may God forgive me, I have slipped into the same pattern, I must confess.

So, James' words here hit home with me.

Then he tells us,

***ONLY A PERFECT MAN NEVER STUMBLES (V. 2).***

"For we all stumble in many ways..." The context here has to do with the power of the tongue, so he's saying that we all "put our foot into our mouths" in one way or another, and we all say offensive things from time to time, sometimes without realizing what we've done.

Back in the 70s, an older couple quit attending the church I was ministering with. When I went to see them to find out what was wrong, they said, "Preacher, it's your language. You used the word "crud" in one of your sermons. That's a filthy word. " I admitted to using the word "crud," but I didn't know why it offended them; I couldn't imagine, since I had been hearing that word in various places for several years. I understood it to be a word describing "bad stuff." Mark Worley and I used to exchange it with one another, saying, "Cut the crud!" Well, when I researched the word, I found that it did have some bad connotation and was used in days gone by to refer to the effects of a venereal disease. That was the meaning the older couple heard when I used the word, and they were offended.

A man who used to attend here told me one Sunday that he had decided to be baptized. I said, "Just let me know when." A Sunday or two later, he quit coming. When I checked on him, he said that he was offended by something I said. He said that I had said that Democrats are sinners. I racked my brain, and finally, I realized what he was referring to. I had read either Mark 2:15 or Luke 5:29, where the King James version has it that Jesus was eating with "publicans and sinners..." I had made a joke, saying, "*republicans* and sinners." From that, he took it that I meant that Democrats were the sinners. This man was a Democrat. He totally rejected my explanation and apology, and I never saw him again. He has since passed away, and, as far as I know, was never baptized. I feel somewhat responsible, but I don't know what else I could have done. He put his politics ahead of being obedient to the Lord.

Next, James gives us...

***EXAMPLES OF THINGS THAT CONTROL POWERFUL THINGS (VV.3-8)***

First, "*bits into the mouths of horses.*" I remember going with my father to horse-pulling contests at the country fair. Anybody know what I'm talking about? Anybody been to a horse-pulling contest? The bit in their mouths controlled some of the biggest, strongest horses ever seen.

Second, "*Look at the ships also: though they are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.*" The rudder is so small in comparison to the ship it controls.

Third, "*How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!*" He says, "*...the tongue is a fire...setting on fire the entire course of life and set on fire by hell.*"

Such is the human tongue – it's a small member of our body, but it wields tremendous power over us, sometimes destroying the lives of others.

Then he writes of...

***...SMALL THINGS THAT CONTROL POWERFUL THINGS (VV. 7-8)***

He says that beasts, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures can be tamed by us homo sapiens, but no one can tame the tongue.

You've seen lions and tigers obey the tamer, and if you've been to Sea World, you've seen huge killer whales and dolphins obey a human trainer, you've seen birds of prey obey the raptor trainer, and maybe you've even seen pet iguanas that are somewhat trained.

But the human tongue, James tells us, can't be tamed. He describes it as *"a restless evil, full of deadly poison."* The tongue is venomous!

Then he points out that...

**...WITH THE TONGUE, WE BLESS OUR FATHER AND CURSE THOSE MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE (VV. 9-10).**

We have sung praises to God with our tongues this morning, but some of us will blaspheme before the day is over by using His name in vain. Some will use it as a "cuss" word. Others will use it as a vain expression, like "O my God!" or "God, no!" or "God, yes." You see it on Facebook all the time: "O-M-G!" And how many times do we hear "Jesus!" or "Jesus Christ!" or just "Christ!" used in vain. We shouldn't use the Lord's name that way. Anjd have you ever thought about the word "gosh"? Isn't it just a substitute for "God"?

James says, *"With it (the tongue) we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so."*

James is telling us that God wants us to see other people the way God sees them – as children of God made in His image just as we are. Are we not guilty of this when it comes to people we differ with, people who have different political views than we do, people who look different from us? Those of us who are quite opinionated are probably more guilty of this than the rest of you.

**THEN HE ILLUSTRATES HIS REASONING (VV. 11-12)**

He says, *"Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?"* Common sense thinking tells us that the answer is "No."

Then he says, *"Can a fig tree. . . bear olives, or a grape vine produce figs?"* Again, common sense tells us that the answer is "No."

Finally, he says, *"Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water."* Again, these are all common-sense arguments.

So, herein lies the problem with the human tongue: it can speak both good AND evil; it can bless AND it can curse; it can build up AND it can tear down.

**NOW WE COME TO THE SUMMATION (VV. 13-18).**

He points out that the tongue can reveal genuine faith; it can give a testimony for God; it can speak wisdom. But, and this is a really big “but,” *“if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.”*

I’ve seen uncontrolled tongues destroy the unity of the church. I’ve seen them destroy marriages. I’ve seen them destroy preachers and their ministries.

By the same token, I’ve seen what James describes in verses 17 and 18: *“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.”*<sup>18</sup> *And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”* The tongues of the wise can unify the church, can save marriages, and can build up preachers and their ministries.

#### CONCLUSION:

The bottom line here is that genuine faith will be evident in the life of the believer: he will “walk the walk” and “talk the talk.”