

The Power of the Tongue – Part 2

Sermon 9 in the James Series

James 3:1-12

As we said last week, all of us have had the experience of saying something and immediately thinking “GULP – I CAN’T BELIEVE I SAID THAT!!!!!!”

Sometimes it’s just a simple slip of the tongue.
Sometimes it’s something really awkward and embarrassing.

In today’s world, we can take James’ practical exhortation about “the tongue” and apply them to OUR FINGERS also, as so much of our modern communication comes by way of the internet.

And, let’s remember, James exhortation on “the tongue” comes on the heels of the passage we just studied – faith without works is dead.

And the commentator, Tasker, makes the solid point that – WORDS are another form of WORKS.

They fall into the same category – so it was natural for James to move from WORKS to WORDS.

Last week we spent most of our time on the verses 1-2 – the responsibility of those who are in authority.

We then dealt with the next 4 verses. As you look there again, notice – James starts out in a positive direction/ or at least a neutral position with our tongues.

A bit in a horse’s mouth – controls the horse.
That is not a negative.

A rudder on a Large Ship – controls the ship.

The tongue is small – but it has great power to control – just like the bit and the rudder.

But it not only has great power to control – it has great power to go OUT OF CONTROL.

The next illustration is a large forest – or the Greek could also mean a large dry land full of scrub brush
A little spark can set it off.

The tongue – IS A FIRE!
A forest fire IS destructive.
And then we see – our tongues are A FIRE.

And the fire often is Hell-fire itself!
Satan has no greater ally in our own selves
– then our tongue.
-- our tongue can defile the entire body!

I. The Double-Speaking Tongue 7-12

Remember James warning about the Double-minded man who is unstable in all his ways? 1:8 – now it is the double tongued.

A. Wild Creatures can be Tamed 7

We have all heard of instances where this went wrong.
It can take many many generations to fully domesticate a breed.

Cross-breed a domesticated animal – like a dog – with a wolf – for instance – and we are told the WOLF SIDE will be dominate.

But, animals can be tamed.

We see amazing demonstrations of that – animals that could easily destroy their trainer – instead – obey his or her will.

This goes back to the creation.

Man was given dominion over the earth and every creature.
Even in a fallen world this is still true.

But, while we are able to exercise so much control over huge beasts, we find we often have so little control over this little member in our mouths.

B. We do not Have the Ability, in ourselves, to Perfectly Tame the Tongue 8

It is dangerous.

We must not trust it.

We need to guard it.

It can turn against us at any moment – and the less prepared and vigilant we are – the more likely it is to turn against us.

The tongue often speaks impudently.

But often, our speech betrayeth us.

The things we think about

The things we hold dear

Out of the abundance of the heart – we speak.

Matt. 15:7-11

We read James with our fingers in the OT and our fingers in the gospels.

We don't necessarily find direct gospel quotes – but we can see the teaching of our Lord very clearly in the writings of his half-brother.

READ

This sounds very similar in tone to what Pastor James is saying. The defilement comes from the inside/out, not vice versa.

This is opposite what we might think.

That's not surprising – many things Christ said are opposite what we would naturally think.

The Companion passage is **Mark 7:14-23**.

Back to James 3

But our emotions can carry us away – and we can speak in dangerous and harmful ways.

I exhort young couples – and older ones too

There is one word you must NEVER say to your spouse.

The “D” word.

DIVORCE.

Why would you in anger and rage threaten your spouse – your loved one – to cut them off from the covenant of marriage – and make them doubt your love for them?

Destructive.

It harms – and it was MEANT to harm!

What’s it say in James 3:8

Deadly Poison

Killing words – likened to the venom of a deadly snake!

C. The Double-Tongue in Action 9-12

We can do a world of good with our tongue.

We can do a world of harm with our tongue.

What we must not be is DOUBLE-TONGUED.

1. Blessing God while Cursing Man

The Bible is full of praise to God.

We are exhorted over and over to give God the glory due to His Name.

But, to curse man who is made in the image of God?

This is the proper time to ask, “Who are WE to judge?”

Judgment belongs to God.

And surely – Christ himself on the last day will say to those destined for Hell -- *‘Depart from Me, you **curse**d, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:*

But how easy is it to CURSE MEN.

In the ancient world – the pagans often thought they could control nature and men with words. A curse was meant to cause harm to an individual.

In our culture – it serves as more of a vile form of venting – using foul language to tell someone off.

There is a time to rebuke and exhort.

But notice James contrast.

BLESSING GOD.
CURSING MAN

Christ exhorted to love our enemies
To bless those who curse us.

As they nailed him to the cross – the God-man – as a man -- prayed,
“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

By this request, they did not receive eternal forgiveness.

But think: As the army came to arrest Jesus, Didn't Christ Himself say to Peter, Put up your sword, even now I could call more than 12 legions of angels to free me.

By blessing, instead of cursing, it appears the angels of heaven themselves were restrained from taking any action to rescue the Son of God.

God – in the book of Deuteronomy – gave the children of Israel a commission to stand on Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerazim.

There was a great valley between them – and half of Israel was on one side and half on the other.

From Mt. Ebal they were given THE CURSES they were to call out – the curses given by God -- and the curses that would befall those who refused to obey God.

The Levites would call out the curses and all the people would answer AMEN.

From Mt. Gerazim they were to call out THE BLESSING and again – the words they spoke came directly FROM GOD.

Deut. 30:19 – sums it all up as Moses – speaking for God says, *“I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that as I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing, therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.”*

You can find these blessings and cursings written in Deut. 27 and 28 and they were carried out when the children of Israel were in the Promised Land which we find at the end of Joshua 8.

2. Fresh water and undrinkable water

I think we have the idea.

How can a fountain give out both.

The fact is the salty, briny water will foul the good water – and all you will have is undrinkable water.

3. Illustrations from horticulture

CONC: The greatest kinds of evils and sins come from the tongue.

Families have been divided.

The beginnings of many fights and killings began here.

Wars have been started – thousands and millions have died.

James 3:16

Tumults and divisions – strife and envy.

A word fitly spoken – how good it is!

A harsh word is like wringing the nose until it bleeds!

The only way to REALLY guard our tongues is to guard our hearts!