

Message #10

James 3:1-12

What are the most dangerous jobs one may do? What are the high risk occupations that increase the percentages of you being injured or losing your life?

- 1) Police - every time you stop a car or confront anything, it could be the last thing you do.
- 2) Special military forces - sent into many different life-threatening situations.
- 3) Fire Fighter - can die from falling, from smoke, from being burned.
- 4) Coal Miner - threat of cave-ins, inhaling toxic dust and you can lose oxygen.
- 5) Tower Climbers who change light bulbs on top of towers.
- 6) High Rise window/building washer - battle wind, ropes can break, you can slip.
- 7) Electric power line installer - very dangerous, can die at any moment.
- 8) Iron and Steel workers - many ways to get hurt or die.
- 9) Explosive technician - including those who work with LP gas - one mistake can kill you.
- 10) Crop dusting and Airplane pilots are high risk.
- 11) Farming is dangerous - heavy machinery causes many deaths annually.
- 12) Truck Drivers - high level of deaths.
- 13) Loggers - many die when tree falls on them.
- 14) Fishermen - many out to sea have perished.

Those are some very dangerous jobs. But I submit to you that there is one job more dangerous than all of those combined. The jobs we just mentioned can cause one to lose physical life, but there is a job that is so dangerous that it can cause one to lose in eternity. **The most dangerous job of all is the teaching of the Word of God.**

Most people have no sense of what is said in this passage. It does not matter who you are or how long you have owned a Bible. It does not matter how polished your skills. This text will set you back in your seat. This text is intimidating, it is challenging and it is serious.

James was in a religious world where all kinds of people were claiming to be teachers. There were religious gatherings and someone claimed to be the leader and the teacher. What James said is this:

THOSE WHO WANT TO TEACH GOD'S WORD HAD BETTER THINK VERY SERIOUSLY ABOUT THAT DECISION BECAUSE THERE ARE SERIOUS PREREQUISITES AND CONSEQUENCES FOR ONE WHO TEACHES.

So many people take a light view of handling God's Word. Almost everyone wants to be some Bible teacher. But the idea of teaching God's Word is no light matter. One of the curses of having so many wonderful Bibles in English is that many think they can read it and teach it. Certainly we have some great study Bibles that can help one determine what a text actually says. But teaching God's Word is serious and dangerous business. One had better know what they are doing.

Now this text is not designed to cause a mass exodus of S.S. teachers, but it should cause every one of us to recognize the seriousness and solemnity of teaching God's Word.

James presents three key facts about being a teacher:

FACT #1 – A teacher will receive a greater judgment. **3:1**

Someone who claims to be teaching God's Word had better understand this point. Notice James uses the plural pronoun "we," so he includes himself. He was a teacher and a writer of inspired truth and he knew that he would be more accountable for it.

Richard Lenski said the real issue will be whether one gave serious study to rightly dividing the Word and accurately unlocking it for the people. It is a very serious matter to stand up before people and talk about God. There is a greater level of judgment for those who do.

When James wrote this, there were no printed Bibles. If you had access to O.T. Hebrew manuscripts, you were fortunate. The Jewish Christians had been scattered and the popular thing for people to say was "I am a Bible teacher"; "I know God"; "I know the Word of God." James said you better think very seriously about that because you are highly accountable to God.

Now we know from studying the New Testament that there were different kinds of teachers in religion:

- 1) There was the heretic preacher - Gal. 1:6-9 - preached another gospel and tampered with grace.
- 2) There was the hypocrite preacher - Matt. 23:4 - the religious Pharisee that said one thing and did another.
- 3) There was the uneducated preacher - I Tim. 1:6-7- wanted to teach, had never been taught grace and didn't know what they were talking about. They didn't know how the law was even used.
- 4) There was the ear tickling preacher - II Tim. 4:3 - religious teacher who scratched religious itches and never tried to rightly divide the Word of truth. Just made people feel good.
- 5) There was the jealous preacher who preached with motives of envy and jealousy. Phil. 1:15
- 6) There was the limelight preacher who wants the notoriety and applause of people.
Matt. 23:6-7
- 7) There was the traditionalist preacher who taught man-made traditions and rules. Col. 2:8
- 8) There was the legalist preacher who taught religious legalism and codes to be right with God.
I Tim. 4:3

All of these kinds of people were claiming they were teachers and James says you better think very seriously about that claim because one who teaches will be judged. In fact, James' instruction is "let not many of you even become teachers." It is serious, serious business.

FACT #2 – A teacher is expected to have controlled speech. **3:2-8**

The “for” that begins **verse 2** introduces us to two explanations about not many being teachers. We all stumble and trip up and make mistakes in many areas of the Christian life. But you do not ever want to trip up and make mistakes about what you are saying about God and His Word. The specific point is a teacher is expected to be a complete man who has careful control of what he is teaching and what he is saying. A teacher needs to realize that what you are saying makes you very accountable.

I want to point out something that is significant grammatically. The noun “teachers” and the noun “brethren” (**v. 1**) are both masculine. The noun “man” in **verse 2** is a very gender word meaning a man as opposed to a woman. The pronoun “he” in **verse 2** is a masculine pronoun. Now I am simply observing the Greek text and my conclusion is in the corporate setting of the church, the teachers are to be men, not women. This certainly coincides with what Paul taught (I Cor. 14:34; I Tim. 2:12).

These churches that are permitting women to preach and teach are in serious violation of the Word of God and the women who are doing it are going to face a serious judgment beyond the norm.

Now James gives two explanatory illustrations about being very careful about what one says:

Explanatory Illustration #1 - Speech has tremendous potential to influence people. **3:3-5**

When someone teaches, there is tremendous potential to influence an audience.

(Potential #1) - Speech can influence an entire audience. **3:3**

Speech is kind of like a bit in a horse’s mouth. You open that mouth and insert that bit and you can control a huge horse. You can even stop a runaway horse by using that bit. By controlling the animal’s mouth, you can move and influence this animal.

Teaching is like that. It has the potential to control an audience. This is why it is so serious to teach.

(Potential #2) - Speech can influence to a specific direction. **3:4-5a**

The specific direction speech may move one is in the direction of the speaker. It is kind of like a small rudder on a ship that can move a ship in the precise direction the captain wants it to go. Now from what I can gather, a rudder needs to be two to three percent of the lateral of a ship, which are the dimensions of the ship. So if you have a ship that is 300 feet, you need a rudder that is six feet. Just think of that. That small rudder can control the direction of an entire ship.

There is tremendous power in speech. The tongue is like a rudder. It is small like a rudder but it has great power. It boasts about great things, which means it is able to boast that it has swayed many people.

If you want to know the power of speech, ask lawyers or ask politicians or ask businessmen and salesmen. James says I want teachers to know the same thing. You better be careful what you are teaching because you can influence people.

Explanatory Illustration #2 - Speech has tremendous potential to destroy people. **3:5b-8**

James uses three metaphors to show the power speech has to destroy people:

(Metaphor #1) - Speech can destroy like an uncontrollable fire. **3:5b-6**

Speech has a potential to destroy someone and consume them like an uncontrollable fire. It starts with some verbal presentation of thoughts and ideas and it leads to destruction. We have just seen the devastation of what fires can do in California. It is speculated that what started the fire was a spark from a malfunctioning power line. Just imagine that. All of the destruction of the fires was caused by a spark from a faulty power line.

There will be many people who will burn in hell because of faulty teaching in religion. I truly believe the point is through faulty teaching many people will end up in the eternal fires of hell.

(Metaphor #2) - Speech can destroy like an untamable animal. **3:7-8a**

The Greek word “tame” is one that means subdue. The verb tenses are interesting. The first verb is present tense speaking of continual action. The second verb is perfect tense speaking of action that started at a point of time and then just continues on.

The point seems to be that once a person starts speaking, they just keep speaking and they become an untamable and unstoppable force. They use their speech to destroy people and they don't stop. That tongue is a dangerous weapon that can destroy.

There are religious teachers in various denominations and religious settings who will not shut their mouths. They are preaching and teaching like a wild, untamable animal.

(Metaphor #3) - Speech can destroy like a deadly poison. **3:8b**

Speech can kill the life of a person just like a deadly poison. Some teacher, teaching false things and destroy others. They can kill spiritual life and growth.

FACT #3 – A teacher is expected to have consistent speech. **3:9-12**

There are two consistency facts brought out here:

Consistency Fact #1 - Our speech is to be consistent with our theological worship. **3:9-10**

The same mouth that claims it is worshipping God and blessing God can present things that curse men, who have been made in the image of God.

What I understand this to mean in the context is that one who is claiming he is a teacher can actually end up being used to put people under the curse so they end up in hell. He can stand up in front of people and put on a good religious show talking about the blessings of God, but he is a phony, who is not interested in people knowing truth.

Consistency Fact #2 - Our speech is to be consistent with our spiritual transformation. **3:11-12**

A fountain should communicate fresh life-giving water. If you mix any salt into the water, you have tainted what is pure.

As believers, it is expected that we will be a communicator of a life-giving fountain of truth and grace.

Our teaching should produce proper fruit, not fruit that belongs to something else.

If there is one key point that needs to carefully be seen here, it is this—our teaching better be accurate and true to the text. When some person who claims to be a religious leader opens his mouth, he had better know what it is he is about to say. He better take that very seriously because God does.