

The Life and Death Power of the Tongue

Epistle of James
By Ty Blackburn

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Providence Church
2146 Buford Hwy
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

Please turn with me in your Bibles to James 3. The third chapter of James. The title of the message this morning is "The Life and Death Power of the Tongue." This will be the first part of that message title. Chapter 3, verses 2-12 is our text. James 3:2-12. We see James spends a lot of time talking about the tongue, the power of the tongue, the power of our words. It's actually something he talks about quite a bit in the book. It's really extraordinary when you step back from it and look at it. He begins talking about our speech in chapter 1, verse 19, when he says that we should be slow to speak, quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. Then in chapter 1, verse 26, he says that if anyone thinks himself to be religious yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless, that true religion is to bridle your tongue. Chapter 2, verse 12, he says that we are to so speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. He's concerned about our speech. Chapters 3, verses 2 through 12, we're going to see is just one of the, actually probably is the chair passage in the whole Bible about the importance of the tongue. It's the most important passage and the fullest discussion in Scripture. There are lots of places it is talked about but this passage would stand equal to any other. Then chapter 4, verses 11 and 12, he comes back to the tongue and says, do not speak against one another, brethren, chapter 4:11. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother speaks against the law and judges the law. Verse 13, he says, you who say tomorrow, today or tomorrow we are going to go to such and such a town, don't do that. Change the way you speak. In chapter 5, verse 9, do not complain, brethren, against one another. Verse 12, my brethren, don't swear either by heaven.

He's concerned with our speech and certainly that's his focus in chapter 3, verses 2 through 12, and put that in context of James's overall message. We've seen as we have been looking at this book that his theme really is that we be not merely hearers of the word. That theme comes out clearly in verse 22 of this first chapter, but prove yourselves doers of the word and not merely hearers who delude themselves. It's not enough to hear the word of God, we need to do the word of God. Those of us who have been born again need to evidence that in doing the word. Here he's picking up on the emphasis of Jesus which we saw earlier in Luke 6 where Jesus said that the difference between the man who builds his house upon the rock and the man who builds his house upon the sand, when the storm hits, remember the difference is dramatic, one house stands, the other house falls, but what's the essential difference between these two men? Both heard the word. It's not

that one heard the word and one didn't. No, both heard the word but only one did what he heard. Only one turned what he heard into action.

So this is James's emphasis, don't be merely doers of the word. Don't delude yourself into thinking that you're okay spiritually if there is not life transformation happening in your life. Now, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is clear that we are saved by grace alone. It's a gift of God. It's not something we earn or merit. We are saved by faith alone, through faith alone. That is, it is received just by believing, not through works. We are not saved by works, we are not saved by merit, we are saved by grace through faith and that faith is in Christ. It's Christ alone. He is our righteousness. He took our sins on the cross. He bore our sins and he paid for our sins and he gives us in exchange his righteousness and that's our basis of standing before God. We never stand before the Lord clothed in anything of our own doing. Our only hope is his righteousness and yet we are not saved by works but we are saved unto works. That is, we are saved by faith alone apart from works, but we are saved by faith alone so that we then can start demonstrating the reality of a changed life through our works. This is the balance. In fact, that passage in Ephesians 2 when he says "for by grace you are saved through faith, it's not of yourselves, it's the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast," he goes on to say "for we are his workmanship in Christ Jesus, created unto good works."

Salvation is all by grace. It's not our works, but once you are saved, once you have a new life, now the call is follow Jesus with the new power that he gives you, and everything that we do for him must be done in his power, by his Spirit, through his word, but that the true believer must manifest that change. There must be a directional change to be saved. We must repent, that's turn, going one way and you turn. Jesus said you must be born again. There must be new life and this is James's great emphasis. He's writing to Jewish believers in Christ who are complacent, who think they're okay, and their lives aren't where they need to be and James is saying, "Listen, you may be okay. I can't see your heart." It's easy for believers to stumble and it's easy for believers to backslide, it's easy for believers not to be what they should be. We often find ourselves struggling, fighting against sin, overcome, but he says the true believer won't stay there, we must press on, and that's the emphasis of the whole book and he comes to that and he says, "Let's talk about this concept of living out the Christian life now in relation to your words and watch what you say and look for God to change you there, and that will be a powerful testimony of the reality of his grace at work in your life." Life and death power of the tongue.

Now we're going to start reading in verse 1. We covered that last week on the importance of teaching but we'll read that in context, just read all the way through verse 12, 1-12, James 3. We are going to be focusing, though, from verse 2 through 12. James 3:1,

1 Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. 2 For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. 3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. 4 Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong

winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. 5 So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. 7 For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. 8 But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; 10 from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. 11 Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? 12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your word and we come this morning asking that you might pour out your grace upon us, that the ministry of the Holy Spirit might be present with each one to help us understand, to apply, to repent, to believe, to obey. For the glory of our Savior, we pray in his name. Amen.

Now, James, I love his style. He has such an urgency about him in every passage and he piles in this passage word picture upon word picture upon word picture really to capture us emotively, affectively. I mean, our affections, our emotions, to get them engaged as we read this passage. There are no less than five word pictures. I think you can make more than that. I mean, he starts off talking about the bits in a horse's mouth. And then he moves to the rudder moving a ship, a sailing ship with strong winds, a great ship turned by a rudder. Then a small flame turning into a great forest fire. Then the untameability of animals, I mean the tameability of animals and the untameability of the tongue. Then the last, the fifth would be the fountain fresh and bitter water and then he kind of lays a couple of extras saying the same thing, can a fig tree produce olives. These word pictures, he's trying to impress upon us the urgency with fervency the importance of this subject, the life and death power of the tongue.

Now, he's saying to us essentially if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you must tame your tongue and that the evidence of grace will be that over time you will more and more tame your tongue but I love his realism because he tells you, it's not going to be easy. It is going to be a bloodbath. That's why he says later no one can tame the tongue. He says tame the tongue if you're really a Christian, then he says no one can tame the tongue. Do you see the realism? The Christian life is not easy. This is the balance. We dwell in a world where sin is all around us. The world system is completely antithetical to living for God. It's opposed to us. We are swimming upstream continually and then we have not only enemies everywhere around us, the enemy is within us. We have a sin nature. Born again, yes, a new nature but the old man is still here. The body of sin, this body that we

inhabit has not yet been redeemed and so sin is present right here with us, the one who would do good, as Paul says in Romans 7.

So James understands it's going to be a battle and he makes that clear, but as we begin to unpack this, I want us to see the life and death power of the tongue and we're going to consider two points, well, actually, we're going to consider two main points and one preliminary observation, so three points total but it's really one pre-point, two real points.

The first thing, the preliminary observation we must understand before we look at the life and death power of the tongue, is that there is a standard set down in verse 2 which we must strive for. When he says in James 3:2, "For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well," that is essentially what he is calling us to. In fact, that is reiterated in verse 10, "My brethren, these things ought not to be this way." You can't allow yourself to be blessing and cursing. You can't do that. You've got to strive toward perfection. You've got to try to bridle this unbridleable entity, your tongue. There is no other choice.

It's interesting, John Phillips in his commentary on the book of James makes an interesting observation. Remember we shared at the beginning of our study and as we have been working through James, that James, the author of this epistle, was a half-brother of our Lord; he and Jude, two authors of Scripture were half brothers of Christ, that is, their father and mother were Joseph and Mary where Jesus was only, of course, his mother was Mary. James grew up in the same house as Jesus and he said, Phillips writes surely James wrote James 3:2, the second part of it, when he says if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man. Phillips says surely James wrote this as his personal tribute to the Lord Jesus Christ. That wondrous person had lived with James in the same home in Nazareth for many years. He had attended the same school and the same synagogue and had worked beside him at the carpenter's bench. He and Jesus had literally grown up together. Looking back on that experience, James pondered the significance of it all. He had never heard Jesus speak a cross word or tell a lie. He had never heard him answer back his parents in a disrespectful way. He had never heard him say anything suggestive or vulgar or say anything of which afterward he would have felt ashamed. He had never heard him speak angrily in a fit of temper or say anything that called for an apology. On the contrary, everything that Jesus had ever said had been wise, loving and true. Looking back over the Nazareth years, James could think of no better definition of perfection, "The man who can claim that he never says anything wrong is perfect." Jesus was perfect. His control of his tongue demonstrates the fact.

It's something to think about, James having lived with Christ. Now we know he wasn't a believer until after the resurrection. It must have been tough to grow up with that kind of perfection. "Why can't you be more like your brother?" never stung more than then. But as he reflected on it now a born-again man, he marveled at the glory of the Savior. He had seen him up close and personal year after year after year and here was a man who never stumbled in what he said. He was perfect.

Now that is a standard that no one else can meet, Jesus alone, but when we come to Christ, when we are born again, when we realize that we fail at everything, we stumble all the time, we can't control anything, we can't do anything fit for God, and we come to understand that that means we are under God's wrath, his just wrath, and then we flee to Christ who has offered himself as a sacrifice for sinners, paid the sin debt in full at Calvary, bearing God's wrath against our sins in himself on the cross, and then rising again on the third day to show that God received his offering. When we go to Christ, we have a new heart and we have a new calling, and the new calling is to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. Or as 1 John 2:6 says, the one who says he belongs to Jesus must walk in the same way that he walked. John there in that second chapter of 1 John is essentially dealing with the same issue James is, that there is a readiness of many to claim to be believers and yet they have no change in their life. And he says this in verse 4, 1 John 2:4, "The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him." This is how you know that you are in him, he says. The one who says he abides in him ought himself to walk in the same manner as he walked. You see, this is the standard. We are to seek to be like Jesus and that's exactly what we are called to be. God's purpose is to make us exactly like Jesus and, praise the Lord, when we die or when he comes back, we will be like him exactly so that he is the firstborn among many brethren.

So the goal we must strive for is conforming to Christ. Now there is no way to do it in and of your own strength. What he calls you to do, he will equip you to do. Faithful is he who called you, he also will do it. Galatians 2:20, the Apostle Paul gives us a window into how do you walk like Jesus walked. Galatians 2:20 says, "I am crucified with Christ nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God." It is now a looking to Christ and a trusting in him, in his grace, in his power, to live out his life in us through his word. We obey him. We take the step. We fill our minds with the word and we trust at every moment in his power. But this is the standard, James says this is what must be; we must strive for this. This is the goal we must strive for. It's not acceptable to say, "It's just too much. I can't do it." Well, of course you can't do it but you still have to try and next year we should be closer than we were this year.

So that's the preliminary point, the pre-point. The standard we must strive for is to bridle the tongue, to not stumble in what we say, to be perfect, and our tongue, to really labor toward holiness in our speech. Now, that's what we're supposed to do but then he tells us about the power of the tongue. That's what the real thrust and the emphasis of this passage is. You are called to this, man, you've got an uphill battle. And the first point as we look at the power of the tongue, the life and death power of the tongue, is the unexpected power of the tongue. The unexpected power. This power of the tongue is an unexpected power. This is what he's getting at verses 2 to 5 when he starts making this, one of the key points he's making is this paradox of small versus great. Essentially, he sums it up in verse 5 when he says, "So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things." The tongue is really small but it does great things. That's essentially one of his main points here and that's what we are focusing on here in verses 2

to 5. He starts off by saying you have a great horse and think about the power of a horse. You know, when you watch horses on TV and stuff and you get beside a horse suddenly for the first time in a long time, it's really something and the power in that animal. I have ridden horses a few times and one horse that I rode a couple of times, all horses are big, you know, if you're going to ride a horse, it's a big horse, but this horse was a monster, and standing beside him, I can't remember his name but anyway, standing beside him was just, I thought, "Man, I've got to get on this guy and tell him what to do. I don't like my odds." He probably knows I don't know what I'm doing too, and I think they do know that. They can tell. "I'm in control," that's what the horse is saying.

But isn't it amazing that an animal that can run that fast, that has that much power, man controls. In fact, one of the things that we need to point out here is that when he is talking about later about the taming of the animals, he seems to be alluding to Genesis 9 and man's dominion over all the various types of animals, and that God when he created man in his image, he created us to rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and all the animals that creep upon the earth. And isn't it amazing, if you really step back and look at it, that we do reign over all the animals. The elephant, the tiger. I mean, you've got to work at it but there are men that subdue these things and we talked about last time, even like the killer whale, the dolphin. They are just so much faster than we are, we could never catch them, but somehow we reign over them because God has given us that authority.

So in the same way, we reign over the horse. You could never run a horse down and catch him if you had to but God has given us this authority and so we do. We have learned how to use a rope and we've learned how to use a bit, and that bit is a small thing. Think about how small the bit is that's on the part of the bridle that goes in the mouth. He says that little bit turns that big thousand pound animal. You know, when a one pound bit turns a thousand pound animal, isn't that astonishing? He says that's the way the tongue is. The tongue is like that. It has unexpected power.

Then he says, in the same way, think about in verse 4, he goes to the second metaphor, the second word picture, "Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds." Here you see a great ship with the sails up and you see strong winds but what is the determinative issue for that ship? It's the rudder, the small rudder. It turns the ship wherever the inclination of the pilot, the captain of the ship determines. The rudder. That's unexpected. You think about this big ship, these big sails, strong winds blowing, and yet James is saying, "Isn't it true that the issue is the rudder?" The small little piece underneath the water that is being turned by the wheel, that is setting the course.

He says this is a picture of the tongue so with those two metaphors piled upon one another, he says in verse 5, "So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things." It's small. It looks insignificant but it has great power. It directs everything. Now you think about that, our tongues are a small part of our body. I don't know how much our tongue weighs but it's not a big portion of the body weight. You don't even see it until somebody opens their mouth, like the doctor says, "Stick out your

tongue." But he says how powerful the tongue is, in a sense, nothing more powerful than a man has than his tongue, and I think what he's getting at is the tongue is, of course, standing in place of the idea of words. The power of the spoken word. The surprising unexpected power of the spoken word. It is an unexpected power, the power that it has goes way beyond what we anticipate for good or evil.

I shared a few weeks back about hearing Joni Eareckson's testimony and hearing her talk about, Joni Eareckson Tada, the lady that broke her back, actually her neck, in a diving accident at age 17 in 1967 and immediately became a quadriplegic. She was a believer and she talked about, she was sharing a testimony and I was thinking about this, here we are, December 2017, and it occurred to me that this is 50 years since this happened. She lived up on the Chesapeake Bay, here we are in Rome, Georgia. She is talking to people from churches all over America and actually all over the world, it was a counseling conference we were at. People would come from other countries. She is telling us her testimony of how she has grown to love Christ more and to glorify him through this amazing difficulty, something that is unimaginable. Who can put yourself in that position and want that? Of course we wouldn't, but to hear her talk, you would because she talked about how much of Christ she has come to understand, how wonderful he is to her because she has to cry out to him every moment for everything in a way that we can't relate to.

But she was sharing and what hit me was, here she is talking 50 years after the fact and she was sharing about some very seemingly insignificant people who said seemingly insignificant things to her and it turned the whole course of her life. She is struggling in self-pity. She can't cry without somebody being there because she has no ability to wipe her own nose or her tears. So she has learned not to cry, but she is groaning in her heart, she is angry at God, she wants him to heal her, and her friend, and this is what she mentioned, I forgot the lady's name but this young girl, another 17-year-old girl says to her, "Joni, you need to be thankful. You need to start thanking God for what you can thank him for." At first Joni was like, "Right." She said, "You can thank him today that you are able to sit in a wheelchair. Last month you weren't able to." And she said, "I started thanking God," and here 50 years later she is telling us about that insignificant word. Can you imagine how insignificant that might have felt to that young girl, 17 year old friend who is dealing with a quadriplegic friend, who just a year before they were out like other 16 year old girls swimming and enjoying life, and now she knows this girl is never going to walk again, my dear friend, and what can I say to her? And she felt like she needed to tell her she should be thankful because God says in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you, and she said that little insignificant thing and here Joni 50 years later is saying, "That was a turning point in my life." The power of the word, the spoken word.

She told about another friend who as she was having a particularly hard time came in and sang hymns with her. Just singing to God. Joni wasn't able to sing yet. I mean, she could but she just couldn't bring herself to but she started singing because this girl sang. Just that little effort.

The power of the word for good, but the power of the word for evil too. The surprising power of the tongue to do evil. In the same way that something that seems so insignificant, you know, an offhanded comment, a word spoken in anger, a cutting remark, what damage it does, what devastating power it has. If we could see all of the things that we have said to others, those of us who are parents to our children, our siblings, family members, friends, if we could really see and understand all the pain that we have brought about by our tongue, something that seemed just insignificant, just a flippant comment, and yet it's like an explosion. Praise God the Lord gives us grace, especially in Christ to forget these things and to put them behind us, to deal with them when we need to deal with them, of course, but to not be bitter over them. But some people are that aren't looking to Christ like they need to in that area. They are Christians or they aren't Christians, they can be controlled by that comment for the rest of their lives.

This is what he's saying. The tongue appears to be small, the words appear to be small things and yet they boast of great things. In the same way a rudder can turn a ship, a word can turn a life. So he's saying this is why it's urgent for us to bring our tongues under the Lordship of Jesus Christ because the stakes are so high and it doesn't appear that way but it's real. The surprising power of the tongue.

The second thing that we want to see this morning, the second main point, it's not just the unexpected power of the tongue, that was our first point, but the determinative power of the tongue. In these same verses, it's really just the flipside of what we've been talking about. It's small but it is determinative. That's what we said. I mean, it was a small, apparently small word that was spoken to Joni yet it turned her life. It was a turning point, and that's what he's saying, the bridle, you turn the horse wherever you want to. It obeys you, the bit does that. The rudder turns the whole ship. And the idea he's getting at, really, is that it is a matter of life and death and the point that James is working toward is that if our tongue and the direction of our tongue, he's basically saying as goes your tongue, so goes your soul. That's what he's getting at, that it has a determinative power, a life and death force for us; that if we really have been born again, then we will be bringing it more into line with Christ; that we will be looking more like Jesus in what we speak. And if we are not, we will find ourselves falling away from Christ and into hell.

That's essentially what he is doing in verse 6 when he speaks about the fire, "the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the entire course of our life, and is set on fire by hell." He says if we are not bridling it and it just continues in that pattern of wickedness and it doesn't stand still, it's going to grow, and if that's the case, he's saying your profession, examine it because to profess Christ, we must possess Christ. I mean, it's not enough to profess Christ, we must possess him. In this power of the tongue, he's basically saying if you will work on this, if you get this right, you get everything right. It's hard work. It is a daunting challenge but he says this, apply your heart with all diligence to bringing your tongue, just like he says we bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, we bring every word captive to the obedience of Christ.

You think about the determinative power of the tongue, I mean, we see it in history. Apparently small things, the tongue of someone, what a dramatic difference it makes in the course of events. I mean, think about the tongue of Adolf Hitler. It's interesting, in fact, you think about World War II, you could almost say it was a story ultimately of two great orators, Hitler and Churchill. Think about what was accomplished because of Hitler's tongue. You look at those old movie reels and you see Hitler and the charisma he had and the way he was able to generate excitement in a crowd with his tongue, the things that he said, and how great evil was unleashed. A great fire burned across Europe and it started in the heart of that man and with his wicked tongue. Nine and a half million Jews in 1933 lived in Europe, 1933 when Hitler took power. By 1945, there were three and a half million Jews alive. Six million had died. I mean, the numbers in the countries is astounding. Like Austria went from like 400,000 Jews to 18,000. Then of course, after the war they moved out. I mean, they got out, so many got out of Europe. They didn't want to live there anymore. They went to the Americas and then to Israel years later, many went to Israel.

But think about that, it started with his words. It's amazing, we have that silly saying: sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me. I mean, in one sense you don't want to let other people's words affect you, you are not to allow that to happen. That's what we're trying to get at but the reality is words are much more powerful than sticks and stones. That is the biblical picture and isn't it interesting, I mean, I've said that point before, the unexpected power of the tongue, in one sense it's unexpected, in another sense it ought to be expected because we are in the image of God. He made us to image him, to be like him, and isn't it interesting, then, we who bear his image, that there is power in our words.

Now, the power truly is as we speak his word and there is a limitation on our power. There are some folks who get confused about this, kind of the name it, claim it stuff. If you just say it, if you just tell your wallet that there is money in it, just tell it, just tell it and it will be there. There are people that actually that's like borrowing sermon material from people on TV out there. I'm not borrowing it, actually, I'm just illustrating it. I'm not borrowing that at all. Like there is power, but we have the inherent power. No, we don't but God has made us to reflect him and he has made it so that you and I are going to be blessed by his word, his written word, so often by somebody else speaking it to you. We need relationships. We need other people to tell us what we already know. Isn't it amazing how often you are struggling and somebody comes and they tell you something and they tell you what you already know and it changes everything, because you already knew it, you weren't living it until a brother or sister spoke it, and then suddenly. It's because God has made us like him and think about he loves to do things with his word. That's how he created. He spoke and the world came into existence, and so he then gives us the opportunity as his image bearers to speak his word and to watch his power go forth.

It's all by his power and for his glory, but don't underestimate the amazing privilege he has given us, and this is one of the things about fallen men, even. They are still in the image of God. I think that's why somebody like a charismatic leader can do the things

they do. There is something about the fact that we are made in the image of God and when someone speaks, there is great potential for evil or good. How urgent it is that we bring our tongues into obedience to Christ.

The determinative power. Think about this: so Hitler, he basically starts speaking and speaking and speaking and look at the fire that burned across Europe. And then it was Winston Churchill in England who stood up against him. England was ready to surrender. The movie "The Darkest Hour," chronicles this in a pretty accurate way. Maybe a little bit of stretch here and there for poetic license or whatever, but essentially the fact is true that Churchill was the one who stood up against Hitler and he was, as reported in the movie, King George says to him, "Apparently you are the only man Hitler fears." I was reflecting on that. Why did Hitler fear Churchill? I think it's because he knew he had his match. And Churchill, what did he do? Essentially he reminded the people of who they were. "You are the British nation. You have a great history. You have a great heritage. We must not submit to evil." We cannot do like so many of the British intelligentsia and elites wanted to do, was go ahead and sue for peace with Hitler. Can you imagine what would have happened? And he in that great speech before the House of Commons says, "We will never surrender. We will fight on the beach. We're going to fight until, you know, basically until we are dead, lying in a pool of blood. We are never going to surrender." And that was the moment that England was galvanized to fight and they stood up against the blitz and all of the bombing of London day after day after day, but it was the power and actually the ongoing power of Churchill continuing to make broadcasts, speaking the truth, speaking the word, the human word speaking and that's what stood up.

There is a quote by Lord Halifax, one of Churchill's enemies. I don't know exactly what he said but in the movie it says, I'm sorry, I should have given what is it, the disclaimer morning, spoiler alert. Spoiler alert. It's still worth seeing, anyway, so just go and see it. But at one point after the speech that Churchill gives, Halifax, he wanted to sue for peace. He wanted to not fight. I mean, in fairness to him, it had only been 20 years since World War I was over. So many people had died in that war needlessly because of the foolishness of the generals. So there were misgivings but Churchill knew Hitler and he knew you can't make a deal with the devil. So when Halifax hears the speech that Churchill gives, he basically says at the end of it, "Churchill marshaled the, what we just saw," he said, "what just happened?" Some guy asked him, "What just happened?" after the end of that speech and he says, "Churchill marshaled the English language and sent it into battle." That's what happened.

The power of language, you see, the power of words, and we have the word of the living God, that which is eternal. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever. It is his word that will abide forever. There are two things that last in this world: the souls of men and the word of God, and what the souls of men need is the word of God.

So he's saying if history can turn on words, how much more can individual personal history turn with words. Our lives turn. And if we are not harnessing our words in and bringing them in obedience to Christ, beware. So James is saying, "Listen, we have a

tendency because we are sheep, we forget. We forget and we are weak and we are fighting against an enemy. The tongue can't be tamed. I mean, it's impossible, humanly speaking. There is no way you can tame it apart from depending on the grace of God and the word of God at every moment. You will not win unless you are doing that." So if you're not doing that actively, what's happening? You're going backwards. It's like being on a hill with the old manual transmission cars. I learned to drive on a manual transmission car, many of you did that are older. The younger people don't know what a manual transmission car is, many of you don't. But remember, getting that thing with the clutch and putting it in gear, boy, I hated to be on a hill at a red light. I don't want to back into that guy's car before I take off. Well, on a hill in a manual transmission car, if you take your foot off the brake and you don't engage the clutch and get into gear, what is happening? You're going backwards. You can't stay where you are. You're either making progress or you are retreating and that is the nature of the Christian life. If you are not going forward, you are going backward.

Now, a true Christian can find themselves going backward because they are not going forward. James is not saying because we struggle with anger, we struggle with harsh words, we struggle with gossip or lying, telling falsehoods, that we are not a believer. He's not saying that, he's saying are you making progress and if you're not, you'd better start and keep reminding each other. How are you doing in this area? I mean, some of us have tendencies in different ways. You know, some of us can say how easy it is to speak in anger and say something, you know, ridiculous like he talks about. We can in one moment be blessing God, praising God. Think about this, you're driving down the road and you are praising God for what he is doing in your life, and somebody pulls out in front of you and they are made in the image of God, they may be an unbeliever, they may be a pagan, they may be way away from God, but they are still in the image of God, and you say something like, "You idiot! What in the world?" And you're thinking in your mind, "I've got no use for that person." Whatever you're thinking. I'm not trying to go that far, but anyway, you know, we say something and we don't think of the implications of what we have just done. We have cursed the reflection of the God we just blessed. It's like blessing God and then looking in a mirror, which is what the image essentially is like, it's like a reflection of the glory of God, and then cursing that image.

James says these things ought not be. We can't be like that. So if that's happening, what does it mean? It means you've got to stop and you've got to repent. You've got to say, "Lord, help me." And we've got to be in the word because it's the word that changes us. We've got to keep meditating on Scripture's like be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. Just stop talking. Think about that person. You know, I pull out in front of people sometimes, I'm sure. I always think I'm getting out of their way quickly and I always have a good reason, you know. They don't know that, though, do they when I do that? So what could be going on with that person's life? Or we meditate on Ephesians 4:29, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear." So I don't want to let anything come out of my mouth that is corrupting, that is unwholesome, which means corrupting. So if I say something like, "I can't believe that!" and I've got people in the car, the people in the car have been corrupted by that. "I can't

believe that driver!" I mean, there is a way to comment on it in a godly way. There really is. I mean, you can say, "That was not a good move. That seems dangerous." You see the different tone than, "What is that person thinking?" Corrupting word, good word.

So if we are having corrupting words come out, we need to repent and we need to ask God. We need to put off and put on. "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification." So how can I build up? Well, I can be praising the Lord even now. "I was going to make that red light and now I'm not because that person pulled out in front of me. The Lord obviously didn't want me to be where I was going to be. I mean, I should have gotten ready earlier maybe, but given all other things being equal, he didn't want me to make that red light. Praise his name. And Lord, thank you for showing me how quick I am to be angry and sinfully just hurtful in my thoughts and my words. I need a Savior. I'm so grateful that, Jesus, that you never would do that and that my record before the Father is your perfect record, not mine; that when he looks at me, he sees your perfect righteousness. And Lord, I'm thankful that even now you can live through me and help me stop being like this. Help me the next time I'm in this situation." So then even as we are driving down the road, we start meditating on Scripture because you've got to be ready. You know it's going to happen. At some point the Lord is going to let that happen again and now I am ready this time, and then when you see that happen, that's grace flowing in and through your life and you are moving toward that perfection. You're never going to be perfect until Jesus comes back or we die, but he will not stop the work he has begun in us. He is faithful to begin the work he completed in us until the day of Christ Jesus.

James is saying, "Listen, the tongue, it is something that if you get this right, you get everything right. If you are working on this and making progress, you can know that your salvation is real." You'll have testimony. This is essentially the role of fruit is Jesus says, "Look, it's not just your profession. You have to understand the Gospel, you've got to profess it, but if you're making progress, if there is growth in grace, that's to be your comfort." That's basically what the whole message of 1 John is. These things are written so that you may know that you have eternal life, and he essentially says here's a test, here's a test, here's a test. Look at your fruit and you can know that you have eternal life. You are progressing. You are moving in the right direction. God is at work in you. And we are to help each other with that. This is why we need to talk about these things among each other, because a lot of times what will happen is, we will get really discouraged looking at ourselves all the time and we think, "I'm not making any progress." Satan then gets involved in suggesting to us and he condemns the believer. That's his nature. He is an accuser of the brethren. So those that belong to Christ, he wants to get you all wrapped up and discouraged so that you won't live for Christ. So often the condemnation you feel is from him. In fact, the Holy Spirit never condemns, the Holy Spirit convicts. He doesn't condemn. Jesus, he points to Christ. You need to repent but you need to look at Christ. But when you are around other believers, they can say, "Listen, you are making progress. I see it. I see it in this area. Now let's talk about what you are dealing with." Don't just immediately explain it away but yet, "What's going on in your life? I'm seeing this." And as we interact with each other, we are helping one another. This is what it means to

encourage one another while it is still called today lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Build one another up. Help one another along.

James is saying the area of the tongue is an area of great importance. The standard must be sought consistently and we've got to keep reminding ourselves to keep pressing on because the tongue has unexpected power and it has a determinative power, but through Christ we can overcome.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for the Gospel, for a gift of righteousness entirely outside of us that you give to us on the basis of Christ's finished work, and we receive it as a gift. And yet, not only do you give us a standing of righteousness, you give us now a new power, the resurrection power of Christ through faith to begin walking more and more like Jesus. Father, help us. Help each one to examine our hearts right now and to think about the ways that we are struggling in this area with our tongue. Lord, thank you that you know every one of us better than we know ourselves. You know the issues that you are concerned about. May your Spirit search each one. Lord, show us what you want us to do, those that aren't today truly repenting and believing in Christ, call them to yourself. Grant them urgency and fervency to cry out to Christ, to place their trust in him completely, and to begin to receive assurance of your righteousness as a gift and then to begin to live for you and your glory. And for those that belong to you, Lord, that are still as we look in our lives, we see areas that are so far from what they ought to be, put your finger where you want it, Lord, and help us commit even now to deal with these issues, to pray more, to study harder, to look for accountability with other brothers and sisters, and make us like Jesus. May we walk, may we talk more like our Savior. We pray this in his name and for his glory. Amen.