

The Power of the Tongue Part 2

Epistle of James
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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the third chapter of James, James 3. We're continuing a message we began last week as we are trying to work through the exposition of the book of James. We are in James 3:1-12 looking at the issue of the tongue, the power of the tongue, in fact that's the title of the message this morning, "The Power of the Tongue Part 2," and the text is James 3:1-12. The power of the tongue.

We have seen that James is very concerned that we as those who profess the faith, that profess to belong to Jesus, that we not only be hearers of the word but doers of the word, that we live out our faith. His concern was particularly for Jewish believers for whom he had a great pastoral concern as the leader of the church in Jerusalem. Many of the people that he writes to were those who formally were in Jerusalem under his ministry or the spiritual descendants of those that were under his ministry, and his concern that they are not living out their faith; that the true believer should be evident in the fruit of his life. The changed life is the true mark of a believer. It's not that it's always uniform, of course not; there are times, even, of backsliding for the Christian, yes, but that the true evidence of saving faith is a changing life, more and more repentance, more and more faith and more and more holiness. So that's what he's calling us to and he's dealing with various practical issues and he comes in chapter 3 to the very practical place where the rubber meets the road, that is the use of the tongue. The words that come out of our mouths. He said, "This is a good measurement of where you are spiritually and how you are doing. What is the direction of your life. Look at your tongue. Look at the things that proceed from your mouth." Here he's following our Lord Jesus who said, "By their fruits, you will know them, and out of the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks," in Luke 6. Look at the fruit of the lips and you will have a window to the heart.

So James is dealing with that issue here. He has told us, we saw last time that he set before us the standard that we are all to strive for and we're going to read it again in just a moment in verse 2 where he says, "If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well." That's the calling. Now, he's speaking of Jesus himself but he's telling us we all if we name the name of Christ, we are to be like Jesus. We are to seek to be like him. This is the standard for which we aim, to bring every word into obedience to Jesus Christ; every thought and every word to the obedience of Christ, that's the standard for which we must aim.

We must seek to bridle the tongue. As he said earlier in his book, if you profess to be religious, James 1:26, "If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless." The profession of faith with a tongue that is unbridled is a worthless profession so he's saying as a Christian, those who name the name of Christ, those who profess to have repented and placed their faith in Jesus, we must labor to bridle the tongue. There is no choice.

So that is his great concern. We saw last time a couple of things, the first points in the message as he unfolds it, the tongue has an unexpected power, a surprising power, you might say. It's more mighty than it appears. It's a small thing yet it boasts of great things. That's his first main point and we said it has a directive power, that is, that the tongue directs the course of your life the same way a rudder directs a ship. The tongue determines in a very real way the ultimate outcome in so many ways, just the actions of our lives, the words of our mouths determine so much, but ultimately it determines even our eternal destiny. If your tongue is not bridled and is an unbridled, angry, out of control tongue, the odds are you will find yourself in hell no matter your profession because the reality of your faith must be evident in some way in your life. We are all called to this and so James is urging us to kind of wake us up out of sort of a slumbering, halfhearted attempts to deal with our tongue.

So let's read the text. We are going to read James 3:1-12. We are going to focus this morning, this morning's emphasis, the power of the tongue is the title of the message but today we are focusing on the destructive power of the tongue. Its power to destroy. Its power to bring great damage, to wreak havoc. That's the focus this morning and verses 5 and 6 are really what we're going to major in on, but let's read the entire passage. 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 together.

Our Father, we ask that you might grant us your grace in abundance that your Spirit might take your word and as a scalpel, that it might divide to the discerning of our thoughts and intentions of the heart; that it might divide joint and marrow; that you might lay everything bare in our hearts before you and us that we might see our sin, repent more fully, and trust in a glorious Savior more completely. We pray in his name. Amen.

On October 8, 2017, the Northern California firestorm erupted. Twelve separate fires originated within a two day period. October 8, 2017, at 9:47 PM, one of the fires called the Tubbs fire, and I didn't know this, in California there are so many wildfires they name them; kind of like hurricanes get a name so they can then distinguish them. In this past year, you remember seeing a number of times the stories on the news about the fires in California. In fact, the Thomas fire started in December, December 4, burned for over a month and it destroyed more acres of land than any fire in California history. That was in Southern California. The most destructive fire in terms of acreage was in December but the most destructive fire in California history in terms of structural damage and cost and loss of life was in October. It was the Tubbs fire and it was only one of the 12 fires. There were 12 fires, the Tubbs fire was one of them and it destroyed more structures than any fire in California history, 5,600 structures, homes, buildings were destroyed.

It is believed to have been started around 9:43 PM. Within three hours, it had moved 12 miles. Imagine this, a Sunday evening, 9:45 Sunday night, people are kind of winding down getting ready for the week, getting ready for bed, moving in that direction, you know, you corral your family toward bed on a Sunday evening. You're thinking about the week, getting ready for the week. They go to bed, people in Santa Rosa, California went to bed and were awakened at 1 AM because the fire had come to the northern city limits of Santa Rosa, a city of 185,000 people, and it had moved 12 miles in three hours. I mean, that's like from Buford to Duluth, and it burned into the city limits and it destroyed, as I said earlier, 56,000 buildings, 28,000 of them in Santa Rosa. Praise the Lord, after about an hour and a half, the winds changed and went northeasterly and took it away from Santa Rosa. It didn't continue burning on down into the city. Sixty mph winds casting that fire and people in other towns awakened in the middle of the night and all these people are awakened out of sleep with no warning, "Evacuate! Run for your lives! Get in your cars!" They talked about in one area there was only one evacuation route for this one small town and the people were riding along this evacuation route and there was a wall of flames on one side of the road, the firemen trying to keep it back so they could escape.

Now think about the urgency that suddenly comes on you. You are slumbering, you are sleeping, and then suddenly you've got to be awake and run for your life. That's the force James wants us to see about the power of the tongue, and the way that he tells this and

unpacks this, is to create that sense of urgency. In fact, in his passage itself, he doesn't really tell you how to overcome it. We're going to see a little bit more I think in this next part, he's going to deal with that a little bit, but he is more concerned with telling you how great the problem is. Now, why does he do that? Because he wants you to run to Christ. He wants to say our only hope is Jesus. "Run to Jesus. You need him far more than you realize." And he realizes that we tend to be very sleepy about dealing with our sin, something I need to deal with and I'm trying to, sort of, but not really that concerned, and not really that urgent. James is saying if we could see things as they really are, spiritual fire affecting spiritual things has eternal consequences that make the damage of the Northern California firestorm even pale in comparison in terms of eternal significance.

That's the urgency and so he sets before us in verses 5 and 6 the destructive power of the tongue. Now, I want us to consider these two verses under two points. The theme is the destructive power of the tongue and the first point is the destructive power of the tongue expounded; and the second point is, applied. The destructive power of the tongue expounded. That's our first point. He lays on top of each other phrases that are just loaded with urgency and impactful words to try to shake us up. It's like he's shaking someone who is asleep, "Get up! Get out! The fire is coming!" It's that kind of force to his language. That's really the way James seems to write in general. He's not a guy who would come in saying, "Anybody home?" He'd break through the door, "It's time to get up!" This is kind of the way he writes and there is a place for that because that's what we need, and the Spirit of God deals with us that way, and he obviously does because the Spirit of God is inspiring every word, every image.

The destructive power of the tongue expounded. There are five propositions in verses, really in verse 6 that we want to look at that expound and expand upon the great destructive power of the tongue. It's basically a series of statements. I mean, look at it, "the tongue is a fire," that's one propositional statement. It's a metaphor but it's a rich metaphor that is a propositional truth. The second statement, the tongue is a "world of iniquity." You see that, it's in apposition to the first statement. The tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity, and in essence, the tongue is a fire, the tongue is a world of iniquity. 3. "The tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body." Number 3 is the tongue can defile the entire body. The tongue does defile the entire body. 4. The tongue "sets on fire the course of our life," and number 5, the tongue "is set on fire by hell." We're going to go through each one of those as we expound upon the destructive power of the tongue, these five propositions.

First of all, the tongue is a fire, our first main point. The destructive power of the tongue expounded, five subpoints. The tongue is a fire. Now, isn't that especially powerful after the preceding sentence when he says, "See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!" The tongue is a fire. It's a lot more powerful than if he hadn't said that sentence before. He said the tongue is a fire before. Well, yeah, it is a fire, you've got to be careful with fire. When he says, "See how great a forest is set ablaze by a small flame," think about that conflagration called the Tubbs fire that destroyed all those buildings, eating into the northern part of Santa Rosa, California; the destruction that

came suddenly out of nowhere. He said the tongue has the power to do that. The tongue has the power to just lay waste. The tongue has the power to damage, to destroy. It is a fire, he says.

Now, you have to handle fire carefully because if it gets out of control, it can destroy everything. That's what our tongue is. That's the first, the tongue is a fire. Secondly, the tongue is a world of iniquity. The NASB translates it the very world of iniquity, literally it says the world of iniquity or unrighteousness. The NIV says the world of evil. The ESV, the world of unrighteousness. And why "the world," the cosmos of iniquity, the world of evil, the world of unrighteousness? The idea is just that it's a way to say all kinds of iniquity. I mean, are you in trouble? I'm in a world of trouble, right? I'm surrounded by it. So he's saying the tongue is a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is a manufacturer of all kinds of evil. The tongue has the power to just produce all sorts of things that you never saw coming. It is unlimited in its scope to do damage.

I mean, think about how many ways you can mess up with your tongue. Isn't it amazing how many times you find yourself saying, "You know, I can't believe what I said." And things just slip out. The tongue is a world of iniquity. It produces all manner of unrighteousness. In fact, it's interesting, James deals with a lot of different kinds of unrighteousness that the tongue produces in his book. I mean, he deals with angry, cursing tongue. That's what he deals with right away in this passage. We bless our Father and yet we curse men made in the likeness of God. So a reviling tongue. He deals with a deceiving tongue or a mistaken tongue, at least, in verse 1 when he talks about false teaching. We teach someone else something that is errant. And this is not just for everybody who is a teacher itself, I mean, when you think about one of the things that I really appreciate about some of the teaching I've gotten the last few years on biblical counseling and our biblical counseling training which has been going on on Tuesday nights. It's amazing, we are so excited to have over 100 people or almost 100 people involved in that. If you still would like to be involved, it's not too late to get started. But anyway, one of the things that Jim Newheiser was saying in the training last week was that everyone is a counselor because everyone is going to be asked their opinion and everyone is going to give their opinion and the question is just whether you are a biblical counselor or an unbiblical counselor. Whether you give good counsel or bad counsel, you are giving counsel, and James 3:1 is saying be careful with the kind of counsel you give. The more counsel you give, the more accountable you are.

He goes on from here in chapter 4 and he says, "Don't speak against a brother. Don't judge. Don't speak down upon, looking down, censorious kind of judgmental speech." He deals with that. He deals with someone who is presumptuous speech where you are so boastful and you know what you're going to do with your life. "I've got it all laid out," and he says, "You don't even know what tomorrow is going to bring." He talks about complaining against your brother in verse 9, kind of the idea there is a groaning sort of against your brother. It's like a murmuring kind of complaining. "You know, you're the reason that my life is a mess. If it wasn't for you, I'd be happy." This kind of thing, he deals with that kind of speech. I mean, he's really concerned about the tongue, the quick tongue when he says, "be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger." Slow to speak,

slow to anger. Man, if you can stop speaking, you'll stop that anger coming out. Isn't it amazing how anger just rushes out. James says, "Listen, there are all these ways we need to look at your tongue." So when he says a very world of iniquity, he's already said, "I'm going to do with a bunch of them as we go along." The tongue can destroy in so many different ways and so we need to be vigilant in so many different ways.

So the tongue is a fire, the tongue is a world of iniquity. Those are the first two propositions in expounding upon the destructive power of the tongue. The third is the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body. Set among our members. Placed, literally placed, set down, placed among our members; that God has put the tongue in this place where it has such power and we need to understand that. This is the way it is. You can't change that.

I mentioned last time, I really think that there is something here about us being in the image of God and God's word being that by which he creates, that which carries his power. I mean, it's the Gospel, the word of God, that is the power of God unto salvation. The word carries his transforming power and so there is something, then, he says, "Listen, God has made you like him in that sense that your tongue, you can't get away from it. It has the power to deal with everything and in this case when you are not handling it, to mess everything up." It is set among your members, I mean, your members can do stuff. I mean, your members can affect other parts of the body but the tongue has the ability to mess everything up at once. You know, the hand, if my hand is going to do something to my leg, it can but if it's going to do something to my leg and it's going to do something to my back, it's going to take a while. You know, if my hand had a murderous intent. "Look at my hand. There it is going after me. You know, how am I going to stop it?" Well, it can only do one thing at a time. The tongue can destroy every part of our body at once. That's what he's saying. It defiles the entire body. In fact, the other translations say corrupts the whole body, the whole person, the NIV. Staining the whole body, ESV. Literally the Greek word means to spot. The tongue is set among our members as that which can spot the entire body and the idea of spotting means, is like when you get a spot on a garment and you've ruined the whole garment. You've got to throw it away. It is stained. It's not worth it. You can't wear it anymore.

So it has the ability, the tongue though it is a small thing, has the ability to do something that defiles every part of you. It stains the whole person. The idea is it corrupts. It brings guilt to the whole person. The tongue literally makes us guilty before God. It brings guilt and shame upon us, conviction by the Holy Spirit dealing with us, but it also can defile us before others like nothing else can. You know, how it damages a person's reputation when they lose control of their tongue. This is one of the reasons for leadership in the church, you are to be someone who especially has self-control and the abilities to rein in the tongue. Not a reviler, not a striker, not a person that's even guilty of fighting verbally but can restrain that.

So the idea is that the tongue has this unique position so James is saying, "Look, the destructive power of the tongue, it's a fire. It has all kinds of different ways that it comes at you, world of iniquity, and it can defile the entire person." Fourthly, the fourth

proposition, the tongue is set on fire, sets on fire the course of our life. It not only pollutes the whole person, that's what we saw in number 3, it defiles the entire body, here he says it sets on fire not just our person, it sets on fire the entire path of our life; not only where you are right now but everywhere you're going. That's the picture. The whole course of your life. The entire path.

The word for "course" is the word "wheel" in Greek, so the idea is like a wheel track or rut, something we can't really relate to as much anymore because when was the last time you were on a dirt road? I used to live on a dirt road in this area growing up and I remember when I first started driving, coming down the dirt road on the way home, and there were ruts because when it would rain, and you've got ruts and what happens is when you're driving, you'd better just drive in the ruts. If you try to drive out of the ruts, you lose control a little bit and the ruts get there and eventually it rains again and the ruts go away, or my grandfather would come out and scrape the road sometimes, and occasionally the county, it was a county road, they would come out and scrape the road. Very occasionally. That's the idea. He's saying that, you know, the wheel has to run in the rut and it's going to run and once it gets in that rut, it's going to stay in that rut, and he's saying that the tongue sets on fire the entire course of that path that is laid out before you. So it's like it not only destroys you in the present, it destroys your future. It has the power to do that, and the futures of those around you who happen to be in the vehicle with you.

So he says this is serious business. The tongue sets on fire, enflames the course of our whole life. It's like a walking fire that's just carrying along flames with it all along the way. James is saying, "Deal with it. Don't neglect this. It controls wherever you're going to go." The tongue is a fire. The tongue is a world of iniquity. The tongue is that which defiles the entire body. The tongue sets on fire the course of our life, that's proposition 4, the proposition we just covered. The fifth subpoint under the power of the tongue expounded is the tongue is set on fire by hell itself. That's what he says at the end of verse 6, "and is set on fire by hell." In a sense, the previous point, number 4 of our subpoints, I guess it could really be D, it sets on fire the course of our life, it talks about the ability of the tongue to spread desolation on ahead of you and around you. The tongue, the fire that the tongue is spreads. This one is more about source. Where did that fire come from in the first place? The tongue is set on fire by hell itself. He says when you have a fire raging like that doing all this destruction, where did the fire come from? It's from Satan.

Hell itself, the word in Greek is Gehenna, the Hebrew for the Valley of Hinnom, Southwest of Jerusalem, which was associated with apostasy, idolatry, evil and judgment. It was the valley where Ahaz and Manasseh offered their sons to Molech in the fire. They worshiped that pagan deity, Molech, by child sacrifice just outside of Jerusalem, and that was the place, then, that became in the prophets the place of judgment. God is going to judge his people there. It became a metaphor for hell itself. The place of fire. So here James is saying when you see the fire burning and you see the devastation happening, you can know that the source of that was Satan himself.

So he says this is the power of the tongue, such is the power of the tongue. Now, that's the first point, the power of the tongue expounded. The second is the destructive power of the tongue applied. The second main point. What I want to do in this part is to think about specific sins of the tongue. James hinted at that or really began to talk about that when we saw that second subpoint in the previous point of the expounding, that the tongue is a world of iniquity, it produces all sorts of evil, and as I said, he then goes through in his letter some of those different ones. As we go along, we're going to see that. We will be coming back to this again and again because it's something that we need to keep wrestling with but I want us to consider just three sins of the tongue, and there are so many we could list. You know, I was reading some various Puritan theologians and one guy in expounding this has 10 sins of the tongue, another guy 12, another guy 8, and you can keep going. You could sort of group a couple of them under one or you could bring this one out and say this is something totally separate. Let's talk about this one. It needs to be dealt with by itself. Well, for the sake of time this morning and because we're going to come to this more over time and we're going to talk about this more next time too, I'm going to deal with three. The destructive power of the tongue applied and what I want to do is look at three different sins of the tongue and sort of see how it illustrates what James is talking about, that it defiles the entire person; it spreads and sets on fire the whole course of your life; and ultimately its source is Satan. It's from hell.

The three I want to talk about, so three subpoints under the destructive power of the tongue applied, the first is an angry tongue. An angry tongue. I thought about titling this an abusive tongue or a railing tongue, but let's go with angry tongue. You know, James mentions that, I mentioned it earlier in James 1:19 when he says, "be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger," the idea of your tongue just getting out ahead of you and usually, what he's saying is, we're normally slow to listen, right? We don't listen well. We are quick to speak and quick to anger. He says you've got to change that. By grace, you've got to change that and become quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger, and the idea is that the words just come rushing out and they are hurtful words and I think this is what James is talking about when he says, I mean, think about the paradox. With the tongue, verse 9, we bless our Lord and Father; that is, we speak a good word of, literally eulogize our Lord and Father. We speak about how wonderful and glorious God is. We are offering a prayer and the very next moment we are offering a curse to someone made in his image. That happens because of a quick tongue. Somebody does something to offend us and how quickly we go from blessing God to cursing his reflection.

I heard Carl Trueman this week talking on a podcast about, they were talking actually about racism, and one of the things he mentioned was, they were talking about hatred. They were trying to think of it biblically. You know, really the issue in the heart is hatred for another human being, and he was saying to hate another human being is approaching blasphemy because you are seeking to strike out at God's image. You are hating someone in the image and likeness of God. You strike out at them, you are actually not just, Jesus said as we read earlier in Matthew 5, the passage that Jess read earlier when he said your righteousness must exceed the scribes and the Pharisees. Isn't that an amazing thing. That's when you know the scribes and Pharisees were meticulously outwardly righteous. It must have been stunning to the Jews that heard that. "You have got to be kidding," they

must have thought. "Nobody is going to heaven." Well, Jesus begins to expound it. No, the scribes and Pharisees just look good on the outside. They are whitewashed sepulchers. They are painted on the outside but in the inside they are full of dead men's bones. They are full of all manner of wickedness and you see it by the way they respond to Jesus. They don't love God, they hate God and they are lying murderers and that's what they showed themselves to be in what they did to Christ. But he says, "Listen, you have to have more than an external righteousness, you have to have an internal righteousness," is what he's saying. Except your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. You have to have a righteousness that starts on the inside and comes out. Being saved by grace, being transformed by the power of God, and your righteousness, then, works itself out. The first thing he deals with after he says that is, "You've heard it said you shall not murder, but I say to you that you shall not be angry with your brother or call him a fool, because in doing that, you are murdering him. You are treating him as if he has no value, his life is worthless. You're a fool. You're an idiot. I have no use for you." You see, that's the force of that. "You have no value." It's character assassination. Jesus said God hates that every bit as much as he hates physical murder.

That's what happens when we have a railing or abusive tongue, when our words come rushing out and we say hurtful things, and it's amazing how it defiles us. I mean, suddenly you were worshiping God and now you are cursing someone. I mean, it's so easy. This is such a subtle sin and sometimes what happens is the most difficult places for me are when I see someone doing real evil. Like for instance, you see someone just lying on the news or whatever. You know he is totally lying. He is deceiving people, or whatever, and I think, "Man, you really are and you deserve to get it." I think that in my heart and now, it is true he is lying and it is true that he needs to repent, but it's not true that I should take any joy or pleasure in condemning him. We should pray for him. Don't excuse what he's doing. No, your actions are really bad but as a human being made in the image of God. He may be denying God by his actions, yes, but it's so quick. We can even be thinking, "You know, you deserve to go to hell." Well, he does but if we have the wrong attitude in that, we are actually guilty of this sin. It's God's place to deal with that. We are to love the image of God there and hope that the person will repent. We are to be clear in the truth, "You are really sinning. What you're doing is wrong." But it's amazing how the tone changes when we are no longer us being offended and I'm just irritated because you are messing up my world and my life, that's the problem. I'm an idolater at that point. I want something else more than I want the glory of God. If I want the glory of God, I can be broken and grieved, really grieved from the Lord's standpoint, "What you're doing is wicked," but it won't have any of that self in it.

So it's so quick, though, that that railing, abusive tongue can come out and you think about the words that we can say to those that we love, and the idea of the damage that it does. James is saying it's much more damaging than we think. I mean, the words that you speak defile you. The things that you say to people affect their image of you, they also affect you yourself. You're guilty so now you want to try to minister to someone and it's like a woman who is maybe talking bad about her husband when he is gone to her children. "Your father, he's just, you know, he's a loser." Whatever. "Now, honey, mom

loves you so much." You are totally defiling your ability to minister to that person and point them to Christ because you are being wicked. You can say, "You know, I have to excuse what dad is doing," but you're wise about how much to even say to your child about it. If they didn't witness it, you don't bring it up. If they witnessed it, you say, "We need to pray for daddy. He's having a bad day. He has sinned." It can be that clear but you see how different that is than, "He's a loser."

Well, that's the kind of thing, if you do that, it defiles everything about you so you don't have anything that you can do for that person. You can't be a blessing to anybody. You're not a blessing to yourself. Not only that, it's setting on fire the whole course of your life. It's impacting the whole future of the home and the family. It is being burned up. You've got a fire raging over here. Now, we manage, honestly, we don't realize this, we manage to live with fires burning around us all the time according to James. I mean, it's not like the Northern California firestorm where you've got to get out or you're going to die. We each have fires burning and they are burning stuff up, and God wants us to put those fires out through holiness and purity and reining in our tongue. If you don't feed a fire, it goes out. And ultimately, what is the source of railing abusive tongues that would say to someone, "You're a fool," directly? Satan. It's exactly what Satan would like to say to that person. You see, Satan hates God and he hates the image of God. He is the accuser of the brethren. He's the one that tells people, wants to tell people, "You are worthless. You are nothing." So when that comes through our mouths, what has happened? We have done his bidding.

It's amazing how quick it is, too, to do that. It's really extraordinary. You think about the great image of this in the New Testament is the story of Peter when in one moment he says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Remember that moment? That was a pretty amazing moment. Jesus said, "Who do men say that I am?" "Some say you are a prophet, some say you are Elijah, some say you are John the Baptist." "Who do you say that I am?" Everybody is kind of timid. Peter jumps right out there and he is bold, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus' heart is thrilled because he sees Peter is getting it and he says, "Blessed are you, Simon, son of John, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven. You couldn't have known this apart from the work of God in your life. God gave you that truth and he has enabled you, your tongue to speak those blessed words right now. I'm going to build my whole church upon that profession that I am the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Then it says right after that Jesus begins teaching them about how he is going to have to go and suffer at the hands of sinners and he's going to have to die on the cross, be raised on the third day. So he's teaching about this apparently right after that for a while and Peter says, "Look, I'd like to talk to you for a moment." And he has the discretion to take him aside. Didn't do it in front of the group. That was one positive. I hadn't thought about that before, that is one positive point for Peter. He takes him aside and says, "Lord, these things shall not happen to you. Surely these things shall not happen to you. There is no way. You can't be the Christ, the Son of the living God, and have these things happen to you." And Jesus says, he didn't say Peter, he said what? "Get thee behind me, Satan. Peter, you are a mouthpiece for Satan right now. He is using your tongue to attack me

and the plan of God and to try to tempt me away from the plan of God in my life, and I can't bother even saying your name. I've got to say, I've got to call it as it is. Satan is lying to me." Man, that must have been something for Peter to have him say that to him. That's what we become when we do Satan's bidding. That's what he's saying. Your tongue is set on fire by hell. You are actually voicing the venomous, destructive, fiery words of the enemy of our souls. He's saying think this, understand this so that you will hate it. You don't want to do this.

So an angry tongue. Secondly, a slanderous tongue, which I've kind of covered that. That's like the mother talking about the dad. You are talking to someone about a third party and you are committing character assassination, even in telling the truth to a third party that's not a part of it. That's gossip which is a subset of slander and it's evil. But what you are doing is you're tearing down another believer in the eyes of another believer by talking to them badly about the third party. It's behind the back. It's, "You fool," behind your back. Slanderer. The word for slander, one of the words for slander is diabolos, which is the word that is normally translated devil. This is just the work of the devil. The devil is a slanderer. As I said, he's the accuser of the brethren. Satan, the Hebrew word has that idea of casting and accusing. Casting blame and accusing. So if we allow our tongues to speak evil of a person that's not there, we are doing the bidding of Satan.

Now, there are places where we have to deal with issues and sometimes you may as Matthew 18 says, and you go to your brother and he sins and you try to reprove him and he doesn't listen and the idea is you don't go just once, you may go a couple of times, or three times. You try. It's in the present tense. The idea is you go to your brother and you try to show him his fault and if he doesn't get it, you take one or two others with you. Well, to do that you've got to go to somebody else and talk to them, "Hey, there is a problem with Jim over here. I need you to go with me. And what it is, I think he sinned against me and I need you to go. We need to talk mostly in front of him but I want you to go with me." So you have to bring somebody in and it may be that you have to go the third step and you have to go to the elders and you have to say, "Look, we've gone and he is not repenting." You see, it's part of the solution. You are talking to someone who is a part of the solution because you care about this wayward sheep. You're not talking to someone else who is not a part of the solution.

This is where sometimes gossip disguises itself as a prayer request. "Hey, you really need to pray for... Let me tell you why." That's evil and we need to call each other out on that because we all have these wicked tongues and we have a sin nature that still is easily enticed into those things, to being a mouthpiece for Satan, and so we have to call each other out on that and say, "Listen, you shouldn't be talking to me about that. You need to talk to them about that if you have a concern. If you have already talked to them, you need to wait on it and deal with it again with them, not me."

Slanderous tongue. Finally, thirdly, a murmuring tongue or a negative tongue. Let's call it a negative tongue. An angry tongue, a slanderous tongue, a negative tongue. Thirdly, a negative tongue, the idea of complaining, murmuring. Even anxiety is kind of a negative

tongue on the front end. So complaining and anxiety are just a matter of past tense or future tense. I don't trust God on the front end, that's anxiety; I don't like what God did, I don't trust what he did, that's complaining. It's the same thing, it's all doubting God, doubting his goodness. In fact, the fact that it spreads, that when you murmur, when you are negative it spreads is so obvious, and this is what he's saying. When you or I allow ourselves to be negative, we are polluting people around us and Scripture over and over says this is why in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Be filled with the Spirit, always giving thanks for all things, Ephesians 5:20. We are to always be thanking God. Now, it's not some kind of Pollyanna sort of pretend Christianity, it is reality. If God is for us, who can be against us? If he did not spare his own Son but freely offered him up for us all, how will he not together with him freely give us all things? The idea is that if God gave his Son, you know that everything he gives you is for your good. So no matter what happens, no matter what evil seems to be running loose here, I can in this circumstance give thanks that God is using this somehow for his glory and my good. So, God, show me how I need to respond but I am thankful. You pray. Don't be anxious for anything but pray with prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, Philippians 4:6.

So the idea, then, but you think about a murmuring tongue and this is something that is really evident when you look back at the people of Israel after they come out of Egypt. The power of murmuring and negativity. If you start reading in Exodus 5 when Moses goes down there and you follow the train from Exodus through Numbers, because that's really the narrative because Exodus, Leviticus is really about the Levitical requirements and stuff, it's about a lot of laws, and then Numbers picks up the narrative again. Essentially what happens is every time something goes wrong, they doubt God. Every time something goes wrong, they complain and they murmur, they grumble. In fact, I've gone through my Bible and circled all the times it's got grumbling. It's amazing. They grumbled. They grumbled. They grumbled. They grumbled. They grumbled. I mean, it's so crazy too. When you look at it from our standpoint, how could you possibly do that? God just delivered you out of Egypt with these 10 amazing miracles. I mean, those miracles were mind blowing miracles. They weren't like little tiny kind of, were they really a miracle? Was that really what happened? He killed, you know, the firstborn of every single man and beast in Egypt, the firstborn male. That's the Passover. The people are giving their jewelry away, "Please, go! Leave us! We're desolated! Our crops are destroyed from the flies, the locusts, the hail! We want you out of here!"

That's pretty profound. The first thing that happens, the Lord, he takes them on a little side tour. They are going along and the Lord tells them Moses is going along the way he thinks they ought to go because it's really the way it looks like to make sense, and God tells him to take a right, basically. They go over here and the camp in front of the Red Sea. Why? Because the Lord wants to allow the Egyptians to catch up with them. The Egyptians catch up with them and they see the Egyptian army coming and what do they do? They immediately grumble. "Moses, why have you brought us out here to kill us in the wilderness? We were better off in Egypt!" You know, God is gracious, he puts his glory in front of them, he opens up the Red Sea, they go through the sea as on dry land. The Egyptians follow them in. He destroys the whole Egyptian army. Okay, now they

have got it, surely. God is really committed to them. "You don't have to worry about it, guys. He is on our side." They go a few more days and they don't have any water. "Moses, why have you brought us out here to kill us in the wilderness?" You see, God who has delivered us isn't able to take care of us. So he gives them water. "Moses, we're hungry. Why did you bring us out here?" They grumble again. He gives them bread. They get tired of bread. "Moses, why don't you give us something besides bread?"

It just goes on and on and on until finally they get ready to go into the land of Canaan and the 10 spies come back and give the bad report in Numbers 14, and that grumbling spirit, that negative tongue, determines their ultimate destiny because they listen to those 10 spies who grumble against the Lord and the people grumble against the Lord and God testifies to them, "Because you listened to those," first of all he kills the 10 spies with a plague and then he says, "Because you listened to them, your corpses will end up in the wilderness. You will never enter my Promised Land." That's the spreading power of negativity. Hebrews picks that up in chapter 3 and 4 and says, "Listen, that's about eternal life. A negative spirit that doesn't trust God over and over and over and over again, is not going to inherit the promises." The heart of true faith, yes, we labor at it but we've got to trust God.

So he's saying, "Listen, the tongue is so important. It's a matter of life and death." And we have a tendency to do all of these things. We have a tendency to complain. It's amazing how easy it comes to us, how easy it is to even speak hurtfully at those that we even love, how easy it is to speak hurtfully directly to those that we love. And James says, "Listen, when you do that, your whole world can go up in smoke. So wake up, deal with it." And essentially he's saying, "Listen, the stakes are so high, we must run to Christ. When you feel those urges to rail, when you feel those urges to slander, when you feel those urges to murmur, run to Jesus. He's your only hope because there is only one person who was able to bridle the whole body because he really bridled his tongue. He never stumbled a single time in what he said. Go to Christ. Rejoice that he is your righteousness. Cling to him." And now he is going to give us more things to help us going forward but the essential thing is, "Run to Jesus," because if you get the principles and you don't get that first thing right, you don't get anything. Just learning principles of how to manipulate your thinking aren't enough. Run to Christ. Now he is going to help you with his word to walk in it and we'll talk about that more next time.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for just the way that your word speaks directly to the issues in our lives. And we confess how easy it is, Father, to be just so sinful and at the same time complacent, to feel a measure of grief but not like we should. We have so many times, Lord, we are dulled. We don't see the damage and we thank you that your word is seeking to open our eyes and we just keep asking you, "Lord, open our eyes." Let us see this week how our tongue is a part of that world of iniquity. Show us the areas that we are sinning in. Let us see them and let us repent. Grant us repentance. Grant us sorrow, true godly sorrow over our sin and grant us deeper trust in a glorious Savior who is able through his cross, our death with him at Calvary, his resurrection, our resurrection

power you made available to us to walk in newness of life, help us run to him and show us how to follow in his footsteps to bridle our tongues for the glory of our Savior. We pray this in his name. Amen.