

The Power of the Tongue Part 3

Epistle of James

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I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to James, the epistle of James 3. We've come again this morning to those first 12 verses of the third chapter concerning the tongue, and the title of the message this morning is "The Power of the Tongue Part 3." The power of the tongue part 3. James is concerned to help Jewish believers. We've noted before he writes to Jewish believers. The author himself was formerly, well, was the leader of the church in Jerusalem, still is, in a sense, but many of his parishioners, those who were part of the church in Jerusalem, have been spread by persecution across the Mediterranean world, and so he writes this epistle to many of those whom he formerly knew as their shepherd, their pastor, their elder, and then to others that have come to Christ, other Jewish believers. His heart was heavy for them and he writes as a shepherd to them and he wants to help them deal with issues he's heard about that they are wrestling with. And the main thrust we've seen of his epistle is to help them live out their faith; that he wants those to whom he writes to be not merely hearers of the word but doers of the word; to have lives that reflect the power of the Gospel that they profess to believe. And he deals with very practical issues and he deals with these practical issues with great emphasis, in a powerful way. He draws on the emotions and the affections to encourage them on to holiness. We've seen this particularly in this passage as he talks about the tongue. He piles up word pictures upon word picture upon word picture to motivate them to holiness.

It's interesting, I said last time as we were talking about, well, let me just kind of quickly review. We said that the tongue in verses 2 to 12 is the focus, the destructive power of the tongue, and it has a surprising power, we looked at two weeks ago. A surprising power and a directive power, or I called it maybe determinative. I can't remember if I said directive or determinative. I may have gone back and forth. That's one point, two different words. The second point in the whole outline. It has surprising power. It's small and yet it boasts of great things, that's the first one. It has a directive or a determinative power. It determines the whole course of your life. The tongue does. Then last week we focused on the third main point and that is as a destructive power. We spent all of our time talking about the destructive power of the tongue which James goes to great lengths to make emphatically clear. It's a fire. Then we come today to the fourth and fifth points. So we're going to have three points this morning, only two main points in the outline, and then we are going to have application. There are going to be two more things about the power of the tongue so I'm going to call them 1 and 2, but in the overall outline, they are

really 4 and 5. So two points this morning about the power of the tongue and then application, so three points this morning totally.

Let's read James 3:1-12. We are going to be focusing on verses 7 to 12 this morning, but let's begin reading at verse 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 pray that you would now give us grace to understand your word. We pray that your word might be in this hour in each heart living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword; that it might cut to dividing joint and marrow, soul and spirit; that it might be a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart; that you might lay each one of us bare before the one with whom we have to do for there is nothing hidden from your sight. We pray by your power and for your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The power of the tongue. We've said we've already seen that the tongue is a surprising power, the tongue is a directive power, the tongue is a destructive power. Today, the first thing we're going to look at this morning is the tongue is an untamable power. It's really clear this is what he goes to next in verse 7, the fact that the tongue cannot be tamed. He really deals with this from verse 7 all the way to verse 10. The tongue is an untamable power. He states this reality by contrast first. He sets before us a contrast and invites us to make a comparison in our mind's eye.

He says, "every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed." He says, "I want you to compare something." He says, "I want you to take for a moment and on one side look at every species of animal in the entire animal kingdom, and on the other side I want you to look at the human tongue, and I want to make a comparison," James says. And he says, "The whole realm of nature on the one hand versus the tongue on the other." And of course he's going to say that humanity, in our human nature, we have tamed every nature of beast there are. They are being tamed and they have been tamed. In fact, that's what he says in verse 7 when he says "is tamed." That literally is a Greek present tense. It has the idea of "is being tamed." Every manner of beast and bird and reptile and creature of the sea is now being tamed and has been tamed. That's a perfect tense which speaks of something in past action that has ongoing results. Every single one we are either taming now or they have been tamed. And that's true.

We were talking yesterday with some friends about dogs and one of the things, you get a dog, each time you get a dog, you have to spend a little time training it. You have to get the dog house trained. You've got to get the dog trained to come and sit, and other things you have to do, to stop jumping on people. Some people don't train their dogs and they are not very much fun to visit, but we should train our animals, right? That's something that you do and that's the idea here. He says every single species of earth is tamed and is being tamed and has been tamed. The verb really pictures the use of force to reduce to stillness and quietness. The use of force to reduce to stillness and quietness so when you tame your dog, there is some force used, there is also the reward system too, but with your voice, sometimes with a pop, you teach them. It's true of other animals.

I was reading in one of the older commentators about a guy who wrote in the 1700s and he was talking about a friend of his who had tamed a horse. There was a horse that was just untamable and this one guy said, "I can get it," and he jumped on the horse and people were just, you know, astonished that he went straight to jumping on the horse. And the horse went crazy and he had a riding crop in his hand, a big stick actually, it was not just a riding crop, and he hit that horse three times on the head as it is trying to buck him off, and he and the horse came to an understanding. Then he began to be affectionate to the horse.

But this is essentially what God has given to us. In fact, look back. He mentions these fourfold state of the animal kingdom. He summarizes the whole thing. If you go back to Genesis 1:26, when we see that man is created in the image of God, then God said, Genesis 1:26, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." That's essentially the fourfold description James uses. That's interesting. You turn to chapter 9, verse 2, this is after the flood. Remember all the animals that have been saved by Noah now are getting off the ark. Noah is praising the Lord. God blessed Noah and he reiterates that command that he gave to man at the beginning of creation. This is Genesis 9:1, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." And this is what he says in verse 2, "The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with

everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given." The terror of man is upon every creature.

Now, there is a sense in which I really believe, I've actually, I remember I had a dream when I was young. I did not plan to share this but let me just go ahead, I've already started. I was like in high school and I was learning more about the Christian faith and the power of God and stuff, and I remember having a dream where I was running from a bear. Like a brown bear, a grizzly bear kind of thing, you know? No grizzly bears around here but, you know, it doesn't matter in a dream, does it? So I'm running for my life from a bear and it occurs to me that I have authority over this bear. Now, I'm not saying, I'm not recommending you go out and try this, but I turn around in my dream and I said, "I rebuke you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ," and that bear, he turned around and ran from me. It was a great dream. It was one of those dreams that actually, the ending was good. It wasn't a cliffhanger. But I'm not saying that that's actually going to happen exactly that way, but there are examples of things like that.

I remember reading a Field and Stream magazine after that some time about a bear charging a hunter on a path and the hunter didn't have time to get his gun up, it happened so quickly that he was just standing there as the bear came to him. The bear came to him and he said as he got within about three or four feet, it was as if the bear recognized man, not another bear, and he turned aside. I think there is really something to that. If you don't run from the animal, you're better off just facing it up. Now, take your gun and shoot him if he's coming at you. Don't take a chance, right? If you don't have a gun, I would say pray and it can't hurt to rebuke him either, you know?

But the issue is really there is a sense in which the fear of man is on every animal and so we need to understand that's the way God has made it. And we are not to abuse the animals. They are part of his beautiful creation but they are for us. Now we are to eat the animals as he says in Genesis 9 goes on to say, "they shall all be food for you." There is nothing wrong with that. God has put that. Now, it wouldn't have been that way before sin entered the world. It wasn't that way, but now on the side of sin in a fallen world, that's what we're supposed to do.

So James is saying, "Listen, every kind of beast of the animal kingdom is being tamed and has been tamed." I mean, you think about the elephant has been tamed, is being tamed, and people ride elephants into battle. That's been happening for centuries, millennia. They tamed the elephant quickly. I mean, not every elephant but you can tame an elephant. You can tame a lion.

I saw a video the other day of a woman who had raised two lion cubs and then she had taken them somewhere else to be cared for and had not seen them in five years, and she shows up at this place and somebody with her was videotaping on their phone. She walks to the fence, it's a chain-link fence, and there are two full-grown lionesses, and she calls them and they come running. It looks like one of those scenes you've seen on a nature show where the animal is about to get eaten, they are coming with such intensity. They jump up on the fence and they wrap their paws around her and just are being affectionate

to her. It looked like it was almost too affectionate, but it was affection. They just were thrilled to see this woman. I mean, think about that. God has put that into the fabric of this created universe. Now, there is a fallen world and so sometimes they don't and we do have man-eaters and all that, so I understand that, but that basically the wiring was man rules and everybody knows it.

So that said, you have falconry. I was reading this week falconry has been around, we know it's been around for at least 4,000 years. We have it written about 2000 BC in Mesopotamia and in Mongolia, that falconry is where you train a bird of prey to go out and hunt for you and bring back the animal uneaten. He doesn't get to eat it on the way back. He brings it back. Falcons, hawks, eagles. It's an amazing thing. They train eagles in Mongolia to go out and kill wolves. A golden eagle, watching that combat between a golden eagle and a wolf made me determine that's the one I would be more intimidated by the golden eagle coming after me than the bear. The golden eagle, but he is trained by its master to go and kill the wolf is to protect the flock or the herd that they have. So they train an eagle. I mean, think about that. It's astonishing. The killer whale. The dolphin. The cobra. Isn't it amazing?

James says every animal, you can look at it and you think about the power, the destructive power of those animals is channeled in and is brought by force and force of the power of humanity into subjection. He says, "Look at that," and then he says, "now look at the human tongue. That is the monster that can't be tamed and that is the monster," he says to his believing readers, "that is the monster with which we must all contend." No human being can tame the tongue. He states three sentences here or three basic propositions again about the tongue right away after he has made the starting this contrast, "No human being can tame the tongue." He says, actually the word order is interesting in the Greek. Literally it says, "the tongue, no one can tame among men." The tongue is the first word there. So he has talked about all these animals and now he says, "Now look at the tongue. No one can tame it." It's interesting how he is such a realist, such transparent honesty from the author. The tongue is the great enemy and look in verse 9, he says, "With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men." He joins with us in it. He says "we." We have this problem.

Let's take a moment to look back at a couple of those things he said in verse 8 as well, "no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil." This word "restless evil" speaks of being "unsettled; unsteady; to be in disorder." The tongue cannot be calmed and quieted. And it's a restless evil. It's malicious in intent. It wants to bring harm and to destroy and it is untamable.

He adds to that "and full of deadly poison." It's full of venom. The picture is really of a serpent biting. The word for "poison" is a word which means "to go out," and so it's like the striking of a snake and the sending forth as the fangs enter the victim of poison, the venom. And it's not just a mild venom, it's a death bearing venom. The adjective "deadly" pictures just bearing death, carrying death with it. It's not a snake bite, like some snakebites you get and it's really not going to be deadly very likely at all. Most American snakes, poisonous snakes, aren't deadly. I mean, I don't know. You can get bit by a

copperhead, it's not usually going to hurt you. A lot of times they'll even bite and they won't even inject venom. Sometimes you'll get a dry bite because of the lack of venom or whatever, they want to save it for the prey they need to kill and they are just wanting to warn you off. I mean, you don't want to take your chances. If you want to see what happens, "Go ahead and bite me. I feel okay. Let's do it again." No. But he says this tongue is full of deadly poison. There is no need to hold back some of the venom. It's always going to strike with a death blow and it sends out that death, and the picture is the suddenness of it. It's full of deadly poison. You can see the snake strike. You watch the snake sits there, sits there, sits there, and then it strikes and the quickness of those fangs coming out. How quickly the tongue can bring death. How suddenly.

After telling us again about this untamable power, he then proves it, so to speak. We are still on this first point, the untamable power of the tongue. He describes it and then he proves it. He says, "You know, I want to tell you the tongue is untamable. You can't tame it. You contrast it to all the animals. You can't tame it. It's a restless evil. It's full of deadly poison." Then he says, "Let me show you that it's not tamable," and he says, "We, with the tongue we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God." And verse 10, "from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing." How can that be? He is drawing on the astonishing contrast here of blessing God, our Lord and Father, the Creator of all, blessing him. That's speaking a word, a good word about him, wishing him well, praising him, blessing him. "Lord, I want you to be honored." And at the same time turning and cursing the one who is made to look like him.

It's actually, I thought about this a little more. Imagine you're sitting there with someone and you're standing in front of a mirror and you're both standing in front of a mirror and they say to you, "I just want you to be blessed in every way. You're so wonderful." And then they turn and throw mud at your reflection. When they see your reflection in the mirror, they throw something at it. They smash the mirror. The sight of you in the mirror sickens them, repulses them, and they attack it. How ridiculous would that be? It's just unthinkable. He says that's what's happening when we bless God and we curse someone who is made in the image of God. In one breath we are blessing God, in the next breath we are actually cursing God's reflection. This happens. He says we do this. The we, "with it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men."

I was reading in one of the commentators about a man who was praying over his food, blessing, thanking God with his family for this day, "Thank you for your kindness to us. Thank you for this food you have provided for us from your hand. In Jesus' name. Amen." Then it said how he proceeded to complain about the eggs weren't cooked right, the bacon was burned. He was irritated because he needed a good breakfast because he had such a bad day in front of him. And his little girl said, asked this question, "Daddy, does God hear us only when we pray or does he hear what we say afterward too?" Bless you, bless you, bless you, what are you doing, what are you doing, what are you doing? That's essentially what he was doing.

It's an untamable power. How can this be? So it's an untamable power, that's the first point, and then secondly, it's an unnatural power. It is against nature. He actually says this again. It's like he keeps charging this hill. He's convinced that we really just don't see it.

I was thinking about this. Last week I promised, I spoke hastily with my tongue and promised that there would be more application next week. We're going to try to do some application but it struck me as I continued to study the text, that James is not really interested in application in these 12 verses. He's not interested in telling you how to overcome it. What he's interested in is saying and demonstrating how bad the problem is. "The problem is bad. It is bad. It is worse than you think. No, let me say again, you don't realize how bad this problem is." That's what he does. Now, I think he gets on into really getting from the mouth to the attitudes in the next section, to the heart in the beginning of chapter 4. So he's going to show us how to turn it around but right now what is he saying? That real change is going to happen when we finally get broken over our sin. That's what he's doing. He's inviting us to keep looking at this amazing reality, that it just doesn't make sense. Look at the whole natural world, he says look at all the animal kingdom. There is nothing as deadly as the tongue. Nothing is untamable.

Then in verses 11 and 12, he says look now not at the animal kingdom, look at the rest of the world, look at the fountain of water. He starts off with the water, then he goes to the plant kingdom and he talks about fig trees and olives and vines. So he says look at water. Verse 11, "Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?" When you find a spring, a mountain spring, and you find it and you drink some water from it, if it's fresh water, it doesn't a minute later when you go to get another drink turn into bitter water. Or if it was bitter water in the first place, it doesn't in a minute become fresh water and then back and forth and back and forth, bitter, fresh, bitter, fresh, bitter, fresh. It doesn't do that but your tongue does.

He says now look at the world of agriculture. Does a fig tree produce olives. When you go to the fig tree, do you go there and find an olive? No, you only find figs. And when you go to the vine, you don't find figs, you find grapes. You never, it's not like nine times out of 10 you find figs, one time out of 10 you find a grape. Ten times out of 10, you either find figs or you don't find figs, but you don't find olives or you don't find grapes. The fig tree may have a bad year but it's only going to grow figs.

So he's saying do you realize how ridiculous it is that we can go from blessing to cursing and blessing and cursing and blessing and cursing? It is completely against nature. What he's saying is this is the effect, this is total depravity on display. We are so messed up by the fall. Sin has so radically affected the soul of man that human nature itself is completely incapable of taming the tongue. Human nature itself is the most, in one sense it's the most beautiful picture that God has given in his universe but to see what sin has done, it is the most tragic and ugly thing in the universe, in that sense of what it was to what it is. And when you and I give our tongues to sin and we speak out those things which come so easily and which are deadly, we are doing, if you belong to Jesus Christ, you are doing that which is exactly against your true now born again nature, and it is of all things the ugliest.

I mean, you look at the animal kingdom, the plant kingdom, you see things as they are supposed to be, how beautiful it is. You know, someone who, something like just growing roses who does it really well and you look at their rosebush and the flower and you go, "Wow, that is so incredible. So beautiful." You watch an animal that's doing what the animal was created to do, a horse running in the horse race. Secretariat. Running the race of its life in the biggest moment, and you watch that and there is something so noble and glorious about that. That is what a horse was created to do, but then you see things where that animal, the horse is being mistreated and horribly dealt with by people. It's awful to see the waste of that animal, the potential that animal has and how it is being squandered. Who is squandering it? Mankind. But the worst thing, that's not as tragic as when you and I are not what we are created to be. There is something in which that is far uglier if we had eyes to see it.

That's what James is saying. It's an unnatural power. It doesn't make sense. There is a sense in which the application, we move to the third point. It's an unnatural power, it's an untamable power, unnatural power, the application. His application is essentially this: be appalled at yourself. Jeremiah 2, he says the Lord, speaking about the idolatry of his people, he says, "Has a nation changed?" This is God speaking, "Has a nation changed gods When they were not gods?" He said all these nation worship gods that are not gods. But do any of these nations just change their gods? Has a nation done that? The Lord asks that and, of course, the implied answer is no. Egypt is still worshiping the god they have been worshiping. All the Canaanite peoples are worshiping the gods they've been worshiping. The Babylonians worshiping the gods they have been worshiping. They are faithful to them. "Has a nation changed gods When they were not gods? But My people have changed their glory For that which does not profit." They have changed from the true God to that which is not profitable. And he says this, "'Be appalled, O heavens, at this, And shudder, be very desolate,' declares the LORD." He calls the heavens, everything in creation, to look at and be appalled at the idolatry of his people. There is a sense in which James is asking us to do that about ourselves. That word actually in Jeremiah, "be appalled," means "to be stunned; to be stupefied; to be brought into a stupor, an incredulous stupor; to be devastated; to make desolate." What he's trying to do is to help us come to the end of ourselves, to put no confidence in the flesh.

Now, I want us to take a couple of things we talked about last week, the angry tongue, we'll take two kind of application points. We're going to talk about the angry tongue and then we're going to talk about the slanderous tongue with the negative tongue together. They kind of go together. They all actually you can just interchange all these things. They all work together really well. Angry tongues, happy to join with the slanderous tongue. The slanderous tongue is great to be with the negative tongue. They just love being together, wreaking havoc, right?

An angry tongue. It's untamable. Proverbs 12:18 says, "There is one who speaks rashly," now get this picture, "There is one who speaks rashly." The word goes forth before you think. "There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword." Now get that word picture. Then he says, "The tongue of the wise brings healing," the hope of the Gospel.

You think about that. A word that escapes your mouth and you want to say afterwards, "I didn't mean it. I'm sorry." What if you just stabbed someone with a sword three times in your anger and now you say, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. Do you forgive me? Are you okay with that? Can we be right now with each other? Well, you're not going to complain anymore about this, are you? I just stabbed you three times with the sword." Maybe you're so full of grace you say, "I forgive you and I hope I see you in heaven," because you're dying. You've been stabbed with a sword. He says that's what it's like when we say things in anger; that we are doing damage to the soul of another human being. We are, remember the image he just used a moment ago, the tongue is full of deadly poison like the strike of a snake, that once the snake has injected its venom, it can't take that back, and how quickly it happens. James says think about these things and apply them to your own heart and your own life.

Is it not amazing, one of the things that I've seen through the years is that when you preach on something, the Lord has a way of humbling you and really just taking you through it, and I'm so glad he does. But I'm preaching on the tongue and so I can think of three times right now vividly this week where I spoke quickly. It's not as bad as it used to be. It's not like wielding a sword like this. There were times where I was like that, where I would say things that were hateful and spiteful coming out of my mouth with regularity earlier in our marriage. I mean, just appalling. So I think I have come a ways and I have matured a lot in my Christian life. Then the Lord, it's almost like offhanded comments, just something you said, a little, "That was a grenade I just threw. I thought I was just... I didn't even realize that." You know, sarcastic words. And it's like the Lord is saying to me, "You are the man that I'm talking about here. You are the one that needs to tame your tongue."

We can have a negative tongue and the incredible damage that a negative tongue can do. It's astonishing how much more powerful it seems that a negative tongue is than a positive tongue. It's like a positive tongue, you gain ground, but a negative tongue can erase what you've gained so quickly. It's just like burn it all up. You know, complaining, putting down people. Slandering.

One of the great examples of the power of negativity is, there are so many of them in the Scriptures but one that really stands out is the story of Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16. Numbers 16. It's really slander and this kind of negative idea and sort of rejecting the way God is doing things all wrapped up in one. Korah's rebellion, remember it's after they have not gotten into the Promised Land because of their lack of faith and Korah is a cousin of Moses. He's another descendant of Levi, so he's some kind of distant cousin to Moses. He's one of the descendants of Levi and Aaron, as Moses and Aaron are. They are descendants of Levi, Korah is a descendant of Levi. And he starts talking to people. We know he starts talking to people because suddenly he and 250 people show up at Moses' tent and they've got a complaint. It takes a while to get 250 people together. He would get all, "Can you guys make it tomorrow at 4? Okay, let's make it Thursday at 3, then." They've got to coordinate. They go and they show up at Moses' tent and they say basically, "You know, why are you in charge of us? Who made you ruler over us? Is not the Lord among all of his people?" So they are complaining about the way God is doing

things. They think they are complaining about Moses. Moses falls down on his face, begins to pray for them. They are not really impressed with that. They say, "Well." Moses says, "Okay, if you guys are really intent on this, we'll have a contest," basically. He doesn't say we'll have a contest, "We'll all offer an offering tomorrow of incense and the Lord will show us who he is with."

So the next day that happens and the Lord, at this point when they show up, they all show up now. God didn't do anything the first day but the next day when they all show up, the glory of the Lord appears at the tent of meeting and the Lord says to Moses, "Step back from the people. I'm going to destroy them all instantly." What's happened is Korah's rebellion has basically got all the people thinking the same way and God says, "Moses, you step back from them. I'm going to wipe them out." This is verse 21 of chapter 16, he says exactly that, "I will kill them instantly. I will destroy them instantly." And Moses falls down on his face and says, "Lord, don't do that. Don't destroy all the other people with these rabble-rousers," basically. So the Lord, of course, the Lord didn't intend to destroy all the people, that's why he has Moses there to pray that way. God puts Moses there to intercede but he's showing us and them they deserve to be destroyed.

So he says, "Okay, you tell the people to back away from Korah, Dathan, Abiram," the other guys that were involved in it. "Back away from them." And the people back away from them and Moses says, "If God has heard me and he has not heard you, may the Lord do something totally different than he has ever done before. May the ground open up and swallow you." And it swallows them and their families alive. The ground opens up and swallows them. That's some hard stuff but that's the wrath of God being displayed.

What is astonishing is not so much that as the next day. The power of that negativity. "Who is Moses? Who is Aaron? Why are they in charge? What's going on? Why is God doing what he has done? We are really unhappy with the way things are going? If you think about it, we have been wandering around here in the wilderness. We didn't get to go into the Promised Land." You see, they start complaining and complaining and start really looking at things and then they see that, you would think that, the ground opening up and swallowing people, that's one that would be hard to forget. You would think that would have chastised the people.

The very next day, they grumble and complain about Moses and they say, they blame Moses for what happened to those people. Like, "You're too harsh." Moses fell down on his face begging God not to do, to destroy, and the Lord says again, verse 45, they come and they have this complaint against him. "It's your fault." The glory of the Lord appears again and God says to Moses, "Moses, back away from the people. I'm going to wipe them out instantly." The same thing, verse 21, verse 45. Moses falls down on his face again and says, "No, Lord, don't do that." But he gets up and he says to Aaron, "Aaron, go and make an offering right now because God is going to send a plague on the people and it has already begun." 14,700 people die of a plague that day. It is stopped when Aaron, you see what God is doing? He is establishing Moses and Aaron are his men. Stop speaking against his anointed, the same way they are prefiguring Christ. You want to say

something against Jesus? You will suffer for eternity for rejecting Christ. That is the one he has installed upon his holy mountain. "Kiss the Son lest he become angry."

So what is that saying? Look at the power of that negativity. The negative tongue. I mean, how could it spread? That's insanity, isn't it? And that's a picture and we look back at that and we say, "Boy, if I had been there, I wouldn't have done that. I would have been over with Moses saying, can you believe these people? How do you put up with this?" That's not true. 1 Corinthians 10 says these things happen as examples for us, that we would not be idolaters. We are to look at these and fear because the same wicked tendency is in us to question God, to grumble and complain, to pray and praise him in a moment of a blessing or a prayer with the family, and then start cursing what he is doing in our lives, being angry with other people, hurting, being negative.

It really is amazing how much a negative tongue, how damaging it is and how easy it is. It's so amazing how easy it is, isn't it? You know, when things don't go our way and they don't go our way a lot, we just want to complain and we are blaming God and we say things like, "I knew it would rain because of the plans that I had made." And we say that in front of our family, to our friends, what are we doing? We are sowing pollutive just wicked thoughts, seeds that are going to grow quickly. "Yeah, I hadn't thought about it but thank you for pointing that out." And our disposition is so quick to run to that.

The same thing with anger, anger spreads like that. I mean, you say something and the person may be damaged and hurt but it creates in them a response. They may be in a position of weakness where they can't say anything back. A child that you may say something abusive and harsh to, but in their hearts they are hating you and something is growing up inside of them, a root of bitterness that's going to continue to hurt them throughout their life and will spread to other people. They will be treating other people the way you are treating them.

James says, "Look at this, look at your life and see how unnatural this is. How appalling it is. Look at how untamable your tongue is. Look at how you've said I'm sorry for this particular sin so many times." Don't you sometimes feel like it's hard to even say, "Please forgive me again because I just did exactly what I asked you to forgive me for yesterday and two days before that." So we are supposed to go and repent but one of the problems we have is that we don't linger long enough over the damage that we've done. Repentance, James is aiming at repentance and that's why he's not offering a quick solution. He's not saying, "Here are four steps." He's saying, "Look at the incredible damage the tongue does. Look at how untamable it is. Look at how unnatural it is. Look at your tongue and look at how much damage your tongue has done."

In the Bible, repentance is a change of mind that Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 7, godly sorrow produces repentance, and godly sorrow is sorrow over our sin. It's not a worldly sorrow. Paul makes that distinction. A worldly sorrow that is just sorry about the consequences for me, and that's really easy, worldly sorrow comes easy. You know, when you let something out and you do damage, suddenly it has messed up everything for you. It has made that other person not feel good about you and so you can be very

self-centered in thinking about what you've done and self is still on the throne and, "I want to make this right because I want you to be right with me. I don't want there to be a problem because I can't handle that so let's make this right." Do you see how selfish that is? That's worldly sorrow and it does not produce repentance.

Godly sorrow is a sorrow that looks at the other person and is more concerned about the damage really done to them, but it looks beyond that because really it looks at the damage done to God. It's not until we look vertically that we can really look rightly horizontally. When we are able to say, "Lord, in reality when I am sinning in anger against someone, I'm striking out at you. I'm complaining about what you were doing in my life. I am actively complaining. I'm actively insulting you like you don't know what you're doing when I say something like, I knew it would rain today." You don't know what you're doing in making it rain, that's what I'm really saying. That's what is really going on. I am insulting God to his face and I'm doing it not just to his face, I'm doing it in front of other people so they can hear it too. The God who holds my life breath in his hand, who is so kind and so good, and if I could see what's really happening, according to Scripture, he never makes a mistake. So the fact that it's raining today is exactly the very best thing that could be happening today. The Bible is clear on that. I believe that. Well, why don't I believe that in my circumstance? "God, have mercy on me, the sinner."

You know, Matthew 5, turn over there, read verses 1 to 6. "When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle,'" or the meek, "'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.'" Jesus in this pivotal sermon in which he is introducing the nature of the kingdom he's bringing, spells out for us really the way of salvation and that "Blessed are, O, how happy are." Blessed also, God has worked in your heart. You have been blessed. God has done something.

"O, how happy are the poor in spirit." That word for "poor" means "those which have no ability to do anything for themselves." It's not like the working poor. This is the poor that are not working, that have to beg. There are two words used for "poor" in the New Testament primarily and this is the word that means not the working poor, hand to mouth, just scraping by. No, this is the person who can't do anything for himself. He said, "O, how happy are the poor in spirit. O, how happy are those who realize they can do nothing in the spiritual realm for their souls." When you realize that you are completely helpless to do anything right, to do anything acceptable for God, Jesus says, "O, how happy are you." That is the key element in a person who is going to heaven.

This is what he describes later, remember in Luke 18 when he teaches the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. The Pharisee, remember, looks up to heaven and says, "Lord, thank you that I am such," he says, "Thank you that I am a righteous man; that I give a tithe of everything that I have; that I fast twice a week. Thank you that I'm not like other men, especially like this publican over here. Thank you, Lord." And then he says the

publican, the tax collector, despised by the Jewish society, an agent of Rome, so to speak, the tax collector would not even lift his eyes but beat his breast and said, "Have mercy on me, a sinner." Jesus said, "I tell you, that man went to his house justified." Both came to meet with God in the temple but only one met with God in the temple, the man who realized he had nothing.

So James is trying to help us realize we have nothing. We are helpless. We are hopeless in and of ourselves. In our humanity, there is no human ability to tame the tongue. You may think that you have tamed the tongue because you don't actually say the things out loud. Some people are more disposed to speak more quickly than others. Some of that is just disposition. There are people who never say a word but who curse people in their hearts all the time. That's the same wickedness. The word that's going on in your mind toward that person that may have not come out of your mouth, James is dealing with that here too. So basically he's saying there is no way any of us, humanly speaking, can do this. So realize that you are poor in spirit.

Jesus goes on in verse 4 and says, not only blessed are the poor in spirit, "Blessed are those who mourn." There is a progression here. When you realize that you have nothing to commend yourself before God and you look at your life, he says, now mourn over your sin. Take time to mourn over it. This is something that we need to do. Even when we have to go, we confess sometimes, we have to confess quickly to keep accounts short, we need to before the Lord ask God to help us mourn over it. "Help me understand what I did more fully, Lord. What was that? Why did I do that? Help me understand the damage that I did in that?" Mourning over our sin. Jesus said, "O, how happy are those who mourn." What an oxymoron. "O, how happy are you when you are mourning from the depth of your soul." Why? Because those are the people God comforts.

"O, how happy are the meek." When you have mourned, when you have come to see you're poor in spirit and you are mourning over your sin, a meek person makes no claim to anything. A meek person is one who knows, "I don't own anything. I don't deserve anything good. Whatever God does with me, it's fine because I don't deserve, I deserve hell. Anything I get is gravy." And he said when you get like that and you're not trying to get things anymore, I love this, "Blessed are the meek." They are the people that let go of everything. What happens to them? They get everything. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." When you let go of everything, God gives you, when you let go of everything, he gives it back to you. What a glorious God.

Then he says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." So you are poor in spirit, you realize you have nothing, you mourn over your sin, you take time to really reflect and grieve over your sin, you ask God to create in you meekness and the Lord does that, and then you hunger and thirst for righteousness. "God, I want to be able to use my tongue for your glory and your kingdom." And that desire will be satisfied. When you hunger and thirst for righteousness, you will be satisfied, and then you begin to be merciful and pure in heart and a peacemaker, and one who is so holy that you will be persecuted. "O, how happy you should be when these things are happening."

James wants us to take time to just really look at ourselves and mourn over our sin, to look at God, to ask him to search us and know us, to really try our thoughts, our hearts, and to show us the evil that is there and to show us how our tongue is so much more deadly and destructive than we realize.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we ask you to show us more of your glory. We pray this week that you would help our eyes to see more of the glory of Christ, more of your holiness, that we might be like Isaiah and see more of you to see our own wickedness more clearly and to say, "Woe is me, I am undone!" In the light of your holiness and your purity, we are filthy and unclean and we need a Savior. We are so grateful, Lord, that when we see that we have nothing, we see that Christ has everything; that he has taken our sins and nailed them to the cross; he has borne the wrath that all of our wicked sins deserve. He has taken it out of the way. He has paid for it in full. We thank you that his resurrection testifies to us that we can walk in newness of life; that by his Spirit through the power of his word, we can by your power, not by might nor by power but by the Spirit, by your Spirit we can tame the tongue. Just like Isaiah who was cleansed with the coal from the altar, his iniquity was cleansed, his sin was forgiven, and you sent him out to speak your word. Cleanse us, remove our iniquity and send us out to speak your word. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.