

The Power of the Tongue

By Ty Blackburn

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Bible Text: James 3:2-12
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Turn to the book of James, James 3. If you'd like to use one of the provided Bibles, you'll find hopefully underneath the seat in front of you somewhere, that's page 1,012. James 3. I'll be reading in just a moment verses 2 through 12, but before I read that, I want to introduce to you our speaker. For those of you who were here Friday and Saturday, you're already familiar with Ty. Ty Blackburn has been the speaker for our marriage conference and did just a great great job on the theme of the glory of marriage and looking particularly as God is Triune and how that has application and implication for our marriages and we did record those sessions and they'll be uploaded, Lord willing, soon to SermonAudio which you can link through our church website. I also would let you know that if you enjoy Ty's preaching this morning, his church utilizes SermonAudio, Providence Church in Duluth, Georgia, so you can listen to other sermons by Ty. But Ty and I personally are very very excited to have Ty and his wife, Patty, with us this weekend. They are some of our oldest and dearest friends. We met them, literally Ty was one of the first people I met on my first day in seminary in Jackson, MS. They were our neighbors and we grew quite close to them and I've appreciated Ty and his ministry and his gifts for some time. So having him here was actually long overdue but he did a great job for us in the marriage conference and I'm really looking forward to the opportunity for all of us to get to hear Ty preach to us God's word from the book of James.

So he'll come in just a moment to do just that, but I'd like to read for us the text, the passage from which Ty will be preaching, and as is our custom at Houston Lake to stand when the Scriptures that are to be preached are read, so would you please stand as I read for us James 3:2-12. Hear God's word.

2 For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. 3 If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. 4 Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of

beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? 12 Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

This is the word of the Lord.

Let's pray.

Father, we are grateful for your word and we're grateful for Ty. We pray that you would equip him to come and teach your truth that we might understand it, that we might apply it, that we might be pointed to Christ. And we pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please have a seat.

Thank you, Paul. One of the things I am so grateful about, Patty and I are both so grateful to the Lord that he took us to Reformed Theological Seminary as a Southern Baptist who had not yet embraced Reformed theology. We just went there because we knew they believed the Bible and Southern Baptist Seminary at that time were in a very sad state of affairs. They've since, there has been quite a reformation in SBC, but I went there as an Arminian not believing doctrines of grace, and we were so blessed to, as Paul said, we were neighbors, we were next door neighbors, walked outside my door, there he was. We got to meet each other and we were dear friends. I considered him my best friend in seminary and has remained a dear brother throughout the years. One of the things I love about him is his sense of humor and I know that's what you love about him, those of you who have been here for a while. Great sense of humor and just so much fun to be around, but such a loving, gracious brother, and like I said, dealt with me where I didn't know what I didn't know. I was a seminary guy, I was called to ministry but I was really woefully doctrinally lacking and he was just such a gracious friend, putting up with me, arguing. You know, I was arguing and stuff and I'm just so grateful for your friendship and the example you've been to me of following Christ and leading the church. And what a blessing to be with you, Houston Lake, as it's so warm, the love of Christ, the love of the Gospel is so clearly evident here. So we're just honored to be able to worship with you this morning. Patty and I are so grateful.

As Paul mentioned, James 3 is our passage and I chose it, I've been preaching through the book of James myself and so I thought it would be good just to share that with you. It relates a little bit to the marriage conference but it's not explicitly about marriage. Clearly it applies to every believer.

This passage is one which, as you read it and you really get, you read through the book of James, James is not, he seems more concerned to convict us than even to instruct us. His

style is confrontational throughout. You know, he uses vivid word pictures. I mean, there are five or six, depending on how you count them. You can actually go even higher than that in that passage. He uses vivid word pictures to engage our emotions. His intention is to get our attention and he seems to have as his purpose, as you read through the book of James, I think it's really illustrated in chapter 1, verse 22, when he says that he wants us to not be merely hearers of the word but to prove ourselves doers of the word. And he's writing to Christians who profess Christ; probably he's writing to Jewish believers as the one who had been the leader of the church in Jerusalem. He's concerned with Jewish believers who have a background in the law, in the Scriptures, in the Old Testament canon. They know many of the commandments of God and they've come to faith in Christ but his concern is that they are not living out their faith; that their theology that they say they believe is not matched by the theology evident in their lives.

So there's a gap between their state of theology and their practical theology, and he seems to be saying, "Show me what you believe by your life." In fact, a large section of James 2 he deals with faith and works. "You say you have faith, well show me your faith by your works." We're saved by faith alone, as we celebrated in the creed that we read earlier, but a faith that saves, faith alone, that faith will not remain alone. It will be accompanied by good works and so he deals with that.

Then in chapter 3, he says, "Let's look at another area that can test us and it's our tongue." And again, he's convinced that the believers to whom he writes in the first century are just like us, they are prone to be complacent. I mean, most of us, if you ask how we're doing and pretty good theology, we know we're not doing, we're not all we should be and we've got lots of issues we're working on, but when we really look at the Scriptures, the Bible has a way of showing us we're a lot worse off than we thought. And in the area of the tongue, this is something as I worked through this passage myself a few weeks ago, that I just found the Lord just really exposing in a new way the failures that are there in my life and it's something that he wants us to really consider this morning.

So the title of the message is "The Power of the Tongue." The power of the tongue, and there are basically four points we're going to try to work through this morning that James unpacks for us in this passage. We're going to begin, first of all, with the fact that it's a surprising power. The first point: the tongue, the power of the tongue is evident in that it's a surprising power.

As he says in verse 5, it's a small part of the body yet it boasts of great things, and he says that as a summary to two illustrations he used. He says you put a bit in the mouth of a horse and you direct it. So you think about the small little bit that goes in the horse's mouth and it's that little bit that directs the entire horse. That's a lot of power in that one little piece of metal that you put in the horse's mouth. He says in the same way a rudder, you think about a ship, a great ship with great sails that are catching the wind, the power of the wind that is driving the boat. You can see those things, they are awesome, but he says where the boat goes is determined by a tiny rudder; that the pilot is able to steer it wherever he wishes by this tiny rudder.

So something small has tremendous impact beyond what we would expect, in the same way, the tongue has surprising power, and for us, we don't, we tend to think that our words, yeah they're important but they're not that important. I mean, think about from, I remember as a young kid hearing, it's not a nursery rhyme but what's sort of like that: sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me. What a terribly in error nursery rhyme. I mean, that's just crazy. This passage is saying that is all wrong. Words do hurt and they hurt more than sticks and stones. They have power. In fact, it's interesting that God builds, he creates the world through his word. We're created in his image and our spoken word does have power and it has good power when we're speaking his word. But it makes sense that there would be even in our words impact because we are a reflection of God.

So it's a surprising power. You know, we think, I read a statistic. I'm not sure. I did some math on this and I'm not sure I really buy this but they say, someone says, you know, I read on the internet, it must be true, that the average man speaks 12,000 words a day. The average woman speaks 24,000 words a day, 2 for 1. Anyway, it's possible. I did some experimenting myself to see if that seems sensible. I think it's fairly close and, you know, there is going to be variation. The average. But let's say, take the man, 12,000 words a day. So you sleep 8 hours, you're awake for 16 hours, that means you're speaking about 250 words an hour, 250 words a minute, 1,500 words an hour. Well, that means that you're saying a whole lot of words and so how could one word or just a sentence be that big a deal? I mean, that's less than 100th of a percent of the words I'm going say, honey. Why are you offended by that? It's very small, insignificant. You see, the words seem like they're not that big a deal and, in the same way, the tongue is not the prominent part of your body. It doesn't seem like that big a deal physically, even, but it has surprising power.

The second thing is it has, the second point, the tongue is not only a surprising power, it has directive power. It is effectual, you might say. It directs the whole course of your life. The idea is that if you get the tongue right, you get everything. In fact, you compare what he says here to something James has already talked about back in chapter 1, verse 26, look what he said in chapter 1, verse 26. He really is concerned about our words. Over and over and over again in the book of James he's talking about what we say, how we speak to one another. James 1:26, he said, "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this man's religion is worthless." If you say you're a believer and you have great theology but you have a habit of just flying off the handle and spouting in anger, or you're a slanderer, or you're a gossip, he says your profession is in question. Now, what needs to happen, and we're all sinners and we all struggle and we have all of these areas or issues we need to deal with, but the Christian is someone who is committed to growing in grace and in chapter 3, then, in verse 2, he said, kind of the flipside of that one we just read in 1:26, "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." Here he says that if you get this right, if you can control your tongue, this is, you're getting everything right in the Christian life. And we know it's the heart that he's going to get to eventually in chapter 4, but he's telling us, "Look." He's like a mother telling her son or her daughter, "Watch your tongue, young lady. Watch your tongue,

young man." Watch your tongue. Attend to it because if you do, you are going to deal with the issues God wants you to deal with because out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks, Jesus says, Luke 6:45. So what comes out of your mouth is going all the way back to your heart so if you start watching what's coming out of your mouth, you're going to deal with what's in your heart, and if you deal with what's coming out of your mouth that goes all the way to your heart, you're going to make a difference in your life. You're going to become more like Christ.

So it's a surprising power, it's a directive power, but thirdly, it's a destructive power. The tongue is a destructive power and this is where he really lays great emphasis. Verses 5 and 6, "So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things." And look at this image, "See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!" Verse 6, "And the tongue is a fire." Listen to verse 6. He has five basically indicative sentences in a row about the tongue. "The tongue is a fire. The tongue is the very world of iniquity. The tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body." Fourthly, "the tongue sets on fire the course of our life." Number 5, "and the tongue is set on fire by hell." I mean, this is a big graphic picture of the destructive power of the tongue.

The tongue is a fire and after saying what a small fire can set ablaze a great forest, he then says that first statement in verse 6, "And the tongue is a fire." He says think about the destruction that comes from a wildfire. The tongue is that, James says. Your tongue is like that.

October 8, 2017 was called in California, northern California, the Northern California Firestorm. Twelve separate fires started in northern California over a two day period, the 8th and 9th of October. Most of them raged for weeks, several for more than 21 days. One fire called the Tubbs fire in northern California, and I didn't know this until I read this, but in California they have so many wildfires, we've seen that, didn't you? We saw them in October and then in December southern California had wildfires around LA. They have so many fires in California they name them. Every fire has got a name, just like our hurricanes, you know, and the Tubbs fire is the most destructive fire in history. It started at 9:43 pm on Sunday night, October 8, about 12 miles north of Santa Rosa, California. Santa Rosa is a fairly large town, several hundred thousand people in California.

So you imagine, Sunday night. The Christians there in Santa Rosa going to bed after a day of worship, getting ready for the next week, people getting ready for Monday, getting ready to turn in. Go to bed, they have no idea that a fire has started 12 miles north. In less than three hours, that fire has moved the 12 miles south and is burning now into the city of Santa Rosa. People are awakened out of sleep by emergency personnel and rushed to get in the car and go. No time to pack things. Go. And they flee for their lives. More than 40 people died in that fire. More than 5,600 structures. This was the most destructive fire. It wasn't the largest but it destroyed the most structures; 5,600 structures destroyed by that fire, 2,800 of them in Santa Rosa. And you think about what that means. You know, "Wake up!" There is destructive power. That's essentially what James is saying here, "Wake up to the destructive power of the tongue." It is a fire.

Secondly, this is our third main point. The destructive power. We said the tongue is a surprising power, a directive power, it's a destructive power, and there are five subpoints here of those indicative sentences in verse 6. First of all, we said the tongue is a fire. Secondly, James says the tongue is "the very world of iniquity." I'm reading from the New American Standard Bible, the truly inspired Bible. Anyway.

The tongue is world of iniquity. The idea is here that it's capable of all kinds of iniquity. There is just no limit. You know, as a child or a young teenager or something, you had a friend that said he's in trouble, "I'm in a world of trouble! I'm in all kinds of trouble! I don't even want to talk about how much trouble I'm in." This is the idea here. The tongue is a world of iniquity. It is all kinds of iniquity. There is no limit to the variety of things that it can do, sinful things it can do.

I mean, think about the different sins of the tongue. James seems to have in focus here in the context the power of the tongue to murder people, I mean in the sense of insulting, demeaning people. When he talks about verse 9, "With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way." He says it's amazing that – think about this – in one breath you can be praying, "Lord, I'm so grateful to you. I love you. I want to honor you with my life. I want my life to be surrendered to you." And then the next minute, maybe you're driving and you're having prayer time as you're driving, of course, you should pray with your eyes open when you're driving. Anyway, you're praying as you're driving and somebody pulls out in front of you. "What kind of? What? Who is that idiot?" I just murdered the person. Jesus says in Matthew 5 if you say to someone, "You empty head," you're guilty of murder. You're devaluing that person to the point that it's the same as someone who would kill them physically. You're killing them emotionally in your heart.

So James says isn't it amazing that we can look at God and bless him in one breath, and in the next breath we can look at a human being, we can look at God's reflection, now think about that. It's like you're looking at a person and you say how much you love them and then you look in the mirror and you see their reflection and you curse it. That's ridiculous. You can't even imagine doing that, but he says that's what we do because we look at God and we bless him and then we look at his reflection in a human being, even an unbelieving, poor driving, human being that obviously needs driving lessons, even. There is a godly way to respond to that and he says the problem is in our hearts and it's coming out of our tongues.

Anger, insults, slander, that's when you're murdering somebody behind their back. You're committing character assassination. Gossip. You're telling things and tale-bearing to other people that aren't a part of the solution. These are destructive things. Lying. There is all kinds of lying that we do. We exaggerate. Tell white lies. Or we just do outright deceit. All of those things pass through the tongue. Flattery, to use our tongues to butter someone up so to gain some kind of advantage. God hates all of these things and, worst of all, blasphemy. Although it's ironic, I heard Carl Truman say that what James is saying here is when you actually curse your brother at any time, you're blaspheming because

you're cursing the image of God. But we also can use our tongues to speak blasphemously of God. We can speak errantly of him. We can grumble and complain against him.

So it's a world of iniquity. The destructive power of the tongue is seen in the first subpoint, it's a fire; secondly, it's a world of iniquity. Look what he says next, "the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body." It has a place among the members of our body that it has the power to defile the whole thing. It ruins everything. In fact, the word "defile" here literally means "spots; stains." The picture is like staining a garment where you can't fix it. The stain is there, it's ruined.

The tongue has the power to ruin your whole body, your whole life, in a sense. Your whole impact. You think about it ruins you for the Lord. It defiles you before God and your relationship with him is messed up by your tongue. How can you be loving God whom you have not seen and not loving your brother whom you have seen? How can you curse your brother whom you see, and then love God? It destroys and disrupts your relationship with God.

Right after Jesus says in Matthew 5, "You have heard it said, you shall not commit murder, but I say to you everyone who is angry with his brother is guilty of murder, and everyone who says to him, 'You fool,' is guilty before the law court, and everyone who calls him an empty-head is guilty enough to go to hell." Right after that he says, this is how that kind of things disrupts your relationship with God, the next thing Jesus says, "Therefore if you are going to present your offering, you're going down to Jerusalem to present your offering and there you remember as you're going to Jerusalem to present your offering to the Lord that your brother has ought against you, leave your offering, go back, be reconciled to your brother and then come back and present your offering." Because God says, "I don't want to hear what you have to say if you're not willing to make it right with your brother." The Gospel, the wonder of the Gospel is it makes us right with God and with each other. It gives us the power to do both.

So it ruins us in our effectiveness. Some of the reasons we're not able to minister effectively is when we've allowed this kind of thing to happen and we've not dealt with it, but it also affects the way other people see us. Think how the tongue can stain you in the eyes of others. If you, you may have gifts and a burden to help someone but if you let your tongue get ahead and you don't make it right, you don't humble yourself and you slander someone else to this person, how are they going to want to listen to what you have to say? Or they know that you're deceitful; that you tend to exaggerate; you tend to lie. It's going to damage your credibility. The tongue has the power to mess up everything.

Next he says the tongue "sets on fire the course of our life." The entire course of our life is set on fire by the tongue. This means the tongue, the damage that the tongue does spreads. It's interesting, the word "course, our whole course, the entire course," translated in the ESV, the Greek word is a word for "wheel," and it can mean the path of the wheel, therefore the course. That's where we get course. The wheel, where it goes. The

rut. But it seems a word picture almost in this, in the sense that, imagine a flaming wheel. You're able to get a wheel to stay aflame and everywhere it rolls, it spreads fire.

That's what he's saying. The tongue has the power just to spread all over everywhere it touches. It spreads all over our lives. When you allow an area, when we allow an area of sin with our tongue, sin never stands still, so if we don't repent of gossiping, we will gossip more and more and more. If we don't repent of slandering, we will slander more and more and more. It will continue to spread in our own hearts, but think about how it spreads among people, gossip and slander. Isn't it amazing how powerful a rumor is to destroy someone's life. How it spreads. And think about how much damage words can do when we say them to someone and how they have a way even within that person's heart, that person's soul of continuing to burn and spread.

If you were to stop and think about the most, if I asked you if we were talking privately and I said, "What are the most painful things anyone has ever said to you?" It wouldn't take long for you to remember with vivid detail what was said to you maybe 40 years ago, if you're old enough, 50 years ago, 5 years ago. And think about how many things you can remember that vividly.

The tongue has a power, a destructive power. We would like to be able to pull it in. It just spreads. It just gets ahead of us. He says it's untameable. You know, there are a lot of times when things come out of our mouth, this is what happened to me when I was preaching on the tongue. I was preaching a couple of messages on this passage and between the first week and the second week I had to report the second week that there were three times this week, there were probably more than that, but there were three times the Lord made me aware of how I just had said really just sinful and stupid things, and some of them, they didn't seem so bad.

One was to my wife. We were going to go out. I was going to take her out for lunch one day. You know, occasionally I remember to do that, to ask her out for a date for lunch. We go for dinner occasionally too, you know, but sometimes I'll work it out where I can be free for lunch. So we were going out for lunch and she just said to me, "Well, we don't need to go," and we were talking about we had some issues going on financially. You know, there is always something breaking down. I mentioned in the marriage conference that we had our car is in the shop. It's a transmission. That's one of those bad things when they say... There are certain things, everything is usually not good but it can be bad and it can be worse. It could be worst. That's almost worst. It's up there.

So she just said sweetly, she said, "You know, we don't need to go. We've got... Maybe we don't need to spend the money or whatever." And I said this. I could have responded in a way that would have been, I said, "Don't tempt me." That's three words. I guess four if you count the contraction. Do not tempt me and that ruined. We did not go out on a date that day because I was saying, "You know, I'd rather save the money than go out with you for sure." Right away it just came out of my mouth and I remember when it got out, I felt like if I could just catch it right there and bring it back in, but it was too late. And it wasn't that she was that angry with me or anything, but it was just like it just

ruined it and I was like, "No, I really do want to go. I've been looking forward to this." That's kind of hard to say I've been looking forward to this when I said that. But then it just grieved me and I spent time thinking about that, praying about that. How? What's going on in my heart?

So the Lord let me see after I preached on it one week, the very next week, and that was just one example of three that week that I just thought, "How did that come out of my mouth?" The Lord is telling us we have to be diligent. The Christian life is not something that we coast through. Sanctification is work. I mean, it's all by grace but we have to put ourselves in the path of God's grace through the means of grace. We've got to take seriously these issues.

So the tongue, it's destructive power, and once we say things, there are times when we say things and you can't undo it. Proverbs 12:18, think of this word picture. Proverbs 12:18, "There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword." To speak in anger and to speak in anger rashly is like the thrust of a sword. Imagine in a moment of anger, you take a sword and you just plunge it into someone several times and then you get control of yourself, you compose yourself and say, "Hey, I'm sorry I got angry for a moment. Will you forgive me?" Well, as they fall to die on the floor, maybe they'll, "I forgive you. I'm going to be with the Lord right now." You can't undo that. He said that's what the tongue is like so we must see the power of it and we've got to learn to be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger, James says in chapter 1, verse 20.

The fifth thing he says about the destructive power of the tongue in verse 6, the fifth subpoint of the destructive power of the tongue, is it not only sets on fire the course of our life, it "is set on fire by hell"; that the tongue is the area that Satan loves to use; that when we find ourselves speaking things that are like thrusts of a sword, when we find ourselves speaking slanderously or in anger, what's happening is we've yielded our tongue to sin and to Satan. The believer can do this.

A great example of that is in Matthew 16. Remember when Peter had that wonderful moment when Jesus said, "Who do men say that I am?" And they said, "Some say you're John the Baptist. Some say Elijah. Some say you're the prophet." And Jesus said, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you Simon Barjona, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and bone has not revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven. You said this because God has revealed it to you and you've spoken the word of God." Look, this is Peter being what he's supposed to be, but it says right after that, Jesus began to teach them, from that moment he began teaching them that he was going to have to suffer and die at the hands of sinners and be raised on the third day, and Peter, this is three verses later, takes him aside and says, he had the sense not to talk to him in front of everybody else. He didn't rebuke, reprove him in front of everybody else. That's the good thing for Peter. He thought, "I should do this privately. I need to reprove the Lord privately." He takes him aside and he says, "Lord, these things shall not happen to you. It can't happen to you." And what did Jesus say? "Get thee behind me, Satan." Get thee behind me, Satan. He recognized that Satan was behind that word. Peter was trying to divert him

from the mission that God had sent him for right after he said, "You are the Christ." He was getting it and then he says this just like James says, "In one moment you're blessing God, the next moment you're blaspheming."

And when we see that happening, one of the things that can do is motivate us to want to deal with it. When we find that, you know, when you're angry and you just want to, it feels good to say it, doesn't it? It feels good to release it sometimes; to vent. But that is not of God. Whenever we say these things, we're actually being the mouthpiece of Satan. When we tear our brother or sister down, when we tear down any person but especially brothers and sisters in Christ, what are we doing but we are doing what Satan wants to do. Who is Satan? He's the accuser of the brethren so when you slander someone, Satan is a slanderer; that his name Satan in Hebrew means "to accuse; to slander." So when we slander, we are doing his work.

Now, James says when we look at our lives and we see the incredible power of the tongue, you know, that it is more than we would expect, it is more destructive than we could ever imagine and we see what we do, it's interesting, as I said, he doesn't really give us three steps to deal with it. In fact, what he kind of does, he's going to go on and talk about it's untameable. You just can't, he says you need to deal with it but then he says you can't. In verse 2 he says you need to try to be a man who doesn't stumble in what he says, a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well, but in verse 8 he says, no one can tame the tongue. It's hopeless. That's a very happy message. I want to tell you something to do, there is no way you can do it. There is no way. There is no hope for us. There is no help for us. There is no hope for us in ourselves and he wants it to linger there and to stay there. He wants us to spend time reflecting on how miserable we can, the mess we can make.

It's interesting, after this he goes on to talk about ungodly attitudes in 3:13-18, then he talks about desires of the heart in chapter 4, and he still hasn't given us clear direction of hope. Now, I think what he's doing is saying, "Listen." If there's really going to be change, if there is really going to be change in our lives, what has to happen? We have to truly repent and to truly repent, we have to have godly sorrow. Not just, "Sorry that I hurt you and that I made you unhappy and now I've got to deal with this mess." You know, sometimes we can confess like that. "I know I shouldn't have said that. Please forgive me," because I know that's what I'm supposed to say, and let's now act like everything's okay. "We're all good, right? Hey, you're supposed to forgive me." That's not real repentance. That's not really even seeing how much damage I've done.

So James wants us to linger over it and to really think about it. He wants us to come to the point that Paul comes to in Romans 7 when he says, "O, wretched man that I am!" I mean, how can I be like thrusts of a sword and then act like I haven't done anything? "Hey, are we okay?" What is wrong with me? James wants us to come to the place where we see that we are impoverished before God, that we are hopeless and helpless, because that's the turning point.

You know, Jesus makes that clear in the Sermon on the Mount when he lays out what it is that defines the Christian. How do you recognize a citizen of the kingdom. There in those first words of the Sermon on the Mount when he sat down and he began to teach, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." He says the place you must start if you want to really understand and be right with God, is you have to come to an understanding of your poverty of spirit. And the word for "poor" there, there are two words for "poor," mainly two words used in the New Testament. One is of the working poor that are living hand-to-mouth. They're scraping by and they don't have anything extra. They're just barely eking out an existence. That's one word, this word is not that word. This is a word where someone is absolutely destitute. They are reduced to begging. Their only hope is to just look for mercy from other people to provide for them. He says, "Blessed. O, how happy are you." That's what "blessed" means. "O, how happy are you when you realize how truly impoverished you are before God."

Then the next one, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." When we see how impoverished we are, when we mourn over our sin, and James wants us to take time to mourn over our sin; to see, "Lord, help me understand the damage that I've done. Help me to understand how this damages your name. Help me to understand the pain that this causes to people that I've sinned against. Grant me grace to mourn over sin."

"Blessed are the meek, they inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." When we truly hunger and thirst after righteousness, and basically what James is wanting to do is he's wanting to drive us to his elder brother, Jesus. He's laying us bare in his book so that we will see our only hope is Jesus. In fact, I think that's who he has in mind in verse 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." We believe that James was the half-brother of the Lord Jesus Christ; that Mary and Joseph had other children after Jesus was born. He was born to Mary as a virgin but we see in the Gospels that he had other brothers. Two of them wrote books of the Bible: James here and Jude wrote books. They didn't come to believe until after the resurrection. Paul tells us that Jesus appeared directly to James after his resurrection. If you read through John, John 7, you see that the brothers aren't believing in Jesus but after the resurrection, Jesus appears to James and James believes and James becomes an apostle.

Can you imagine what it would have been like to grow up, to having the older brother, Jesus? Never would these words have felt so much sting. "Why can't you be like your brother?" Never sinned. Always did what his parents wanted him to do. Never spoke, he had complete control of his tongue. Always obeying God perfectly and James watches that throughout his life and here as he talks about the tongue, he goes back and he says, "There is one perfect man who bridled his whole soul. And our call is to be like him, but the only way you can be like him is by trusting in him; by realizing how far we come short, by mourning over our sins, and by running to a glorious Savior who lived a perfect life and, therefore, gives us his perfect righteousness; and who has a spotless Lamb takes away our sins. Pays for them, washes us clean." And then not only that, but he gives us his power as we trust in him and we pray to him and we apply his word, we meditate on

his word like James 1:19, "Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." Meditate on his word before Christ and watch him change us into his image. That's what he wants to do in our lives.

So you think about your tongue this week. Ask God to spend some time, you spend some time asking God to show you because if you're like me, and all of us are this way, even though you see it, we don't see it. And a good thing to do is ask your spouse, "How do you think I'm doing in this area? Am I truthful in the way that I speak? Am I angry? Do I speak with an angry tongue?" Ask your children. Ask your friends. And be prepared to humble yourself. But most of all, run to Christ.

Let's pray together.