

"True Faith and the Tongue"

James 3:1-12

Part 1

Introduction: Today we have come back to our study in the book of James and as we do we have come to a section where James is going to deal with the tongue of the believer.

Now the last time we were in the book of James we looked at James 2:14-26 in several messages. In chapter 2 James spoke of the difference between dead faith and living faith. He told us that living faith or true faith is a faith that produces fruit within our lives. Someone who says they are saved but there is no fruit in their life has been deceived by their own heart. James gave us 2 examples of living faith:

1. Abraham when he offered his son Isaac on Mount Moriah.
2. Rahab when she hid the spies who came to spy out the city of Jericho.

Both of the examples James gave us were the results of true saving faith in the life of Abraham and the life of Rahab. James closed this section with verse 26.

Notice James 2:26

²⁶ For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Now as we come to chapter 3 James still has the same thought in mind. He is still thinking about how true faith will manifest itself through works and in 3:1-12 James is going to address the subject of the tongue but I don't want you to miss the point James is making.

The overall thought in this section is SELF CONTROL.

In other words true saving faith will manifest itself in self control.

Now if we are going to talk about true saving faith and self control the best place to start is the tongue. You see the tongue is the revealer of the heart.

Illustration: Do you remember years ago when you would go to the doctor the first thing he would tell you to do was to stick out your tongue. I am not so sure the doctor could really tell how your physical condition by looking at your

tongue but I do know that a person's spiritual condition can be known by their tongue.

The Bible is very clear that the tongue will tell exactly what is within the heart of a man.

Matthew 12:33-35

³³ *Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.*

³⁴ *O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.*

³⁵ *A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.*

Judges 12:1-6

And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward, and said unto Jephthah, Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee? we will burn thine house upon thee with fire.

² *And Jephthah said unto them, I and my people were at great strife with the children of Ammon; and when I called you, ye delivered me not out of their hands.*

³ *And when I saw that ye delivered me not, I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon, and the LORD delivered them into my hand: wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day, to fight against me?*

⁴ *Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim: and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said, Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites.*

⁵ *And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay;*

⁶ *Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand.*

The tongue of the Ephraimites revealed their true identity. That is the very truth that James has in mind. The tongue will manifest what is in the heart and if there is true saving faith in the heart it will be revealed by self control.

When writing about the unsaved Paul wrote in Romans that the tongue will manifest the unsaved heart.

Romans 3:13-14

¹³ Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips:

¹⁴ Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:

Now let us get to the book of James and consider what it is that James has to say.

I. Controlling the Tongue

Notice James 3:1a

There are many things to consider within this verse. The word "masters" means "teachers". James is telling these Hebrew believers not to rush right into a teaching position.

Now to understand this better we would need to know the culture in James day. When the Jews went to the synagogue there was an open platform given to anyone who wanted to comment after the Scriptures were read. Here is an example.

Acts 13:13-16

¹³ Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.

¹⁴ But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down.

¹⁵ And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.

¹⁶ Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.

Not only was it done in the synagogue but also in the churches.

1 Corinthians 14:26

²⁶ *How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.*

So we can see that it was common practice in James' day for someone to stand in an assembly and teach on the passage that was read. Apparently the people James is writing to could not wait for the open floor to be able to speak on the passage that was read in the gathering. When the opportunity was given they were quick to jump into the position for they desired to be teachers. One of the reasons was because teachers were held in very high esteem back then. There were many perks that came with the position of being a teacher of the Law.

James will now give them a warning.

Notice James 3:1 again.

Those who teach the Bible will be held to a higher level of accountability. That is the very idea here. The teacher will be held to a much higher level of accountability than the person who is a hearer of the Word.

Application:

Let me just stop here for a moment and remind you that this applies to all levels of teaching the Bible. It goes from the pulpit to the Sunday school class even to the opportunities we have outside of this building. We who are teachers will be held to a stricter accountability when we stand before the Lord because we are teaching the VERY WORD of GOD.

Anyone who is considering stepping into a teaching position needs to consider the position in the light of the Judgment Seat of Christ; for when that day comes we will be held to a higher level of accountability.

Let me give you 3 reasons why we will be held to a higher standard:

1. We are responsible to know the Truth of the Bible and then teach the Truth.

There is no room for personal opinion when teaching the Bible. We must study the Word, know the Word and deliver the Word without any compromise at all. That is not easy at times when you know things that are going on in the lives of people and you know the Truth

is going to cut deeply. But I must always remind myself that I am not up here to please you but I am here to please God.

2. What we teach has an impact on many lives.

When we stand up to teach the Word of God we are leading people with what we say. That shines a very bright light on the teaching ministry. I never want to soften the Word or distort the Word so as to lead someone down the wrong path because when I stand before the Lord I will be held accountable for all of you people and what I taught you. That is why it is so important that I study and learn the Word. I can never stand behind this pulpit and wing it.

3. We are expected to live what we teach.

Not only am I responsible for what I teach but I am responsible to live what I teach to you.

These are 3 reasons why we will be held to a higher level of accountability.

Notice James 3:2

The word "offend" here means "to stumble". The idea is that everyone one of us commits sin as we go through this life. We stumble in many things according to James.

James also tells us that if anyone does not stumble or sin with their words they are a "perfect" or a mature believer. Not "perfect" in the sense they never sin anymore but they are mature and they are able to exercise self control over their tongue. He also says that if a person is able to control the tongue they are then able to control the entire body.

But let me point out the concern which James has here. We are all going to stumble as we go through life and everyone one of us we be held accountable for our lives from the time we were saved until the day we die or are raptured from this earth. So if a person is going to step into a teaching position there are several points they need to consider:

1. Be sure you have the gift of teaching.
2. Be sure you are called to teach.
3. Be sure you know the passage which you are teaching.
4. Remember that when you step into the teaching position you have stepped up to a higher level of accountability.

It is one thing to stumble as we go through this life as believers but if we stumble while teaching the Word of God then it not only has an impact on our lives but it can impact many other lives as well.

Now these first 2 verses of chapter 3 are a spring board which James uses to focus upon the power of the tongue in the verses that follow.

Notice James 3:2 again.

The end of this verse has some interesting information.

"and able also to bridle the whole body."

James says that if a man can bridle his tongue the he will be able to keep his entire body under self control.

Now James is going to illustrate this in 2 ways:

Illustration #1

Notice James 3:3

When a bit is placed in a horse's mouth the entire horse is then under the control of the one who holds the reigns. Just one small piece of metal placed in the mouth and against the tongue will give you absolute control over the horse.

The bottom line is that when the tongue is controlled the entire body is controlled.

Illustration #2

Notice James 3:4

Next James uses the illustration of the ship. The ship is so large and the winds can be so strong but when the captain has the control of the little rudder he can control the entire ship.

Both of these illustrations are used to help us to see that when a person is able to control their tongue then they will be able to control all other sinful desires.

Conclusion:

The tongue is a very powerful organ. Someone said that is why God placed it in a cage behind 2 rows of teeth.

Let me show you what Jeremiah said about the tongue.

Jeremiah 9:8

⁸ Their tongue is as an arrow shot out; it speaketh deceit: one speaketh peaceably to his neighbour with his mouth, but in heart he layeth his wait.

Jeremiah called the tongue an arrow. Why did he say that? Because the tongue can kill at a distance that is why.

God gave us the tongue and the ability to speak for 3 reasons:

1. To praise Him.
2. To communicate with Him
3. To communicate with our fellow man.

Now that sin has entered into the world the tongue has been used to curse God and to slander and to back bite our fellow man.

We need to learn to control our tongue. Let me leave you with a list of sins that can come from the tongue:

1. Lying
2. Slander
3. Back biting
4. False teaching
5. Deception
6. Gossip
7. Tattling
8. Cursing
9. Blasphemy

All of these are sin and the tongue was created for none of these.