

"True Faith and the Tongue"**James 3:1-12****Part 2**

Introduction: Today we come back again to our study in the book of James and as we do we will pick up where we left off last week. Now last week we started into James 3 and in James 3:12 James is addressing the matter of the tongue.

Last week I told you that the tongue is a REVEALER of the heart. If you are around someone long enough you can tell what their heart is like just by listening to their speech.

Matthew 12:34-35

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.*

James knew that when a person was saved one of the evidences of their salvation would be a change in the way they speak. Let me show you what Paul said about the unsaved person.

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:*

This is the description of the mouth of an unsaved person. But when you are saved you change and one of the changes is a new way of speaking or really we could say that we receive a "new language".

2 Corinthians 5:17-18a

¹⁷ *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

¹⁸ *And all things are of God...*

The phrase "*all things are become new*" certainly includes our speech.

James knew this and that is one reason why we find this passage in which he addresses the tongue. When we get to the end of this passage James will present a test for his readers to use to examine their own lives to be sure they are saved.

Last week in our study we looked at James 3:1-4 and I want to give to you a quick outline of those verses and then move into verse 5.

I. The Tongue can Condemn.

Notice James 3:1-2

James speaks out here against those who desired to step into the office of a teacher. There seemed to be a problem with many people wanting to be teachers in James day and in these verses James addresses this and at the same time he reminds them of the tongue's power to bring condemnation. He reminds them that to step into the position of a teacher was to step up to a higher level of accountability.

II. The Tongue can Control.

Notice James 3:3-4

Here James points to the power of the tongue. It is like the bit in a horse's mouth and it is like the rudder on a ship. The bit may be small compared to the horse and the rudder is small compared to the ship but the bit controls the horse and the rudder controls the ship.

It the same way if we are not careful the tongue can control us. It is so important that we get control over the tongue. In verse 2 James tells us that if we can bridle the tongue we can control all the other areas of our lives.

This brings us to where we are today.

III. The Tongue can cause Great Damage.

Notice James 3:5

The first part of this verse is connected to the preceding verse. It is the second part of the verse that I want to draw your attention to.

James uses the word "behold" to get the attention of his readers and he points them to a small flame. He tells them to consider how great a fire a little flame can start. This actually means, "Consider how large a forest a small spark can destroy". You and I both know that with a small flame you can do great damage.

Illustration: When I was in 5th grade we built rockets and used engines and fuse to launch them. We lived in Morgantown WV and there was this huge field we decided to launch our rockets from. The fuse was too long and it set the weeds on fire then it burned the balsa wood fin and the rocket fell over before launch and shot across the ground that combination set the entire field on fire. We ran and the fire company never knew what started the fire and neither did Mom until many years later.

Notice James 3:6a

James says the tongue is a fire. In other words it is just as deadly as the small flame.

It is interesting that James compares the tongue to fire and it is because fire spreads very quickly. If you have a cup of water you cannot drown an entire city but if you have one match you can burn an entire city.

Let me show you a verse from Proverbs.

Proverbs 18:21

²¹ *Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.*

This is a very interesting verse and it is one that if we would stop and think what is said here it would most likely make us choose our words a little more carefully.

The writer tells us that DEATH and LIFE are in the power of the tongue. Let me give you 2 thoughts to consider with this verse.

1. Our tongue can be a great source of encouragement.

If we speak words of encouragement those words can be used to carry an individual throughout their entire life.

Proverbs 10:19-21a

¹⁹ *In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.*

²⁰ *The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth.*

²¹ *The lips of the righteous feed many:*

Proverbs 12:25

²⁵ *Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad.*

Proverbs 16:24

²⁴ *Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.*

Proverbs 25:11-13

¹¹ *A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.*

¹² *As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprovor upon an obedient ear.*

¹³ *As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him: for he refresheth the soul of his masters.*

Words of kindness and encouragement can lift someone from the depths of discouragement and carry them for years.

But the sad part is:

- 2. Our tongue can destroy, discourage and damage more lives than we can begin to imagine.**

Remember Joseph and the lie Potiphar's wife told concerning him? It cost Joseph the next 2 years in the prison.

Gossip is one of the most destructive past times in our world. Listen to this.

My name is Gossip.

I have no respect for justice.

I hurt without killing. I break hearts and ruin lives.

I am cunning, malicious, and gather strength with age.

The more I am quoted, the more I am believed.

I flourish at every level of society.

My victims are helpless. They cannot protect themselves against me because I have no name and no face.

To track me down is impossible. The harder you try, the more elusive I become.

I am nobody's friend.

Once I tarnish a reputation, it is never the same.

I topple governments and wreck marriages. I ruin careers and cause sleepless night, heartaches and indigestion. I spawn suspicion and generate grief. I make innocent people cry in their pillows. Even my name hisses.

I am called GOSSIP. Office gossip, Shop gossip, Party gossip, Telephone gossip, Facebook gossip. I make headlines and headaches. REMEMBER, before you repeat a story, ask yourself: is it true? is it fair? is it necessary?? If not, do not repeat it. KEEP QUIET. GREAT minds discuss ideas....Average minds discuss events....Shallow minds discuss people....Which are you?

Notice James 3:6 again.

The tongue is a "world of iniquity". If we could wipe the world clean of sin and there was no more the tongue could fill it again. That is how sinful the tongue is.

Notice James 3:6 again.

He lists 3 things about the tongue here that I want you to see and understand:

a. The tongue can defile the whole body.

If you have ever been in a place where there had been a fire you know the lingering effects of the smoke. The smoke gets driven deep into everything. You can wash the clothing and the furniture but the smoke smell still remains. The garment may look great in appearance but when you get close the smell of the smoke ruins the outward appearance.

Application:

That is exactly the meaning here. You can dress up, you do many things right but if you cannot control your tongue it will defile your entire appearance and reputation.

Illustration:

Not so long ago I heard a lady talking at the Procure Fitness Center in Bedford. She is a lady that dresses very neatly. Her hair is never out of place. I have seen her at her place of employment several times. To look at her you would think her words would be very professional and fitting for her outward appearance. But that is not so. When I heard her

talking to someone several weeks ago her mouth was as filthy as anyone that I had ever heard on the construction site.

Listen, if you cannot control your tongue it will defile your entire body. But that is not all.

b. The tongue sets on fire the course of nature.

The idea here is that not only will it defile you but it will also defile the affairs of your life. The idea is that where there is gossip, slander, back biting, tattling, lies, false accusations, filthy language and other sins of the tongue families, individuals, churches, and many others are destroyed, hurt, or damaged.

c. The tongue is set on fire from hell.

The word "hell" is found only here and in Matthew 5. It refers to the Valley of Hinnom. It was a valley outside of Jerusalem where garbage, dead animals, and the bodies of criminals were thrown to decay. There was a smoldering fire there and it was a place where there were worms that were constantly feeding on the decaying flesh. It was a place where you would not want to be nor would you even desire to be close because of the contamination.

Listen to this: James uses that to help us to see just how defiled and contaminated the tongue can be. But there is even more.

This is a sobering thought. The tongue that is my mouth and yours can be used by Satan as a tool to inflict pain, to ruin a reputation, to divide a church, and to contaminate our lives.

Conclusion:

Let me give you something to think about in closing today. This is from the Commentary of Chuck Swindoll on the book of James.

"If you ever see a wild animal prowling your neighborhood you can call your local animal control agency to round it up and haul it off. The dog catcher can take stray dogs to the pound or return lost dogs to their owners. Feral cats can be caught: skunks can be removed: and raccoons can be trapped. We can round up all kinds of wild and roaming animals.

So why not a catcher and a pound for stray words? No that's an occupation that could earn a decent living in any economy.

Imagine a razor-toothed accusation cornered by a couple of word catchers: "Careful now, be very careful...that's a mean one!"

"Who would let such a thing loose?"

"Aw some guy got worked up and unleashed it on his poor wife."

I would hate to see what she feels like now."

"Like shredded wheat, probably."

"Well, let's get this pit bull of a word off the street before it bites someone else."

Now then, let's say you are home and these same word catchers suddenly knock on your door. "Excuse me, sir," they ask, "does this word belong to you? We caught it running loose out there, backbiting everyone where you work. Your boss said it sounded like one of yours." You take a long look at their catch and, sure enough... you let that pit bull of a word loose on Wednesday, and by Saturday it has ruined a family's weekends. Red faced you claim your nasty words and send the word catchers away."

We can laugh and chuckle at that story but it is not all that far from the Truth. Let me show you what I mean.

Matthew 12:36-37

³⁶ *But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.*

³⁷ *For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.*