

The Power of the Tongue – Part 1

Sermon 9 in the James Series

James 3:1-12

Today, we focus on THE TONGUE.

What James says is well known, very true and experienced by every one of us.

Have you ever said something, and then almost immediately went, “GULP – I CAN’T BELIEVE I SAID THAT!!!!”

At times like that, we might be VERY GLAD to pay \$1000 to “unsay” what we said, but that cannot happen.

James exhortation on “the tongue” comes on the heels of the passage we just studied – faith without works is dead.

And the commentator, Tasker, makes the solid point that – WORDS are another form of WORKS.

They fall into the same category – so it was natural for James to move from WORKS to WORDS.

I. The Responsibility of those in Authority v. 1-2

A. Let not Many of you become Teachers (Masters) v. 1

The Greek word is sometimes translated “master” and what it usually refers to is someone who makes his living by functioning in an official teaching or preaching capacity.

Christ used this word about Nicodemus in John 3:10 – “are you not the teacher in Israel, and you do not know these things?”

He directs his remarks at first to those who are the leaders in local churches. How true it was then – one could argue it is even more essential now.

James lived in a day when there was no printed word.
Each preacher was somewhat limited in his influence.

Later would come the printing press – and the words of teachers would be spread throughout the world on the printed page.

Later came radio, then television
– now – the internet
– something unknown to a previous generation
– The internet has made it possible for people to listen to thousands and thousands of preachers and their preaching 24/7
– in the comfort of your own home
-- at no cost
-- and at very little cost to the preacher
(unlike radio, tv, or even books)

With the proliferation of good, sound, biblical material
We also have the proliferation of error and heresy
The proliferation of opinions and ideas
The proliferation of good, bad, and all the “in-between”.

What James says by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was true then,
and is certainly **STILL TRUE** today – in an even a larger sense!

And notice his HUMILITY

WE (he includes himself) shall receive the greater judgment.
WE (he includes himself) stumble in many things.

- A pastor whose tongue is out of control is not to be trusted.
- A pastor who keeps his tongue perfectly has never walked this earth.
- We are responsible for what we say and what we teach.

Here is the great benefit of a **CONFESSION** of **FAITH**.
It sets **BOUNDARIES** for us in our teaching.

We don't have to "make it up" as we go along.
We don't have to re-invent the wheel with every new controversy.

You, as a congregation, know the direction and overall beliefs of the ministry and are not taken by surprise.

A Confession of Faith doesn't cover EVERY area of doctrine and practice.

That would be impossible – even ridiculous.

But it does form a good guideline – a boundary – a fence if you will – in helping to define truth and error.

And there remain many subtleties, issues, opinions, etc. that need to be worked out – but a good Confession exists to unify and solidify the truth in a local congregation.

Be not many teachers/masters?

Why?

Because – those who are in authority speak with heavier words than others.

This is true with political leaders.

This is true on the job with your boss.

This is true in the church (James specific application 1-2)

This is true in the home.

Let me apply this to each of us who are as parents for a moment.

Those in authority **MUST TAKE EVEN GREATER HEED TO THE WORDS THEY SAY.**

A mother and her 13 year old daughter are having an argument.

-- The daughter says something **FOOLISH** even hurtful.

-- Then the mother answers back with something **FOOLISH** and hurtful.

Both have sinned - BUT

The words of the Mother have INCREDIBLE power to crush the daughter.

You can be incredibly hurt by the young daughter's words – true.
But the daughter can be absolutely crushed by her mother.

You see -- the Mother has something the daughter does have.

The Mother has the power to DISCIPLINE her daughter properly.

The daughter blows up – and that is terrible.
The Mother blows up – and it devastating.

In fact, don't we say, "Wait a minute. Who is the adult here?"

But, which one of us who are parents haven't said some mean, ugly or hurtful things to our children.

**Which of us have never had to apologize to our children?
AND – if you never have – consider this:**

One of the saddest commentaries I ever heard about was a lady, who was talking about her father growing up – in all her life – *she said she never remembers him admitting to be wrong, or saying "I'm sorry"*.

IF YOU NEVER HAVE SINNED WITH YOUR TONGUE to your child – You are a perfect parent!!!! V. 2

If you can control your speech that perfectly (and speech is the hardest thing of all to control according to this passage) then you should be able to control every part of your body.

But you and I can not PERFECTLY control our speech. So, by God's grace we are called upon to:

- Weigh our words carefully.
- Realize that what we say has a tremendous impact.
- Learn to take responsibility, and ask forgiveness for evil words when they are found in our mouth.

Are you disqualified as a parent because you spoke in an evil way?

No, of course not.

You are not DISQUALIFIED as a parent.

- You are QUALIFIED as a SINNING parent.
- What are you going to do to make it right?

Your job as a parent is to be THE INSTRUCTOR.
The one who leads by WORD and EXAMPLE.

It is an awesome job, but one that you have, by the very nature of the fact that GOD MADE YOU A PARENT!!!

Proverbs 4:1-6

Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding.

For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law.

For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother.

He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live.

Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth.

Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee.

Proverbs 6:20-24

My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother:

Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck.

When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.

For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life:

To keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman.

Let's bring it back to the context of James 3.

B. The Stricter Judgment v. 1

Here is the reason not many should be teachers/masters.

To quote Moo

“Teachers, because they bear so much responsibility for the spiritual welfare of those to whom they minister, will be scrutinized by the Lord more carefully than others. Jesus warned (Luke 12:48)” *For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.*

Acts 20:25-31

Paul understood this principle as he spoke to the Ephesian elders.

READ

And Paul warns Timothy of the same thing.

1 Timothy 6:20

2 Timothy 1:13-14

C. Our Common Problem – Stumbling v. 2

We all stumble in many things.

This is one of those PROVERBIAL statements in James.

This also moves us from speaking exclusively about teachers.

We – in v. 1 is in relation to authority.

We -- in v. 2 is in relation to humanness.

While it is true that teaching/authority puts one in a place of special watch care because of the position held

– EVERYONE is in the same boat

-- EVERYONE stumbles

-- The One that doesn't is a perfect man.

There has only BEEN ONE!

II. The Incredible Power of the Tongue 3-6

A. Illustrations 3-4, 6

1. A Bit in a Horse's mouth
2. A Rudder on a Large Ship
3. A Forest Fire – started by a Small Fire
4. The Tongue itself is as a Fire

And the fire often is Hell-fire itself!
Satan has no greater ally in our own selves
– then our tongue.
-- our tongue can defile the entire body!

B. Application v. 5

The tongue is powerful – but it's power is not always used for good.

It's a passage that we miss a little in – because it reads well in the Greek. James is using alliteration that we simply can not duplicate in English.

We can't duplicate the alliteration – so the wording comes to us a little differently than maybe James intended.

μικ-ρον -- με-λος -- μεγ-αλα

- It sounds a little strange.
- Is Pastor James is talking about bragging?

Meg al-aw-kheh- O – it literally means – “to talk big”

*So the tongue is a small organ and can talk big.
So it is with the tongue – small as it is – it is a great boaster.*

But – taking this word “Boasts great things” a little further.

James is not really saying, “*The tongue talks big, but can’t back it up.*”

He is not saying, “*The tongue is just a loud braggart.*”

The contrast in the verse has to do with SIZE.

It is between LITTLE and BIG.

-- It is admittedly little.

-- Its power is all out of proportion to its size.

James idea is THE POWER the tongue has – it speaks with arrogance and causes a massive amount of damage – as you can see from his further illustration – **in verse 6.**