

PP Heart Talk

Part 8-James 3:1-12, 17 The Fiercest Battle

2/29-3/1/2020

Illus At an evening social for army officers and their wives, the commanding general of the base had been given a special award and opened the evening with a long speech of thanks. A lieutenant mumbled to the woman at his side, *'Why they would award him a prize is beyond me. What an old windbag.'* The woman turned to him, her jaw set, and said, *'Lieutenant, do you know who I am?'* *'No, ma'am.'* *'I am the wife of the man you just called 'an old windbag.'* *'I see'*, said the young lieutenant, *'and do you know who I am?'* *'No, I don't,'* said the general's wife. *'Good,'* said the lieutenant as he disappeared into the crowd.

Have you ever said something that you wish you could take back, wondering if you will ever get a handle on your mouth?

The tongue seems such an untameable thing, but it is just the messenger of the heart

You have heard the expressions, *'Speak your mind'*, or *'Tell me what's in your heart'*; or the older one, *'A penny for your thoughts'*

These all tell us that our words come from within us, and Jesus tells us the source: **PP *"out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."* Matthew 12:34**

James is about to impress on us the seriousness of the responsibility to speak well

PP 1-To tame the tongue, remember we have accountability

Teachers in the church were massively influential, so James warns them, ***"Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. 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."* 3:1-2**

If you are a teacher in the church, then know that we bear greater accountability before God

The power of the words for someone on a platform is massively influential

The young Christian YouTube world was rocked recently with the very popular duo of Rhett and Link deconstructing their Christian beliefs

Each of the comedic duo were involved with Campus Crusade for Christ, but each has stated they are no longer Christian and affirm, among other things, an LGBTQ lifestyle

Together, so far, there has been 340,000 views of their denial of Christianity

Yet the truth is, ***'we all stumble in many ways'***, not just famous YouTubers and teachers

None of us have tamed it completely, we are all in need of the power of God

We learned in this series that a **68 year long life speaks enough to fill 7,220 full length books**

And God will hold us accountable for every word we speak and they will give evidence of Christ's recreating work in our hearts or the rejection of Him

PP *"I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."* Matthew 12:36-37

The tongue has potential for great good or terrible evil, and James goes there next

PP 2-To tame the tongue, remember its potential for good or evil

“If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. 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. 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!” James 3:3-5

In each of these three examples, the point James is making is of the potential power of the tongue
A little metal bit in a horse's mouth can direct and control the whole horse

A small rudder can control and direct an entire ship

A little spark can begin a forest fire that wipes out a million acres

He wrote in verse 5, ***“So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.”***,
which means that though small, the tongue is incredibly influential in many lives
But not only for good, potentially evil as well: ***“How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!” 3:5b***

I'm sure you recall reading of the Great Chicago fire in October 8, 1871, allegedly started in
Catherine O'Leary's barn when the family cow knocked over a lighted lantern

By the time it was over, 300 people were killed and 100,000 left homeless, with 17,000
structures destroyed

What some don't know is that on the same day the Chicago fire began, 250 miles north, another
broke out in Peshtigo, Wisconsin, in which 1200 people perished and 1.2 million acres
burned

This one was allegedly started from small controlled burns done to clear land

The tongue has great power and it can do tremendous good, or terrible evil

James warns of the latter outcome: ***“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.” 3:6***

If you have ever had a house fire, you'll know how destructive fire is, but smoke is as well
Smoke damage can be so extensive that even if the house is still standing, the smoke ruins
everything in it, ***‘staining the whole’*** house, ***“setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.” 3:6c***

PP Our English word ***‘hell’*** here comes from the word ***Gehenna*** that James uses

Gehenna, the Valley of Hinnom, was located in a valley on the Southwestern side of Jerusalem

In the OT, some of the kings of Israel sacrificed their sons there to the false god Molech

In James' day, Gehenna was the place where the trash of Jerusalem as well as the carcasses of
dead animals and executed criminals was burned

It was said that there was continually a fire burning in Gehenna, which is why Jesus used
the fiery valley as a metaphor for His teaching on Hell, the future place for Satan and his
demons

James is strikingly telling us that the tongue can be Satan's tool, weaponized for his plans

The devil can inflame our sinful flesh to speak words that can hurt and destroy

We use just the right words to make ourselves look innocent and someone else to look wrong

This often happens at work and we can do it too

There was a ship's first mate who after a drunken binge was written up by the captain in the

ship's log with the entry: 'mate drunk today.' Months later, that first mate got his revenge

by writing in the log, 'captain sober today.'

A powerful twist of words can impact someone's career

We exaggerate or under emphasize, all the while being ruled by our own motives

Think of the malicious power of gossip, or even the empty praise of flattery

PP *Gossip is saying behind a person's back what you would never say to his or her face; flattery is saying to a person's face what you would never say behind his or her back*

Think of the weapon called a critical tongue, what is called a fault-finder or judgmentalism

A fault-finder is one who has become self-inflated by a sense of their own rightness and looks down on others with a judgmental heart

PP *"Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing."*

Proverbs 12:18

Our tongues speak lies, falsely accuse others, betray confidences and so much more

Our mouths are capable of great good, but James is impressing on us the seriousness of how damaging they often are, and he's not done yet

PP 3-To tame the tongue, remember it is beyond your power to do

"For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison." **James 3:6-8**

James has told us that we are going to be accountable for our words, that we must use our tongues good, for life, and not destruction and death

Now he will impress on us that there is no human power capable of taming them

On a windswept hill in an English country churchyard stands a drab, gray slate tombstone

The faint etchings read: **PP** *Beneath this stone, a lump of clay, lies Arabella Young, Who, on the twenty-fourth of May, began to hold her tongue.*

It took death to finally tame Arabella Young's tongue, but is that our only solution?

The Greek world took great pride in its control over the animal kingdom

It was not uncommon for the courtyards of Roman houses to have fish ponds with tamed fish

The Romans built a temple to their god of medicine, and in his temple tame serpents glided about and were supposed incarnations of the god

Those who were sick would sleep in the temple at night and if a serpent glided over them, it was supposed to be the healing touch of the god

But while mankind figured out how to control animals of all kinds, not so the tongue

PP *'no human being can tame the tongue'* means no one can reduce it to stillness or quietness

Let us take note along with Augustine that James did not say no one could tame the tongue, but rather *'no human being can tame'* it

James will show us that our only hope is in Christ as we learn to pray with the Psalmist:

PP *"Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!"*

Psalm 141:3

PP 4-To tame the tongue, remember the true source of our words

“From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.” James 3:10-12

James uses several metaphors to communicate the same thought...taming the tongue requires a transformation of the source...the heart

The kind of water you get when you open your faucet depends on the water table below ground
If you have a fig tree, don't expect olives to grow from it, or figs to come from a grapevine
In the same way, if you pipe water out of a salt pond, you aren't going to get fresh water
Our words travel up out of our hearts, and nothing changes them on their way
Speaking words of life come from hearts full of life, and words of death from hearts of death
Only a renewed heart can produce pure speech

PP *“If a cup is filled only with good water, it cannot spill even one drop of bitter water, no matter how badly it is jarred.” Oswald Chambers*

The heart must be renewed, not just at the beginning of salvation, but continually

In a few verses we see that it is God Who can tame our tongues, and He wisdom for this reason

“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.” James 3:17

PP *‘wisdom’* is the power of God to take His knowledge and apply it to our lives in pure speech
And God is willing to give it generously to any of His children who ask for it

PP *Self-control without God's control, leads to no control...an untamed tongue*

As we saw last week from Colossians 4:2, a Christian who speaks often to God will speak well to others

We come continually to our wisdom-giving God in prayer, asking for His wisdom, and we will see our hearts increasingly tamed

If our tongues are to be tamed, we remember first that God is holding us accountable for every word we speak

Impress on your soul the great potential that our mouths have for either good or evil, life or death

But let these two truths settle in your heart that in our own power, we cannot tame the tongue

Be encouraged that God can tame it and He does this by going to the source and generously giving wisdom to any Christian who asks

So pray continually as you wage war against your heart and its messenger, your tongue

Amen?

Pray