

James the Just: The Tongue

Today I'm continuing in the series "James the Just." If that doesn't sound familiar to you, it's because I started it about a year and a half ago and in the midst of it, God directed me elsewhere.

The book of James is my favorite of the epistles in the New Testament. James teaches about practical faith. He teaches righteous living. These are things I love.

James is the brother of Jesus, but he wasn't always a believer. But we see once he got the revelation of who Jesus was, he became a great leader in the early church and declared himself a bondservant of Christ.

Where I left off in the series was chapter 2 verse 14 which is about faith and works but I already preached an entire message on that called "Faith vs Faith". If you want to listen to that and the beginning of this series, you can find them all on our website. www.freedomreignsinchrist.org

I'm starting back up at the beginning of chapter 3 where James teaches us about the power of the tongue.

The tongue is a powerful member of the body. You realize that you can't even speak if you don't have a tongue? You can make noises but you can't speak clearly, you can't converse and relay your feelings as easily as you can with a tongue.

But I used to think the tongue was the strongest muscle in the human body. It was one of those things I heard once so I just assumed it was true. The tongue is like Satan, yes it has power but sometimes we give it way more credit that it deserves. Just because something has power or is powerful, that doesn't mean it has to have power OVER YOU!

The tongue is used to bless and it is used to curse. The tongue says some smart things and it says some stupid things. The tongue is used to encourage and build up, and it is used to slander and tear down. So the tongue can be good or it can be bad.

James 3:1-2 (HCSB)

1 Not many should become teachers, my brothers, knowing that we will receive a stricter judgment, 2 for we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a mature man who is also able to control his whole body.

James emphasizes the great responsibility of a teacher. He is specifically talking about people in an official teaching or preaching role. Teaching and preaching are not to be taken lightly. Those who are in these roles are held to a higher standard.

Teachers and preachers are still sinful people saved by faith. Not only do they stumble (make mistakes) but they can cause those who they are teaching to stumble!

This is why we won't let just anyone teach and preach. If someone is leading a class or preaching from this pulpit, then the elders of this church trust them, it means that we believe they know the great responsibility they have in their teaching. We believe they carefully study and present the truth of the gospel, not their opinions. But that doesn't mean they won't make mistakes....there is only one perfect man and He is seated in heaven, in glory and power!

Everyone else makes mistakes, James reinforces this by saying that *"if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a mature man who is also able to control his whole body."*

...other translations say perfect man. The greek word teleios means brought to its end, finished, that which is perfect. How many of you are perfect? Me neither!

This is why it is crucial that teachers and preachers are aware of the severity of the things they teach. It will NOT be without error 100% of the time. The key is that they know and understand that and they seek the leading of the Holy Spirit!

My greatest fear in preaching is that I won't represent God's Word truthfully and accurately. Because of that I don't get up here and "wing it", because of that I spend time studying the scriptures, looking up the Greek words, reading other sermons, reading commentaries, most importantly, listening to the Holy Spirit. I'm a man, I make mistakes.....but I strive for perfection, I aim to please God.

If a man does not stumble in what he says, then he is perfect and able to control the whole body. Did you know the tongue had that much power? If you can just control your tongue, you can control your whole body!

James 3:3-5 (HCSB)

3 Now when we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we also guide the whole animal. 4 And consider ships: Though very large and driven by fierce winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5 So too, though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts great things. Consider how large a forest a small fire ignites.

Have you ever thought about how a 195 lb man can control and direct a 2000 lb horse? It is by using this bit that is in the horse's mouth. When the man pulls left the horse knows to go left, the man pulls right, the horse knows to go right. If the man pulls back, the horse stops.

The entire horse is responding to and obeying the direction of this bit which is only about 5-6" in length. It may be small compared to the horse, but it's power and influence over the whole horse's body is great!

James also references a rudder on a ship. A very large ship is controlled by the direction of a rudder. The size of the rudder compared to the ship is actually a pretty complex equation but I've been canoeing before. A 17' canoe can be easily steered and directed just by placing the end of your oar in the water on the left or the right.

We went this last year and Xander had never canoed before. So he sat in the front, I was in the back. This way I could see what he was doing and teach him how to row to speed up, slow down, turn left, turn right. As he did most of the work, I sat back and just stuck the end of my oar in the water to make corrections. Just a few seconds and I could have us moving right or left.

A horse's bit and a ship's rudder while very small in comparison to what it controls or directs, has great power over it! With this small thing, the direction of the whole thing is determined!

"So too, though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts great things. Consider how large a forest a small fire ignites."

A fire can start with a spark or a small flame. A fire can spread faster than you ever intended. A fire can cause great destruction before you even notice that it was spread. This is how the tongue works.

Often times people speak carelessly....I've heard people say something about someone I know, they didn't think anyone else can hear it. My wife and kids were at a restaurant in town a few years ago and heard the table right next to them talking about ME.

It doesn't matter if you are just visiting, just joking, or whatever other excuse you want to make. The fact of the matter is....you and only you are responsible for the words that pass through your lips.....choose them carefully!

Matthew 12:36-37 (HCSB)

36 I tell you that on the day of judgment people will have to account for every careless word they speak. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

But wait.....we are going to be judged for the things we say? YES, you are!

But wait....I'm saved by faith, right? I hope so!

There is a reason why the words we speak are tied to our judgement....

Luke 6:45 (HCSB)

45 A good man produces good out of the good storeroom of his heart. An evil man produces evil out of the evil storeroom, for his mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart.

If your mouth spews trash, it's because your heart is a landfill....it stinks and it's rotten and everything that flows out of it stinks and is rotten too!

I challenge you to go out to the landfill and find something good. You can't because even if it has the appearance of good, it will stink because of where you got it.

Yes, James did basically say that we can't control everything we say, we are sinners. But notice that Matthew 12:36 said you will be judged for every CARELESS word that you speak. Other translations say idle words, the Greek word is argos meaning lazy, shunning the labour which one ought to perform.

It's referring to a pattern or careless words. It's referring to you being lazy with what you say, not carefully considering the ramifications of your words. This is when you ignore the responsibility of being a Christian and thinking before you speak, shunning the work that you are to perform....godliness!

It's an overflow of your heart! Is your heart a landfill? If you are speaking carelessly, then you don't just need to learn to shut your mouth, you need a transformed heart. I say this with all seriousness.....you have to seek God on that, He is the only one that can do it!

I don't think we realize how disastrous the tongue is and can be....

James 3:6 (HCSB)

6 And the tongue is a fire. The tongue, a world of unrighteousness, is placed among the parts of our bodies. It pollutes the whole body, sets the course of life on fire, and is set on fire by hell.

The tongue is not "like a fire", it IS A FIRE! It's sinful words rapidly causes destruction and ruins everything around it. It pollutes or contaminates the whole body.

People are so infatuate with their physical appearance. They want to make sure they look good. That's all your appearance is, what you look like. It's not what you actually are, it's just how you appear. You can be the most physically beautiful person in the world....you can appear to be beautiful.....but people know the truth, who you really are when you open your mouth!

1 Peter 3:3-4 (HCSB)

3 Your beauty should not consist of outward things like elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold ornaments or fine clothes. 4 Instead, it should consist of what is inside the

heart with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very valuable in God's eyes.

The way you speak to others determines your beauty, are you respectful or are you mouthy. Do you speak well of other people or trash them.

If you are mouthy, bossy, gossipy, slanderous, you are ugly. Ugly is contagious.

James said the tongue sets the course of life on fire! This is the main thing to take away from this text today. **The words you speak will direct the course of your life!**

Proverbs 18:21 (HCSB)

21 Life and death are in the power of the tongue,
and those who love it will eat its fruit.

You can speak life, and you can speak death. These things are IN the power of the tongue. Yes, that same tongue that is set on fire by hell!

You are a sinner living in a sinful world, your first inclination, your natural desire is to speak death because your tongue is set on fire by hell. If you submit to that desire, you will speak carelessly, and you will lead a life of death.....

This is real. I know people who struggle with the same things they did years ago. They are still speaking death. The I cant's, the I wont's, all the negatives about the situation....so the circumstances remain the same.....I'll tell you what that is not....it's not faith in God....it's faith in the devil.

There's this biblical principle and truth, you reap what you sow. Oh, you may not yet, but the harvest is coming.....

Joyce Meyer once said something like this: People go around saying they are sick and tired of this and sick and tired of that, before you know it those people are actually sick and tired.

They speak this death into their lives. Your words have power, the power of life and of death.

If your life sucks.....stop talking about it and maybe it will change! Start to stand on the truths of God's Word instead of the lies of the enemy. Start speaking life, have faith, believe in the things that are unseen....

The tongue sets the course of life on fire....the course of life is not just the direction of your life but also the evil of the tongue can affect everything in your sphere of influence.....and set it on fire, this means to burn it up!

This can happen in two ways.

1. Maybe you have relationships that changed, you are no longer as close as you once were or never got as close as you wanted. If you don't know why, maybe you burned the relationship up. They got tired of the negativity.
2. Do you wonder why the people closest to you are so negative? Maybe it's because they are your friend, it only takes a spark, maybe you burned them up. Your fire spread....

The things we say have a great impact on our own lives but also on the people around us.

I'm not ok with people gossiping to each other. (Here is where every single person in the room and listening online thinks "I don't do that")

Don't call gossip venting. Don't call gossip sharing prayer requests. Don't call gossip seeking counsel or getting advice.

If you wouldn't say it with the person you are talking about in the room, then you shouldn't say it.

Your words can either be poison or the antidote.....

Have you ever started telling something and deep inside the Holy Spirit said, "No, don't say that?" It's awkward because we want to finish the sentence. But the best thing we can do is stop in the middle of the sentence and apologize to the other person for speaking out of turn.

When we tell something we shouldn't be telling, we not only defile ourselves but we defile the listener.

Now I realize issues arise, there is a model to follow.

Matthew 18:15-17 (HCSB)

15 "If your brother sins against you, go and rebuke him in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 But if he won't listen, take one or two more with you, so that by the testimony of two or three witnesses every fact may be established. 17 If he pays no attention to them, tell the church. But if he doesn't pay attention even to the church, let him be like an unbeliever and a tax collector to you.

This is the biblical model but it's rarely exercised even among church members. Our first step is usually to complain to others, second is complain to more people, third might be to tell someone in the church that might take your side.

NO, go talk to the person, then take a couple people with you (not for them to be on your side, for them to witness and give testimony of what happened) then last take it to the church, this would be the elders, not their wives or a deacon, or Sunday School class.....

The tongue has the power of life and death, it is set on fire by hell, it sets the course of life on fire for you and for others.....

James 3:7-12 (HCSB)

7 Every sea creature, reptile, bird, or animal is tamed and has been tamed by man, 8 but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 We praise our Lord and Father with it, and we curse men who are made in God's likeness with it. 10 Praising and cursing come out of the same mouth. My brothers, these things should not be this way. 11 Does a spring pour out sweet and bitter water from the same opening? 12 Can a fig tree produce olives, my brothers, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a saltwater spring yield fresh water.

The tongue can not be tamed by man....but what the tongue does is reveal the true condition of our heart.....

Jeremiah said the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.....and it's out of the overflow of the heart that the mouth speaks.....

Here is what God can do with the filthy heart....

Ezekiel 36:26 (HCSB)

26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

Would this be your cry today? Would you ask Jesus to give you a heart transplant today?

Could you be like David when he said *"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."*

Would you ask the Lord today to use your tongue to speak life?

To bless the name of Jesus
To worship Him
To give testimony of His goodness
To share the life giving Gospel