

Sermon: Gary Boyd 20th September 2009
James 3: 1-12

Subject 'Taming The Tongue'

Wow! What a subject! Taming the Tongue! God knew I needed to hear this sermon!!
Have you ever said something that you wished you had never said?
Sometimes we say it deliberately other times it just comes out. But words once spoken are spoken whether good or bad they are spoken they are out there.
We bless and we curse with our words.

There as old rhyme that we used to say. "Sticks and stones may break my bones, But names will never hurt me" You know I reckon that was a lie from Hell. We now know that names can and do hurt us.

Let's talk about the power of our words. Words can hurt or heal -- they can tear down or build up. Words are powerful.

The power of words, in some sense, shows the image of God in us. It is by the power of the Word that God created the universe. When God said, "Let there be..." there was! It is the Word become flesh that brought us salvation. The author of the letter to the Hebrews says, The Word of God is living and powerful -- it is sharper than any two edged sword." [Heb. 4:12]

Today's scripture reading from the letter of James is a critical test of Christian maturity. Paul teaches us that the Holy Spirit wants to shape the character of Christ in us. If you want to ask yourself the question, "How am I doing?" Listen to this quick assessment from James 3:2. The Living Bible puts it this way, "If anyone can control his tongue, it proves that he has perfect control over himself in every other way."

The lesson from James is a powerful blending of emotional and spiritual insight on Christian maturity. While the Apostle Paul frequently takes us to the heights of the mystery and wonder of the faith -- James is the one who speaks where the rubber meets the road. His whole letter is a kind of a, "Thanks, I needed that!"

A little bit about James

The Apostle James was the half-brother of Jesus -- as a matter of fact he thought his brother to be unbalanced! [Mk 3:21] After the crucifixion and resurrection James came to believe that Jesus was indeed the Son of God who came to save the world. The letter of James opens as the writer calls himself, "...a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. Legend tells us that shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, when many Jews were becoming Christian, James was commanded to renounce Jesus. When he refused, James was thrown from the top of the temple and then stoned to death as he lay dying from his injuries. James' willingness to die for his faith is one of the more compelling arguments you will hear for the claims of Jesus.

It may be that the memory of his own careless words spoken about his half-brother helped James to write one of the most powerful passages about the tongue in all literature.

Consider for a moment the wonder of our power of speech. When we hear a word, the physical movement that enters our ear and then inner ear activates 24,000 little nerves which react through the limbic system and results in the sending of hormones into the body. Our whole physical system reacts, when we hear words of care or condemnation. When we hear words that bring us pain or anxiety, the physical-chemical reaction takes 72 hours to subside. No wonder some people live in a perpetual state of agitation and upset!

It is critical for those of us who claim Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives to look very carefully at his Lordship in our power of speech. Most people are far more sensitive than we know and when we're honest, most of us are more sensitive than we dare to admit.

In our closest relationships we live out the old song, "you always hurt the one you love..." -- especially with our tongues. We know just the right buttons to push.

Rare is the person who never participates in destructive conversation that can only be called gossip. Have you ever said or heard something like, "Well -- guess what Bob told me about Alice?"

Our scripture lesson from James may seem harsh. But if you look at it carefully with an open mind, you will see he is right on target. The unbridled tongue he says, "...is set on fire by hell."

Let me ask you the following, three questions

I have never hurt another person with my words - true or false

I have never repeated something about another person that I did not know for certain was absolutely true. - True or false

I never participate in idle talk about other people and their lives. - True or false

James says that the tongue is like a spark that sets off a whole fire. We are all capable of saying things that can start world war three. It is like throwing a spark into a puddle of petrol and the whole thing flames up instantly. The tongue is like a spark that instantaneously ignites a huge fire around and about us.

But we need to speak don't we – that is how we communicate (mostly). We also communicate with a look, or a touch, a smile, a frown, or by the volume or inflection in our voice. We also communicate with a wave of the hand, a beckon or an upturned thumb or an upturned finger!

Communication is a very important part of our lives. But with our tongue we either bless or we curse. It is like sin we either do or we don't. Take lying for example. We exaggerate the truth for effect but if it is not the truth then it is a lie.

Someone once said that a half truth is a whole lie – but that is another subject on its own.

Let's look back to the tongue.

You know it is not even just the tongue but the voice box and the lungs. Sometimes it is not what we say but how we say it. Sometimes we say something and it is taken as anger or annoyance when it is not meant that way.

If I say (softly) 'now, listen to me or (loudly and fast) 'Now, listen to me. That is quite different isn't it?

My wife, Cilla and I were talking one day about anger and she made a comment that I was basically an angry person. I asked her when and asked for an example.

And she said when I teach people to Water Ski I was angry if they did not follow my instructions right..... and I said "I was never angry when I was teaching someone to ski". I was in fact happy they wanted to learn to do something that I love doing. Well Melissa Barry (then Melissa Freeman) was in the room so I called out to her. "Hey Melsie when I was teaching you to water-ski did you ever think I was angry with you?" . She responded 'Oh Yes!!!'

Obviously the tone of my voice and the way I was delivering the instruction came out as perceived anger. And you know what 'Perception is everything'. It is what people perceive that they believe to be true. Sometimes we get the chance to correct the incorrect perceptions – but I wonder how many of us are carrying a wound or wounds because of what we perceived someone said or did (or even did not say or did not do)

You know sometimes we are simply busy doing something and someone asks us a question and we give them a quick answer so we can get back to our task and if we are not careful we leave that person feeling short changed or hurt or even wounded. They may even choose not to ask us again because of the pain we caused – or they think we caused!

James said, "No one can tame the tongue. We can tame all kinds of animals. We can tame lions and tigers and elephants and dogs and parrots and dolphins and whales. I have seen all these bird and animals trained, but James says that no one can tame the tongue. No one. Absolutely no one.

James also says that the tongue is also two-sided. The tongue gives thanks to God in one breath and in the next breath; we curse and judge our fellow human beings. For example, we come to church on Sunday morning, and we will sing our songs of praise and thanksgiving. Then, on the way home from church, we may say to our friend or spouse, "Did you see so and so today? Did you see the way that they were dressed? Did you see the look that he gave to her?" A person sings praise and thanksgiving and we walk right out of church and we are critical of someone that we saw.

So James, the brother of Jesus and the pastor the church in Jerusalem, was thinking about the wise and practical implications of the love commandment; that is, what does it mean to love our neighbor as ourselves. What does this perfect law mean for our care of the widows and orphans, our placating the rich and looking down our noses at the poor? What does this perfect law mean for the tongue?

Knowing that none of us can control our tongue; knowing that all of us are guilty of name calling, hostility, judging others and gossip; knowing that all of us have this problem; James said that it is very difficult to live out the law of love. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. It is very difficult to live out this law of love because of ... the tongue.

People we need to be so careful in how we communicate. Jesus when asked what is greatest commandment said this:-

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this; love your neighbour as your self. There is no commandment greater than these" These are Jesus words as found in Mark 12 Vs 30-31

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this love, your neighbour as your self.”

With Our tongues (and voices) we praise our Lord and Father and with it we curse people, who have been made in God’s likeness” / James 3: 10. Says My Brothers and Sisters this should not be. How can this be?

God loves all his people! We are God’s Children, saved by Jesus blood, and being born again Christian believers we are called to love all his people too!

You know, it often amazes me that God really enjoys our praise and thanksgiving. God takes pleasure in it. God asks for it. All through the Bible, God wants and asks for praise and thanksgiving. The psalms are filled with praise and thanksgiving, as if God wants its. As if God needs it. As if God absolutely enjoys it.

We too are made in God’s likeness and whether we are little children or older adults, we need strong self esteem. Our self esteem is built and nourished and enlarged when we receive praise and thanksgiving. As much as a garden needs rain in order to grow, so we need praise and thanksgiving in order to be healthy human beings. That is the way we are wired.

The opposite is also true. The cruelest, unkind thing you can ever do is to withhold praise and thanksgiving from one another. To withhold praise and thanksgiving from one’s spouse or children or family or friends, is not the way God made us. God has made the tongue in such a way is that we are to express praise and thanksgiving with it. People need it and we need it

The tongue. It is so small. It is so small but it is so significant. It takes a little rudder and you can steer a great big ship. You can take a small bridle and you can steer a great big horse. You take a small tongue and it steers the whole direction of our personality. Jesus said, “This is the fundamental moral law by which you are to live. You are to love your neighbor the way that I love your neighbor. You are to love your neighbor with words of praise and thanksgiving.

**“Thoughts unexpressed may fall back dead
But even God can’t kill words after they’re said!”**

James concludes that the tongue can not be tamed -- except - as in his metaphor of the ship-- except - the rudder which determines the course be controlled by the pilot of the ship. "Look at ships," he says, "Although they are so large and driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder whenever the pilot desires."

You see, we are the pilots and our tongues are the rudders that determine the course of our lives and the lives of others. If we are able to control our tongue, James suggests, we have begun a strong degree of maturity in our relationship with Christ. Jesus Christ is the Master Pilot who can work in our hearts to pilot the rudders of our tongues...

Therefore the key to taming the tongue is to bring our lives more completely under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

We are entrusted with a great power, Our Tongue (and our speech)

We are given a gift that can create or destroy. We can build up or tear down with this gift.

One of the strongest warnings Jesus ever issued was about how we speak.

Listen carefully:

Jesus said "I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter..." Matt. 12:36

Why is this issue so important to Jesus?

The spoken word is powerful. We can draw people to the love of God with our speech or we can turn them off. We can set the course of a child's life with loving or careless words
And turn a young person around with positive nourishing words.

I encourage you today during communion if you need to have prayer to help you use your tongue and speech in more positive ways to go to the prayer support members and have them pray with you.

Closing prayer

Father we thank you for the gift of speech and for the gift of our tongues. Please lord help us to bring our tongues under your Lordship. Help us to listen to your Holy Spirits guidance as we speak to each other with love. And Father May you touch our tongues and heal them - and fill them with Praise and Thanksgiving.

We ask this in Jesus name. Amen