

Today, I'd like to talk to you about the tongue...The tongue... The tongue is a very powerful tool...

From the tongue come words...And words are extremely powerful...words have the power to integrate or divide, to inspire or to discourage, to inform or to deceive...

Words have the power to create...

- **To create nature:** Light was created by God with the words, "Then God **SAID**, "Let there be light"; and there was light."

Words have the power To create movements: "I have a dream that we will one day live in a nation where men will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character..."

Words also have the power to create emotion:

Words have the power to create **laughter:**

"Hello my name is Inigo Montoya, you killed my father...Prepare to die..."

Or as a boy named Ralphie said, "I want an official Red Ryder, carbine action, two-hundred shot range model air rifle..." Only to hear in return, "You'll shoot your eye out..."

Words have the power to hurt another:

The old saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me..." is simply not true...

Yet Words also have the power to inspire:

FDR stated, "December 7, 1941 a date which will live in infamy..." or as another president said 20 years later... "Think not what your country can do for you...But what you can do for your country..."

Words have the power to heal: "Four score and seven years ago, our forefathers brought forth to this land a new nation...conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal..."

Words also have the power to ruin and destroy...destroy even kingdoms... "Well, let them eat bread..."

Transition:

Yet these famous phrases are only the tip of the icebergs...For many more words and phrases have inspired humans for millennia...And Many of us have far more quotes and words that we

have stashed away...

For many of us...We can reach back even to our childhood and remember kind words that shaped our life...Or perhaps harsh words that do the same...

Yet we also all have times where we felt like the Words of God came through our mouth at just the right time for another person...Yet we all also have times we felt like the disciple Peter...Shoving our foot in our mouth...

WE:

But there must be two inevitable conclusions...For here..for every person in here...there must be two inevitable conclusions...**One, that words are powerful...**Words shape and mold others, Words can create movements, inspiration or division...

And two, that every human being...every Male and female, young and old, struggle to control the tongue...That the tongue is powerful and everyone struggles to control it...The flames fly from the tongue effecting generations of people....

But why is the tongue such an issue? Why do we struggle with it so much?

Transition: Well, today, James addresses the issue that we all struggle with...

James addresses the **TONGUE**...James first gives us a Caution in verses 1-2, Consequence in verses 3-5, and then James urges for our consistency of tongue as he give us some very practical application in verses 9-12...

Transition: So come with me to James 3, James 3 and we will begin this morning with a caution in verses 1-2...

GOD:

Read verses 1-2, “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment...For we all stumble in many ways, if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well...”

What group does James first caution? James first warns teachers...that they will incur a stricter judgment...**And based on the immediate context, their judgment** will specifically come for what they say and teach...

Who are teachers? James is not addressing any and all teachers...He is not addressing school teachers or college professors but specifically anyone who teaches the Word of God...

He provides a warning to all Bible teachers of a stricter judgment... But Why do Bible teachers receive a stricter judgment for what they say?

Well, first they teach with their tongue... They teach the Word of God with their tongues... So every teacher's content must be accurate...

But based on the context it also seems to imply that teachers are not only judged for their Biblical content but also for anything they say... Teachers are not just judged for what they teach but also for what they say outside of the classroom outside of Bible Studies...

Transition: And His warning should cause two reactions for each one of us...

Reaction #1: A hesitancy to attain the position of a teacher... The hesitancy should not keep us from teaching... But rather to force any Sunday school teacher, any Bible study leader, any pastor or elder to be cautious and respect the position and privilege it is to teach the scripture...

Reaction #2: To realize the gravity of responsibility... Think about it: the gravity of eternity is in a Bible teacher's hands... The proclamation of the Gospel through the mouths of teachers can dictate the eternal direction of someone's eternal life...

It not only dictates one's eternal destination but also the eternal distinction of our sanctification...

Transition: So, James first warns teachers of the importance of controlling their tongue in verse 1... But then James spreads his cloak not just over teachers but all believers... Look at verse 2...

Read verse 2... "For we all stumble in many *ways*. If anyone does not stumble in ^[b]what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well."

Now notice something with me... notice the first phrase... "*For we all stumble in many ways...*" What does this phrase tell us? So, the tongue is not the only area we all struggle with... So let us make a conclusion... There is no perfect preacher nor human except for the Lamb that was without blemish that paid our sin... Christ Jesus...

Notice something else also... Notice the rest of verse 2... "If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well..."

Notice the process of sanctification is revealed here in verse 2... In our process of becoming more and more holy... Notice what is the last thing to go?

The tongue...Right? Because if a man controls his tongue the He is a “Perfect” or “complete”...In control of the rest of his body...

Friends, we all struggle with what we say...In fact, the last thing to gain full control in our pursuit to become like Jesus Christ is our tongue...Is what we say...

The ultimate sign of spiritual maturity is controlling one’s tongue... (repeat)

Transition: But then James moves on from cautioning teachers and Christian AND He moves on to then discuss the three consequences of an untamed tongue by using three vivid metaphors in verses 3-5...

Notice the three metaphors with me beginning in verse 3,

Read verses 3-5, “Now if we put the bits into the horses mouth so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. ⁵ So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and *yet* it boasts of great things.”

Net us zoom in on the first metaphor...Metaphor #1: The bit and the horse in verse

3...What does a bit do in a horse’s mouth? A bit in a horse’s mouth does more than direct him, right?...

Perhaps, many of you have been on the back of a horse before...Although they are generally tame horses always terrified me as a kid...Yet despite my fear of them, I have ridden a horse several times...So, from my limited experience, I remember that a bit in a horse’s mouth does more than direct...

Think about it: If you are on the back of a horse...The bit is in the horse’s mouth attached to the reigns which the human holds...

Now, If you were on the back of that giant horse and you decided to yank on it hard...How would the horse behave? It would probably buck up in the air...

Or, If I were near a water trough and loosened the bit...How would the horse react? They would drink...

The bit does not only direct but it also controls a horse’s behavior... The bit in the horse’s mouth controls their behavior...

So, what is James saying to us today?

Consequence #1 of an uncontrolled tongue... **It controls us...An untamed tongue controls our behavior...**

When we get upset, how do we typically lose our temper? With our tongue....

When we are joyful, how do we typically express our joy? With our tongue

When we encounter a problem, how do we typically figure it out? With our tongue...We either talk to someone else about it or to ourselves...

When we are emotionally hurt, how do we typically react? With our tongue...

An untamed tongue controls us... (Repeat)

Transition: What else is a consequence of an untamed tongue? Look at verse 4...

Read verse 4, “Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires...”

Consequence #2 to an untamed tongue...It Direct Our Paths...An untamed tongue directs our paths...Or, let me put it another way...The tongue often dictates your destiny...

The tongue often directs the health of your marriage...The health of your relationship with friends or with your children...the health of a relationship is often founded in what we say...

The tongue directs your reputation...The wholesomeness of your speech or the lack thereof...can dictate what others think of you...

The tongue directs your career...The way you talk to your boss or the way you talk to your co-workers often dictates your promotions or demotions...

The tongue can even direct the health of an entire organization...The speech of the leadership in any business trickles down throughout the entire organization adopted at every level...

Friends, What we say matters...And what we say has consequences...for good and for bad...

Finally, the final consequence is found in verse 5... “So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things...See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire...”

Consequence #3 of an untamed tongue...Consequence #3: The Tongue Can Have Limitless Destruction...

An untamed tongue has limitless destructive force on all those around you...

How do I get this limitless aspect? Think about a fire...As long as there is flammable material nearby the consequences spread...Friends, with an untamed tongue...The influence of your words spread to anyone around you...

Illustration: To tell you a quick story...**Perhaps the time I personally witnessed** the limitless destruction of a fire was when I recently visited the Smoky Mountain National Park...The Smokies are one of the most beautiful places...The beautiful rolling hills and green lush forests and are awe inspiring...

Yet Recently, While driving up toward Clingman's Dome I noticed what looked like a hole in the side of these huge mountains...I mean Throughout the park there were blank spots...all over these former lush green mountains...

Yet Upon closer examination...I noticed black charcoal burn marks on many of the trees...

An actual forest fire about a little over a year ago and swept throughout the park...it spread throughout the region and caused widespread devastation through the entire National Park... ..

And do you know how it was started? Supposedly, it started with a simple match...Supposedly, some campers began a fire while camping on the Chimney Tops accidentally setting ablaze of thousands acres...

That match...did not just affect them...But it affected thousands and thousands of acres and thousands of people...In fact, a friend of mine had their mountain cabin burned to the ground by that one match...

Friends, our mouths are that one match...The words that come out of our mouth are that one match...And based on what we say...It affects all those around us and can even spread to people that we do not even know...

Transition: So, James first provides a caution, then three consequences illustrated with three metaphors...James then in verses 6-8 James provides all of us a bit of a reality check...

Notice the first reality check in verse 6...

Read verses 6,

“And the tongue is a fire...the very world of iniquity, the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life and set on fire by hell...”

Notice what James does here...in this verse...Notice James takes these metaphors in verses 3-5 then summarizes them in this one verse forcing his audience to have a reality check...The tongue defiles the entire body...It literally stains us...Controls our behavior... Sets on fire the course of our life...It directs our paths...And is set on fire by hell...It spreads to others...like fire...The enemy uses our tongue to devastate and spread to unsuspecting victims...”

Transition: James in his effort to drive home the three consequences of an untamed tongue...James gives his first reality check...

Reality Check #1: The tongue defiles us...or stains us... (Word study?)

The Tongue defiles us or more literally stains us...

Transition: But then he gives us Reality Check Number 2 in verses 7-8...

Read verses 7-8, “For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. ⁸ But no one can tame the tongue; *it is* a restless evil *and* full of deadly poison.”

Reality Check #2: The tongue is difficult to tame...The tongue is difficult to tame and is dangerous full of deadly poison...

But friends let me ask you a question... Why does James spend eight verses regarding the dangers of the tongue? Why does James give a caution, consequences then a reality check regarding the tongue?

Friends, perhaps the most dangerous weapon in the world is untamed tongue...But even MORE dangerous is a person who does not realize that their own tongue is untamed...

The most dangerous person in the world is an careless person with an untamed tongue...Our society has plenty of examples of people with a careless untamed tongue...

But allow me to illustrate the danger of a tongue in the mouth of careless person...

Think about this: A gun is a dangerous thing...Right? But a gun in the hand of someone careless.....is a recipe for disaster...for a deadly disaster

Friends, the tongue is very dangerous...It is FULL OF DEADLY POISON...But even more dangerous is an untamed tongue in the mouth of an ignorant careless person...(Pause)

Friends, the tongue is dangerous and difficult to control...But perhaps if we realize its danger

then we will be more cautious and less ignorant limiting its danger...

Transition: So James gives a caution, consequence, a check or reality check...But then he gives a beautiful practical application in verses 9-10...

Read verse 9-10... "With it we bless *our* Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; ¹⁰ from the same mouth come *both* blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way."

What is James' practical application for the tongue? Be consistent...Right? Be consistent

Notice what he says... "With it we bless the Lord and with it we curse men...Who have been made in the image of God...My brethren, these things ought not to be this way..."

James' point: Be consistent...Be consistent with the tongue...

My point today: Be consistent with the tongue...

Rarely does a person pray to God with lies dripping with foul language and sin...Why? Rarely does a person pray to God with gossip spewing from his lips...Why? Because we Fear Him, Right?

In the same way that we respectfully talk to God...We should also respectfully talk to man...We must be consistent....

When we talk to man, our lips should not be dripping with lies or fables...when we talk to man our lips should not be dripping with gossip or division...When we talk to people our lips should not be dripping with anger or a temper, nor with crass talk or filth...

Be consistent... Why should we respect and be consistent before man? Look at verse 9 "Because all men are made in the likeness of God..." God created us all in his image...And as his image bearers, we should respect each other as such...

Transition: But notice how James closes out this section...James again shows off his brilliant writing prose because notice what James uses again in verses 11-12... two metaphors...James uses verse 9-10 to communicate his point then verses 11-12 to illustrate his point...

Look at verse 11-12...Read verses 11-12, "¹¹ Does a fountain send out from the same opening *both* ^[g]fresh and bitter *water*? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor *can* salt water produce ^[h]fresh."

His first metaphor is of a fountain or more literally a natural spring...The inclusion of the natural spring metaphor here demonstrates James' location of writing from the Palestinian area...Notice here that James references both a bitter and fresh spring...

Because it is interesting to note here that in the Land of Israel both bitter and fresh springs were very common...Bitter springs were very common in the Rift Valley (the valley containing the Jordan River) for the ground was laden with minerals...Think about the Dead Sea...It is evidence of the Rift Valley's bitter minerals...

But alongside the presence of bitter spring, fresh springs were also common in the area providing life to all those around...

One commentator adds, "The point is that at its source, a spring is either one or the other, either bitter or fresh...and a spring either aids life or inhibits it..." Friends, **Does our tongue aid life or inhibit it?**

The commentator continues, "Both metaphors further connects with the fact that it is inappropriate for the tongue, the instrument of teaching and words, to produce both blessing and curse..."

Transition: James' caution, consequence and reality check all lead to one central application... To Be Consistent...Do not have both bitter and fresh words coming from your mouth...Talk to men as you would talk to God...Talk wholesomely to all people both family, friend and foe in a way that brings life to others and does not inhibit...

Transition: Now, I don't know about you... But I personally find this section of James to be very convicting...**Personally to me, James 3:1-12 is the most convicting passage in the whole Book of James...** Because we all *including myself* struggle with the tongue...It forces me and all of us to think about the conversations we have on a daily basis...With those inside the church and outside as well...

Personally, as I think about the tongue... I must first apologize...My tongue has not been consistent and since it is the last thing to go in my sanctification process... I will likely continue to struggle

I apologize if I have offended you and I apologize for the future when I unintentionally offend you...

Transition: But friends, because today's passage is so practical and so relevant to every human

being...I'd like to take some extended time for the application section of today's message...

Transition: So, now, as we head toward closing I'd like to answer the question, "So What? How do I apply this passage to my life...."

YOU:

In order to apply the text today, first I'd like to start with a reality check...

Friends, an untamed tongue in the hands of an ignorant careless person is the most dangerous weapon of all...

Transition: So we each must personally perform Step #1...A Personal Reality Check

Step #1: Reality Check

Personal Reality Check:

If James' point today is to Be consistent...then let me ask you a question...Are you consistent?

(Repeat) Do people at work know you the same as the people at church?

Do your friends know you the same as your family?

Do your neighbors know you the same as your best friend?

Or...

Is your tongue the same in prayer as it is in public or behind closed doors?

Is your tongue consistent with all people as if it were before God?

How did you answer these questions? If poorly then perhaps a sober self-assessment is needed to erase carelessness and ignorance...

Let us take a step out and have a situational reality check

Step #2: Situational Reality Check:

Situations:

Question #1: When are you most inconsistent?

Oftentimes, our tongue becomes most untamed in certain circumstances...

Personally, my tongue is most untamed in times of stress...

Situationally, When is your tongue most inconsistent?

- Is it stress? Or times of discouragement?

- Is it a certain group of friends?

- Is it when you are fearful or uncertain of your circumstances? I had a friend one time that this very reason set them off...Anytime there were fearful...Look out bullets were flying...

Situationally, When are you most likely to lose your temper? What “sets it off”?

- Is it when someone disagrees with you?
- Is it when someone does not show you respect
- Or is it when someone spreads a rumor about you?

Understanding the situation that causes you to have an untamed tongue is ideal to help avoid compromising situations or to recognize our tendencies ... By thinking through situations and through relationships we can begin to understand areas that we can avoid or people that we treat poorly in order to begin fixing or becoming more consistent...

Transition: Essentially Step #1 and Step #2 are to address our ignorance and carelessness...Step #3 is the step to help us be more consistent...

How do we become more consistent? How do we become more consistent before man as if we are before God?

Step #3: Speak as if God is listening...

Practical Advice: Speak to others as if God is right sitting next to them...Imagine God right behind...Because he kind of is...Right?

When you speak to your co-workers or to your spouse, when you speak to a friends or fellow church member...Let us be consistent by imagining God is right next to them...

If we would not talk disdainfully to God then pretend God is right there...

Ask yourself the question before you speak...Would God be honored in what I am saying? Would I speak to God this way? Would Jesus Himself be pleased with what I am saying...

Transition: So in order to apply this passage we must first have a personal reality check, a situational reality check, and become more consistent by speaking as if God is listening...But then we have one more step...

But Before we got to Step #4...I first want to take a time out...I want to Pause and realize something from the text...

Transition: According to James every human being struggles with their tongue...So, if every single human being struggles with the tongue then I imagine everyone in this room struggles with their tongue...

But perhaps some of you have regrets from the past...Perhaps you didn't handle a discussion

with a spouse well or with a son or daughter, if with a fellow church leader...If you are perhaps gritting your teeth over your words...If you are carrying the burden of shame or a grudge...

Transition: If you are sitting here this morning perhaps cringing at something you said in the past...Then I am going to offer you Step #4...

Step #4: Ask for Forgiveness....

Ask for forgiveness...

Friends, everyone of us...have someone we have hurt with our words...Unfortunately, oftentimes the ones we hurt the most are the ones we love the most...

If you have hurt someone....go ask for forgiveness... Now, don't be like the kid who's arm is twisted by his parents...saying, "I'm sorry"...

Instead, name something specific that you said that harmed that person...Say, "Ya know, Laurel, I was short with you this morning and didn't listen...I apologize for it..."

But let us also remember...A sincere apology is not just asking for forgiveness but is also a moment of change...Truly asking for forgiveness should be a moment of repentance...When we ask for forgiveness let us take it upon ourselves to also correct the behavior...

Because think about it...If we only ask for forgiveness and don't correct the behavior then we will be a broken record of forgiveness...Repeating the same thing over and over...

Friends burn the broken record...Let us BE CONSISTENT in our speech before all man as if it were before God...

And friends listen...if someone asks you for forgiveness...Then FORGIVE...FORGIVE...FORGIVE...

WE:

GOOD QUOTE on the tongue

