

Jas15 – Your Tongue & Your Destiny James 3:1-5

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Open your Bibles. Title of the message today, “Your Tongue and Your Destiny.” We’re going to James 3:1-5.

In 2003, seems like forever ago, this church was in its infant stage when the demonic principalities and powers let loose a full scale demonic attack on me personally, and on my family. Those principalities and powers that had been assigned to this area, this town, which had been so successful for so many years running churches out of this town, they only had one purpose in their attack on me and my family. They just wanted to destroy the church, that’s it. All they wanted for to make sure the church did not exist. They didn’t attack me and my family because we were anything special; they attacked us because it’s a method that the enemy uses so successfully to destroy churches. Take the pastor out, take the church out. I felt for quite awhile the enemy was going to be successful in his plan.

Here’s my point. Here’s the enemy’s whole war plan. Get a hold of one person’s tongue. And from the intensity of the spiritual attack during those times, I might even say “possess” one person’s tongue, because it was like nothing I had ever seen. It wasn’t really the demonic control of one person’s tongue that almost brought this church down. It was the large majority of the remainder of the congregation joining in what that one person’s tongue was trying to do. One person’s tongue started the flame, incensed by hell itself, and a good portion of the congregation joined in and fanned the flame.

I know now, and I always knew to some extent, but I know now that most of the people involved in that season of literally “hell on earth” in this church for me and my family, I know that most of those people weren’t specifically controlled by the enemy. They were just doing what their tongue did. They were doing what their tongue did naturally. One tongue starts the flame, the rest of the tongues fan the flame by sin nature. The enemy very often succeeds in his goal to destroy a pastor or a church.

More people than I ever imagined believed what were really, honestly demonic lies about me and my family. Not one of those people, and I’m talking like two-thirds of the church, not one ever came to me and asked me if it was true. Not one. Including the leader that was involved. Not one ever said, “Hey by the way Dave is this stuff true?” Not one. They believed it. They loved it. Because the Enquirer is a successful magazine. Because we love to hear the horrible. It was bad.

The enemy had done his “intelligence.” He had done his spy work, he knew me really well. He knew two things about me very well. He knew if he could get people to attack my personal integrity OR and especially AND if he could get people to attack my family he knew I would “blow a gasket.” And I did. And he led me right up to it, and I poured all the gasoline on the fire he needed. Because he knew exactly how to set me off to try to take me out and my family out in order to try to take this church out.

Hell sat in church and was way more active than the Christians were during that season. In the end, the Lord kept me standing. If you’re in the ministry I want you to hear why. Number one, because the accusations weren’t true. That’s why. And number two, because even though I was an idiot and I responded poorly, and responded in anger, and responded sinfully, even though – I was still walking uprightly with the Lord. And so there’s a little side note here for you, if you’re a minister, you walk true, in genuine, personal righteousness. You stay true to the Lord. And you ignore the enemy’s inspiration of slander and accusation and demonic lies. You shut it out and you walk straight with the Lord, and he will be your salvation. And he will be your rock and he will be your strength. You let him handle it. Cause if you get involved (if you’re anything like me) you’ll just make it worse like I did.

The enemy has no interest in the truth. You know that, right? The enemy has no interest in the truth. He only has interest in one thing. He has interest in using your tongue to fan the flame of his destructive work. Your tongue. My tongue. That’s his only purpose; to use our tongues for his advantage, for his success.

In 2009, that’s six years later, we had kind of a wave two of a similar attack. Same enemy, similar approach. Even brought back some of his favorite soldiers to try to stir it up again. But the only weapon he used, even in round two, was the tongue of Christians. That was his only weapon. For hell to gain victory in this community and in this church the only weapon he needed, the only weapon he used was the tongue of Christians.

Do you think that’s anything new in the church? Do you think we are unique as a church or unique as a town? Say no, because I meet with pastors (so many pastors) all the time and the one thing we are tired of hearing about is how the enemy uses the tongues of the people in our congregations to try and destroy us. We’ve heard it so much we don’t even want to go to the meetings to hear that again.

James had the same problem. Remember, James was very probably the first book written in the New Testament. And James addresses head on the power of the tongue in the very first book written to the New Testament church. That’s where we’re going

Let's pray. *We need to just hear this Lord. We need to be strong. We need to be broken. We need to be courageous enough to hear and broken enough for you to speak to us. Lord you've done a great work here and your Word wants to do a life transforming work. Show us Lord the power of the tongue. And show us how our tongue can set our very destiny. Show us now we pray, in Jesus name, amen.*

So - A lady comes up to her pastor and says "Pastor, I'm really struggling with my tongue. It's time - I want to put my tongue on the altar." And the pastor says, "I'm sorry Ma'am - but our altar is not that big!"

We gotta talk about the power of the tongue. We gotta talk honestly about the power of the tongue. We have to talk about the power of our tongue personally. The Bible is never talking to that other person that you think it's talking to. Listen, if God wanted to talk to the other person you think he is talking to, he would just talk to them. This is always what I gently and lovingly try to tell people when they tell me what God wants me to do. I say listen, I spend a lot of time with God. He can bring it up any time he wants. This is for us, personally. This is about our tongue not their tongue. It's about the power of our tongue. Listen, this warning is for us. And the warnings in the Book of James about the power of the tongue are absolutely the hardest hitting (in my opinion) focus that he has in his book.

We've already been shot between the eyes twice, just ramping up to this section.

James 1:19 (ESV)

19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;

James 1:26 (ESV)

26 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

Those are pretty "in your face" warnings. Apparently, he's not done. Starting in Chapter 3 verses 1-12 there are four more paragraphs (if you will – the Bible wasn't really written in paragraphs) four more subjects that James deals with in these twelve verses. And so we are going to do those two this message and two in our next message.

First exhortation is focused on those who think they should be teachers. Let me just tell you before we get into this, the first exhortation obviously would apply to formal teachers, formal leaders, but you know that the church is full (you may be one, you may know one) of people who desire to have influence over other people. Do you know that?

Have you ever been around somebody in the church and really they just have a desire to teach you something, to show you something, to reveal something to you. I'm not saying that's bad, I'm just saying that's who James is talking to. Let's let him say what he desires to say.

The first exhortation sets the bar on the seriousness of our words. It sets the benchmark (if you will) on the seriousness of our words.

James 3:1 (ESV)

I Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

We who teach will be judged with greater judgment, greater strictness. The emphasis is not so much on the ministry training being a teacher part, but the emphasis is on we who assume that position are subjecting ourselves to greater judgment. To a stricter judgment. The warning is to set our speech in the correct light so that we understand that God is not messing around. Especially when you claim to be speaking on his behalf or explaining something that he said. If there is someone who is looking to us in the church, obviously especially in a leadership position, but if there is someone looking to you for counsel, for direction, for revelation from God, be afraid. Because God is watching. And he is listening. And you might hear him say like Ricky Ricardo to his wife Lucy "Hey Lucy, you have some 'splainin' to do!"

Listen, this is a serious deal. 1 Corinthians Chapter 3 talks about the Bemis seat of Christ, the Judgment seat of Christ. And we will give account, Jesus says in the Gospels, and we will give account of every idle word. We need to be really careful. We will give account of every idle word. We need to be really careful.

It's important to note that every single major problem this church has had, has involved the destructive tongue of a leader. And I really thought through this, and it's a correct statement. Every *major* problem that keeps me up at night praying has involved the tongue of a leader. However, the enemy very seldom goes directly for the leader. The enemy gets someone who he can more easily control and then tries to draw a leader in. And hear me, please, if the enemy fails to draw a leader into his destructive plan, very seldom is any damage done at all. Very seldom. The enemy is after leaders because leaders have influence. That's why we are so careful to put people in that position.

James is referring to leaders here. Those who are seen as leaders in the church. Jesus got his point across to those who lead, to those who lead the young, including the spiritually young. Write Matthew 18:6 in your margin.

Matthew 18:6 (ESV)

6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

The millstone would be better for him than what? Better than facing Christ on Judgment day. Listen, if you're saved today, you're saved for eternity and you're not going to lose your salvation. But there's a fire coming at the Judgment seat of Christ. And all the works that you built on the foundation of Jesus Christ will pass through the fire. And 1 Corinthians 3 says "*some will be saved as if from the flames.*" Barely.

Here's the problem. There are some people (in other churches) who desire positions of influence for the wrong reasons. Here's the number one reason, it's very simple. It's self-centered ambition. Vanity. The desire to build self up. James says think again if that's your desire because as soon as you put yourself in that place you subject yourself to a greater or stricter judgment.

Here's the point. Your tongue has power. It influences people around you and God cares about it. He cares a lot about it. Especially if we are speaking on his behalf.

I'm going to tell you one more tidbit of my personal life and death battle with hell inside the church. And I hope that's not shocking to you that the demonic realm works primarily inside the church. Listen, these guys have been around awhile, these principalities and powers, and their focus is not on the strip clubs, but on the church. During this time, the thing that was the most difficult for me is there were these "thus says the Lord" prophecies going around the church, complete with scriptures that had come *direct from God*. And the prophecy was, with scripture attached, that God was going to see to the certain demise of Dave. That God was going to take him out. I received a number of "casual" death threats, but I got one really credible, serious death threat. Because a crazy person believed that prophecy and desired to help God see it through, enough to where we had security and we were ready to protect ourselves, with deadly force. Because somebody got the idea that if I just say it's from the Lord, it will really happen.

Here's the thing that blows our mind. And I try to be shocked by it, but my cynicism is wearing on me. It's people who are either one of two things. It's either those that *claim* to be Christians or those who *really are* Christians. Saved, blood bought, born again, headed to heaven Christians who are loaning their tongue to hell.

And James knows this is such an easy area for Christians to stumble in. Look what he says in James 3:2.

James 3:2 (ESV)

2 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.

We all stumble in many ways because we are all sinner and we all at some time have been duped into being used by the enemy to do damage with our tongue. Able also to bridle whole body. We all stumble in many ways, right. Because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Paul says in Romans 7, in me (in my flesh) nothing good dwells. We all stumble. We all stumble in many ways. But look at what James says here in verse two. ***if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man able also to bridle his whole body.***

Underline that word “perfect. It’s kind of a hard word to grasp. But that word translated primarily means mature or complete, but we interpret scripture in the context that it’s written. So let me give you the top two Greek lexicon’s definition of the word. Here is the sense. (*From Strong’s*) - **“Complete in Integrity and Virtue”** (*Louw Nida*) says **“Not Lacking any Moral Quality.**

So James is saying if a Christian can control their tongue that they are well on their way to being complete or mature in their integrity and their moral quality. Do you see it? James is connecting our ability to control our tongue with the maturity of our Christian walk. Very clearly connecting it. Now we know that there are plenty of people who can put on a mask of integrity and virtue. So don’t be duped so easily, look a little more carefully. Because some of the worst damage done in churches has been done by the people who wear the mask of perfect moral integrity. Jesus called them Pharisees. Look a little deeper. Be careful. It may not always be easy to discern but it’s still true. Setting aside hypocrites and Pharisees, if you want to know how much God is transforming a person’s life you listen very carefully to what’s coming out of their mouth. You want to know if Jesus Christ is radically transforming a life? Listen to what they say.

James says there in verse two that a person who doesn’t stumble in the use of their tongue can bridle (control) their whole body.

George Stulac - IVP Commentary

James . . . sees the controlling of one’s tongue as a decisive matter, influencing the entirety of one’s life

Here’s the translation: if you can control the sin of your tongue, you can control the other sinful tendencies in your body. Why? Because the tongue is so powerful and it’s so easy for us to be drawn into sin with our tongue. That once we begin to master that, that

overcoming the sin of the rest of our fleshly nature is not that hard. When the transformation impacts your tongue, it's like you know it's impacting the rest of you. Just like Spurgeon says, and this is practical, not theology, but he says every Christian goes through three conversions. The conversion of the mind, the conversion of the heart and the conversion of the wallet.

Here's the point. When a Christian really begins to mature, they give. And that's how you know that they are maturing. Same way with the tongue. When a Christian's transformation begins to mature, it changes the way their tongue works.

James uses the word bridle for us controlling our tongue and says that if we can control the direction of our tongue then we can control the direction of our life. It causes him to think about how we control a horse.

James 3:3 (ESV)

3 If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well.

James is saying in that your control of your tongue directing your life is the same as the control of a bridle directing a horse's life (if you will.) That as you can control the direction of a horse with its bridle you can control the direction of your life with your tongue. Do you see the connection? Is it pretty clear? Because James only has like four or five more illustrations to help you understand.

Here's the dramatic (it's dramatic for a purpose) statement: *Our tongue can determine our destiny.* Destiny! That's such a big word. I know all you Calvinists are freaking out. "No! Nothing can determine my destiny. It's already set."

Yeah, well James says otherwise. James says that your tongue sets the direction of your life. And the direction of your life sets your destiny. The fact that God already knows about it doesn't change the fact that your tongue is still setting your destiny.

Let me give you what a famous New Testament commentator, Douglas Moo, says here: ***As the bit determines the direction of the horse, so the tongue can determine the destiny of the individual***

WHOA!! (to use a horse term) What do you mean the tongue can determine the destiny of an individual? Isn't that overstated? James says that you controlling your tongue is like you controlling a horse. And as the bridle directs the horse, your tongue directs your life.

Let me paint a picture of two people. I'll stand them side by side for you, and you decide if their tongue sets the direction of their life.

Person #1) Their speech is generally characterized by anger, bitterness, criticism, judgment and hostility.

What direction do you think
their marriage is headed?
Their relationship with their children is headed?
Their ability to be used by God?

The direction of their tongue is setting the direction of their life, even their destiny.

Person #2) Their speech is generally characterized by love, joy, peace, patience and kindness.

What direction do you think
their marriage is headed?
Their relationship with their children is headed?
Their ability to be used by God?

Without a doubt – in the things that matter the most – your tongue can determine your destiny.

Your tongue sets the direction of your life, just like the bridle in a horse's mouth sets the direction of a horse.

Chuck Swindoll:

This mere “two ounce slab of mucous membrane,” can legitimately boast of its disproportionate power to determine human destiny.

What is it with this idea that your tongue can impact the *destiny* of your life? ***Isn't that overstating the POWER of just WORDS? Come on, really - they're JUST WORDS, it's not that serious.***

Our words aren't any more destiny setting than just an o-ring is to the destiny of a vehicle. But if it's 1986 and that vehicle is the space shuttle Challenger, and you are one of the families of the seven astronauts who died in that horrifying explosion that so many of us have seen, when you found out their destiny was set by an o-ring that was loose, you would never say “just an o-ring.” And how many lives have been devastated or are being devastated because somebody's tongue is loose... maybe our tongue?

The tongue is a small member of the body, yet it boasts the ability to do great things, either good or bad.

James 3:4–5(a) (ESV)

4 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.

5 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things . . .

James now compares our tongue setting the direction of our life to how a ship's rudder sets the direction of the ship. A ship's rudder is a small piece of that ship, but it can boast great things.

In 1989 the Exxon Valdez ran aground in Prince William Sound. The “tongue” of that ship steered it to cause unbelievable damage to something God created to be so beautiful. The pilot of that huge ship was careless with its “tongue” and eleven million gallons of crude oil destruction destroyed 1,300 miles of some of the most beautiful coastline in the world. Eleven million gallons of destruction caused by the “uncontrolled tongue” of one ship. And James says we run the exact same risk in our lives if we do not understand the deadly power of the tongue.

But it's not just deadly power that the tongue has. The tongue is also capable of steering our lives into great and awesome relationships and places in life. A minute ago when we described the direction two people's lives are headed by the use of their tongue.

The first person's tongue spoke anger, bitterness, criticism, judgment and hostility. These are some of the works of the flesh. (Galatians 5 and Ephesians 4.)

The second person's tongue spoke with love, joy, peace, patience and kindness. These are some of the fruit of the spirit. (Galatians 5:22-23)

If your tongue is constantly speaking the works of the flesh it will impact your destiny. If your tongue is constantly speaking the fruit of the spirit it will impact your destiny.

Here is my very strong encouragement to you today...

Do not focus on trying to change your tongue. Do not make a commitment to try harder to speak more like the fruit of the spirit. It's wrong focus. Instead, deal very deeply and very personally with these words from Jesus.

Luke 6:43–45 (ESV)

43 “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit,

44 for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes,

nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush.

45 The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Out of the abundance of your heart your mouth speaks. Do not try to change the fruit on the tree. Let God “change the tree.”

This is one of the hardest truths for Christians to deal with in their own lives. ***Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.***

Forget trying to change the tongue *without* changing the heart because it is impossible. God wants to give you a new heart. He wants to take out that old, evil heart that speaks forth its own fruit. God wants to replace it with a new heart that speaks forth the fruit of the spirit.

We have got to beg God (continually) to change our heart, not just our tongue. The *source* must be changed because the source produces the fruit.

Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

Change your heart (and then you can)
Change your tongue (and then you can)
Change the direction of your life.

Let's pray. *Lord, let's listen to what the Lord would tell us through this Word; **Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.** Let us hear individually what the Spirit is convicting us of. As our heart begins to lean to the flesh and to the world and to sin, convict us. It will show in our tongue. Lord we need a new heart. Change our heart God.*

(If you have never surrendered your heart to Jesus Christ I am telling you with all love and all compassion, there is no hope for you, until you do. This life is a vapor. And Solomon tried it and he said it's meaningless. You need Jesus Christ to forgive you of your sin and come into your life, to be eternal life in you, to reserve a place in heaven for you. You need Christ. Right now I'm going to ask you to surrender your life to Jesus Christ. There's no hope without Christ. Pray something like this :) Dear Lord Jesus, I am a sinner, my heart is black, I can tell by my tongue. Please forgive me Lord. I repent of my sin. And I ask you to come into my life to be my Savior and to be my Lord. I surrender all to you Lord and I pray you would transform me by the power of your life in me. I commit this day to follow you all the days of my life. Fill me with the Holy Spirit. It is in your name I pray, amen.