

From Salt Pond to Fresh Spring | With great power comes great responsibility. | James 3:1-12

1. Venerate the potency of your words to direct your life and the life of others. (1-4)
2. Revere the capability of your words to destroy your life and the life of others. (5-8)
3. Look to Christ to change you words from cursing to blessing. (9-12)

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What if I told you, there was a comic book phrase so good and so true that it made it all the way to the US Supreme Court? ...It's true.

I'm sure most of you have heard it. It's called by some the "Peter Parker Principle" attributed to the late, Uncle Ben: *With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility*.

Stan Lee didn't just come up with this phrase out of nowhere in a 1961 Spiderman Comic Book. A simple wikipedia search will show that this phrase's conception is traced back to a popular saying during the French Revolution.

But to go a few centuries further back. Jesus Christ himself taught the same thing when he said, "To whom much is given, much shall be required."

But think about what this means for you?

*With great power, comes great responsibility.*

Do you have great power? The answer is a resounding YES.

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit dwells inside of you, and *not only that* every one of you here today has the powerful ability to communicate.

Your words have great power. The power to build up and edify and strengthen and breath life and hope and meaning. Or the power to tear down and chip away at people and restrain and repress and stifle growth.

With great power comes great responsibility. Your tongue is powerful, and that's what James has in the cross hairs today.

Please take your Bible and turn with me to James. We are in a Series called Faith Does, and a few weeks ago I preached a sermon called Pure Religion from the end of James chapter 1, and here's how it ended:

James 1:25-27

But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being not hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

In these verses James gives us three specific elements of pure religion that is undefiled before God:

- Spirit filled speaking James 1:26
- Selfless giving James 1:27
- Separated living James 1:27

So now that we are in chapter 3, James is circling back to these three concepts. And I'm pointing this out now, because as we step into this...we really have to remember the context.

This message is about how you speak, it's about turning negative, salty words into positive, fresh words.

And like most of the messages in this series...this is going to be touchy and challenging. But I want you to see this upfront....James isn't just dumping religious rules over your head here. James 3:1-12 is very much about giving you practical specifics on what to do and what not to do with the words of your mouth, But..... we can't isolate these verses from the overall narrative. Because if we do that we are left with religious duty...and when it comes to your words... it's not always pretty... So before we go any further....get this: guilt and shame are the opposite of what this message is about.

The goal of this entire letter is to teach you what genuine, pure faith looks like: It showcases the love of Jesus, and that change of activity happens through a changed identity. [Today you are going to see how a salt pond can change into a fresh water spring, when it comes to your mouth.](#)

Next week we are going to see the motivation behind visiting orphans and widows from the rest of chapter 3.

And in two weeks we will be in James 4 where James digs in on how and why you can keep yourself unstained from the world.

[But today we are going to see how potent your words really are, and how the way you handle your tongue is the most powerful thing you can do to bring glory to God.](#)

[So let's go to the text and please follow along with me as I read James 3:1-12](#)

*Read 1-12*

Here's the first point:

### **1. Venerate the potency of your words to direct your life and the life of others. (1-4)**

Did I get your attention?

Notice I didn't just say "Get Good at Vocab"

What challenges you more?

"Venerate the dynamic potency of your words"...OR....."words are powerful"

One of those phrases is cliché and forgettable...one of them is hopefully a little more inspiring, maybe it adds weight to the situation and makes you stop and think.

[The word venerate means to "regard with great respect"](#)

What you say has the power to direct your life and lead you somewhere...either to new horizons or to the lowest of lows.

Notice James' point here in verse 2. We all struggle in various ways. Nobody is perfect. That's assumed.

But this area of your tongue is a problem that is common to man.

We all have to bridle our tongues.

If you can fully control your mouth....you are perfect....and you can control your entire body. Literally he's saying....if you meet someone who fully controls their mouth you have met a perfect person and they can do no wrong!

But let's be real, that's none of us.

Do you want to think about how bad you are doing at this? (of course you don't)

*David, why would you be so negative...especially after last week :) I'll tell you why in a minute ok :)*

But here, test yourself. We can call this the tongue test... in the last week, have you:

- Complained or grumbled? (I'm out) - what else would I talk about?
- Boasted about yourself?
- Gossiped or unnecessarily repeated bad news about someone else?
- Insulted someone or drug them down with your words
- Defended yourself in a way the excused your mistakes

Some of us very well have a perfect score....and by perfect score I mean imperfect score. You are 5 for 5 on the negative ways to use your mouth.

Some of us have already failed this test and it's not even lunch....and you're at church....We aren't going to ask for a show of hands...

But why am I parking here at this uncomfortable spot? (*David I get it can we move on to happy thoughts....*)

I'm pointing this out because, this message doesn't need to be about other people. This is for you.

This isn't for you to point your finger at your spouse.  
This isn't ammunition for you to hang over the head of your children.

This is about you, personalizing this problem we all deal with.

James illustrates this beautifully...

You put a metal bit in a horses mouth tie some leather straps onto it you control that massive powerhouse of an animal.

You steer and direct a massive ship with a little rudder.

The small thing controls and guides the big thing.

That's true for you and it's true for the loved ones in your life that you influence!

Your little mouth, leads your life. Your communication steers your direction.

Some of you ride horses, some of you ride in boats....but if James were alive today he would probably be using the steering wheel of the car illustration.

What you say is taking you somewhere. This is one of the reasons why we need to take great care and concern to measure our words.

Word vomit is not a good idea....I'm guilty  
Verbal processing is one thing...but spilling everything you're thinking in the middle of an argument....how many times has that ever concluded the argument with a nice bow?

Does it ever? Of course not.

What you say is taking you somewhere. And how you say it will lead to one destination after the next.

Your words add up, and they build off of each other.

So please get this?

**Your words are powerful. And they carry great responsibility!**

And the first step James gives us here, is to slow down and acknowledge the potency your words carry and how they *lead and direct* your future. Every word you say has an impact, and it influences your future, your mind, will, and emotions. It also directly influences others around you and how they think about themselves.

Proverbs 18:21 says death and life are in the power of the tongue

This is why James started with this thought about teachers...yes it was some pastor to aspiring pastor wisdom...but it wasn't just free advice that was isolated from the main point. Your words have power not just for yourself and how you view yourself; they also have incredible power to lead people somewhere.

Remember, he started this chapter with - "not everyone needs to be a Bible teacher"....tread very carefully into that position. With great power comes great responsibility.

*You want to preach and teach the Word of God. Not so fast....it's not easy....and oh by the way you will be judged with greater strictness and higher standards.*

*I'm going to be judged by God for what I say to a greater degree than people who don't teach God's Word.....that's a little terrifying. And it means I better have some authority behind what I say. And that authority isn't coming from me, it's coming from God's revealed Word so I better be sure to clearly and accurately communicate God's Word and you should be holding me accountable for that.*

How the Bible is taught.... has the potential to either heap shame or heaviness on individual people or it has the power to liberate people with the truth.

Your words have the potential to wound other people in ways we really aren't even aware of. And honestly, many of the ways we lash out and react have to do with some sort of wound that came from the words of someone else in our lives.

Your every word leads somewhere. Empower instead of suppress. Heal instead of wound.

*Do you think about this?*

You are going to lead people with the words you say. Are you steering them either into a better place or a more harmful place?

- If you complain and grumble about every negative thing that happens to you....that's going to affect your children. They are going to pick up on that and complain and grumble. We have to wake up. We live in a sin cursed world, rough things are going to happen....life isn't fair and how we react and talk about it shapes the way we feel about it and how those around us shape their ability to navigate through those same problems.

- If you boast about yourself and out of insecurity feel like you have to constantly prove yourself and one up other people's stories, that's going to negatively impact the way people interact with you and how much people want to spend time with you.

- If you're always defending yourself and making excuses for yourself at work that's going to make other's resent you and not work as hard.

- If you insult people and drag them down with little jabs....that is going to affect people. Not just in the moment....but many of those words cut deep and they resurface years down the road.

I'm sure many of us, if we stopped and thought for a second could recall old wounds. Something hurtful that was said to you personally....that still impacts you to this day...

Think about how great of impact you can have on your kids if they see you face adversity and they see you spin it into a positive? You give God the glory, instead of staying stuck in the past....Think about how profound of an impact that can make on the souls who are looking up to you and being guided by you.

Your words direct your life and the life of others just like the very small rudder directs the ship through all the different waves and strong winds. And here's the second truth you have to realize about your words...

## **2. Reverse the capability of your words to destroy your life and the life of others. (5-8)**

*Read 5-8*

Not only do your words have powerful influence in *directing* your mind will and emotions and those of everyone around you.

Your words have the power to *destroy*. Just as beautiful and valuable as the right words are... to the same degree negative words are destructive and dangerous.

If you pay attention to history, the highest of heights in human history and the lowest, most depraved moments are marked by the same thing...*rhetoric*.

How did Hitler enflame the Nazi party and set out to take over the world? He did it with rhetoric. There is no great movement in human history that did not have communication at the center of it. Deceitfully crafted rhetorical flair incites fury, patriotic or unpatriotic zeal, love, hate. See, one of the truths of human history is that words can lead us to some of the most deplorable, despicable, wicked things imaginable. Things we couldn't fathom doing we can fall into because words have defined reality for us.

This was true of the Holocaust, and movements of mankind on a macro scale. This is also true on a micro scale with personal liberties. Even now when it comes to abortion and how we view babies in the womb. Think about the power words carry to dehumanize and twist the truth. It's not a person. Sure, it has its own heartbeat. Yes, it has its own DNA strand. Yeah, it has its own blood type. Its heart is beating. Ok, its brainwaves are functioning. And Yes, it can feel pain. But it's not a baby, It's a *fetus*.

Language matters. Words can dehumanize. They change how we view other people. They change how we view ourselves.

When people hear that police officers are horrible over and over again....they ignore all the good, brave men and women of uniform, and they focus on the few bad apples....you get people frenzied up to do wicked, violent things to police officers. We see that in the news every day. Words have power....they lead people somewhere and they have the power to destroy.

And here's what James says about this. Mankind has been able to tame every kind of beast from pet lizards to dolphins (vs7) **but no human being can tame their tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. vs8**

In verse 6 this word for hell is the greek word Ghenna. It refers to the valley of Hinnom, outside Jerusalem there the fire was never put out. This word is used 12 times in the NT, Jesus has 11 of those 12 references, James here has the 12th.

The valley of Hinnom was a trash dump that had a constantly simmering flame. So hot it just consumed anything that was thrown down into in. It doesn't get any more destructive than just getting incinerated into nothing.

Fire not only starts small and grows, it creates more heat and it also destroys.

Verse 6 also says the tongue is a world of unrighteousness.... so much sin is wrapped up in your words.

But in Colossians 4 we are told that our speech should always be full of grace seasoned with salt.

So our words are compared to a raging wildfire. The west coast is being ravaged by forest fires right now. Is there anything more scary than an out of control raging fire?

How did these fires in California become so bad? Well it depends on who you are listening to. Arsons have been arrested. Some people will tell you that global warming is playing a factor....But one thing that can't be overlooked is that for years there have been reports about

mismanagement of the forests. There have been environmental policies put in place that eliminated controlled burns, and dead trees were not removed. Those dead trees have multiplied year after year in these forests like match sticks ready to ignite and now the fires are more devastating than ever.

Those forests that were mismanaged, full of dead trees remind me of what happens to our mouth when we allow the wrong thoughts to go unchecked. If we don't clean up our thoughts and keep our emotions lined up with truth...eventually, it's only a matter of time before the fire gets set off and all of those things that don't belong there and should have been removed, will intensify the fire....and more and more destructive words will spew out. ....**The wrong thoughts that linger in your mind are like dead trees in the middle of the forest....waiting to catch fire.**

Jesus tells us in Luke 6:45 tells us, *for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*

Your words are an overflow of what's in your heart.

So the question you have to ask yourself is, what do your words reveal about your heart?

Do you have the wrong thoughts and motives that are just waiting to catch a spark and erupt into a raging fire?

Because Your words are telling what's inside your heart?

Is it anger?

Jealousy?

Bitterness?

*Or are your words..*

Grateful?

Joyful?

Peaceful?

Patient?

**You know yourself better than anyone and I hope you see fruit of the Spirit coming out of your mouth! I hope you speak the truths of the character of God and bring him glory!**

But I realize after last week...many of use are taking another gut punch this morning. Now do you see why Martin Luther didn't like this book very much?

But James takes us here to a pretty pessimistic place... NO human can tame the tongue.

Remember verse 2....he knows none of us are perfect and we all have room to grow in this one.

*Yeah, I'm on sentence away from being fired.*

*I've been scaring my kids every time I harshly ask them what they are doing.*

Verse 8 doesn't offer much hope does it?... thankfully there's more to this passage. Let's read the the next 4 verses and see how he concludes these thoughts:

*Read 9-12*

Taken at face value he still hasn't directly given us much hope. Has he?

*Come on James....please help me out here...I'm guilty ok. Give me something.*

If you think, I've been negative today please don't look at me. James is just laying it on all of us right now. Myself included. But the more I have thought about this passage this week, the more it's influenced the way I talk to my wife...and especially my kids...

I don't think anyone is feeling great about themselves right now.

But James has a very unique way of motivating us across the finish line.

When you look closely there's actually a couple nuanced points.

If you are a note taker....we are officially in point three right now, but I'm intentionally not telling you what it is yet...because James has a reveal coming for us. I don't want to spoil his punchline. Remember how we talked about this last week, James likes to make you think.

Here's more like Christopher Nolan....he's got a little Ridller in him....that's just his style.

So let's roll with him. Hear him out.

First thing he mentions as way of motivation is how we can bless God and curse people out of both sides of our mouth.

And why is that so messed up? (look at verse 10)

**James 3:9-10**

**With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.**

**Men and women are made in the image of God!**

We are made in his likeness....nothing else on earth is made in the likeness of God.

God is a spirit....but just like Gen 5 explains that Seth was made in the image of Adam....Adam was made in the image of God.



We are little miniature prisms ....walking breathing statues of our creator....that's why we are the pinnacle of His creation...so the way we speak should respect and and show value to the image bearers of God.

Think about it this way...

I have three children. Beckham is 7 Paxton is 5 Monroe is 2 I love them all....they came from the loving relationship that I have with my wife Julie.

They share my blood and to a certain degree as their father, they represent me.

Take Beckham, he's all boy. He's intense he likes to wrestle and doesn't care if he get dirty... he's a bull in a china shop....Beckham is a lot like me. Paxton is a lot like Julie...Monroe... we're still trying to figure her out.

But what if you came up to me and said about one of my children....let's take Beckham since he's more me than he is Julie...bless his heart...I can't stand your son. Your son is pathetic... and you just went on and on.

How do you think I would take that?

I would be ticked. *How dare you. Where do you get off....that's my son!*

And I think most of us in here would respond the same way if someone attacked your children.

This is what James is saying....how dare we are image bearers of God attack and demean with our mouths God's children!

We have no right! You're more talented...sure fine....praise God..he's the one who has gifted you and made you who you are!

But we should never spew out salty words about and to other people....when we are called to be a fresh spring of of life giving words!

And look with with me again at verse 12...

*Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.*

Do you remember how we have been joking around the last couple of weeks that James loves the confrontation sandwich approach. He's always starting these, let's not call them rants... these inspired Challenges...with my brothers....he's easing you in....brothers...sisters...

And it gets really intense in the middle...you have to shape this up....you're giving off a bad vibe...the sound quality out of this speakers is a little compromised. I'm going to need a high fidelity sound coming out of that speaker that matches the original recording.

But before I lose you....verse 10...My brothers these things ought not to be so....

And again here in verse 12....let's bring this in.

Fig trees can't bear olives  
Grapevines can't produce figs.  
Salt ponds can't yield fresh water.

There's only one way you can change from a salt pond to a fresh water spring.

What is it?

Change of identity through Jesus Christ!

This is point three.... James is ready for the reveal, so here you go...

### **3. Look to Christ to change your words from cursing to blessing. (9-12)**

Now this is where I need you to focus.

You may be thinking? Well, David seriously, I know you like to always end every message with Jesus Christ as our ultimate hope....but come on now...he's not in here.

This is depressing. I'm depressed. I can't change the way I talk....my mouth is horrible.

James knows that...I get the feeling that our sarcastic author who's already called us fools couple times and has pretty clear record in the Gospels of running his mouth with his brother Jesus....I get the feeling that he can relate.

You're not alone here....

But if you have been paying attention literally throughout these last 12 verses James has been giving clues of who we are to look to...

#### **WORSHIP TEAM COME UP**

- Do you remember who used a fig tree to represent fruitless people?
- Do you remember who used a vine to describe our relationship with The empowering of the Holy Spirit?
- Who was it that never stumbled in what he said?

Was there every a perfect man?

- Who was it in Luke 12 that used the "south wind blowing a scorching fire" analogy?

You know what I have written in my Bible right after verse 12. Points to Jesus! Seriously, write down write now...

Luke 6:43-45

And I'm going to read it to you....

For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. 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 the mouth speaks.

Is it just me or do you think James 3:12 is pointing us somewhere?

Your words are either going to be a guilt heap. Shame machine for you....the stuff impure religion is infested with....

Or It's something you can control by looking to Jesus Christ and seeking his power to change you!

Our world needs to see a different fountain...there are enough salty bitter people.

They need something fresh!

Jesus is the only one who can make a bad tree into a good tree...and when the tree is good, that's when the fruit is good!

Your identity changes your activity...not the other way around!

This isn't just about adding new words to your vocabulary and picking out words and trying to throw them away....if the tree hasn't changed it's going to keep bearing the same fruit!

Jesus changes you from the inside out!

John 7:37...

"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

Only Jesus can change you from a salt pond into a fresh spring.

And James here is giving us clue after clue after clue. Do you appreciate it more?

Would you have rather him just said it in black and white....or in the midst of him talking about the power of communication do you think it's more memorable to uncover the answer to what has been alluding us all along?

Your words will either wound or they bring healing.

Your words will either bring shame or they will bring freedom.

The right word at the right moment can change the direction of someone's life.

LOOK TO JESUS to change the way you speak from someone who's words bring cursing and negativity....to someone who flows out words of living water and brings blessing!