

“Taming the Tongue,” James 3:1-12

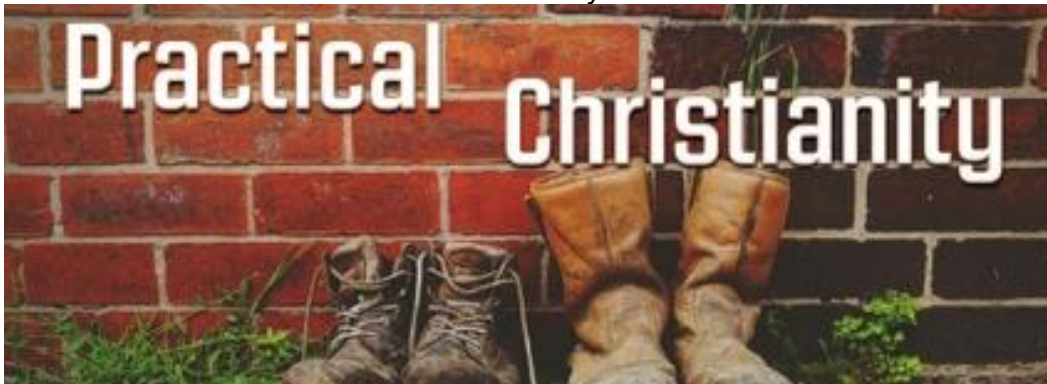
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Did you know you are carrying a weapon with you at all times? You might say, “I don’t have a concealed carry...I’m not carrying a weapon.” I’ll say it again...you are carrying a weapon tonight. This weapon that you and I carry has the power of life and death. You might say, “Pastor Kevin... I’m not packing heat tonight.” But, I would say that you actually are. But, you may continue to argue, “I’m not carrying a gun.” But you are carrying a TONGUE! You might not think of it...but your tongue is a weapon. It’s the weapon that lurks caged behind our teeth. **Tonight, we’re going to talk about “Taming the Tongue,”** this powerful weapon that has the power of life and death.

James 3:1-12

¹ Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. 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. ³ If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. 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. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life,^[a] and set on fire by hell.^[b] ⁷ For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰ From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers,^[c] these things ought not to be so. ¹¹ Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

We continue in our series called: “Practical Christianity”...



and if there’s been a message that fits the sermon series title...this one does. This is shoe leather faith...this is boots on the ground stuff. This is very practical teaching!

Now, let’s see if we can review a bit and set the scene for where we are concerning this discussion on the Tongue. We need to understand how this fits; based on where we’ve been. Matthew shared last week how from James’ perspective...true faith manifests itself in good works. We saw that in how Rahab and Abraham showed their faith by what they did. Faith without works is dead, useless. If you and I are going to talk the talk, we’ve got to walk that talk. We can say all day long how much we are a Christian, but the book of James says, “Show me!” That was the last verse in chapter 2.

James 2:26

²⁶ For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

Now remember, as we are studying this letter...James' primary concern was to teach what godly living looked like. He was writing to baby Christians about what it meant to live like a Christian. These were first generation Christians. No one to show them. And in verse 1, we just saw how James goes from talking about faith and works to warning those who would consider teaching the Bible about the danger in doing so. He's going to go from faith and works to teachers who need to be very careful in how they teach (use their tongue).

James 3:1

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

Church, that verse scares me to death! Why? Because I'm a teacher and I'm going to be judged with a greater strictness than those who don't teach. Why? Because what comes out of my mouth about the Word of God is either going to be accurate or it's not. Oh...I can't play fast and loose with the Scriptures. It's the Word of God and I've got to study as a workman and be prepared to teach the Word of God skillfully and rightly. And you know what...you trust me to teach you accurately.

You are placing trust and faith in me in that you have chosen me to teach you and your family the Word of God. Inherently, we trust teachers. We trust our school teachers, we trust our coaches (because they're teaching), we trust our teachers here at church.

Let me use another respected profession to illustrate. A doctor. We place faith in our doctors. I'm not going to argue with my doctor about something...no...I expect him or her to be skilled and trained and read up on the latest medical issues...I'm trusting them with my life. We defer to their authority. We trust our teachers. But, if the teaching is false...oh my...remember Jesus saying, "It would be better to have a millstone hung around your neck than to lead a new believer in the faith astray." You see, that's the whole reason we are studying the book of Colossians on Sunday mornings. Why? Because there was false teaching. Podcast on the REAL JESUS. I have to be very careful in teaching you because I don't want to bring harm on you.

James then moves to the tongue. You see the application in what we've seen about faith and works is in how we are to use our mouths, our tongues. If we have true faith then we're going to demonstrate that faith in how we talk...how we use our tongues. Christians are to talk differently from other people. We aren't to talk like the world. You see the way we talk gives undeniable evidence as to what we're like, and whom we're following.

James 3:2-3

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.

Church, it's this simple: if you and I can control what comes out of our mouths, we can control our entire lives. What's your speech like? How do you talk? Is it pleasing to the Lord? Does it honor Him? Do you remember what Jesus said to the Pharisees? Jesus has just healed a man with a shriveled hand and the Pharisees are giving Him a hard time for doing it on Saturday, the Sabbath. They even accused Him of doing it by the power of the Devil. Jesus nailed them...

Matthew 12:33-37

³³“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. ³⁶I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, ³⁷for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Our speech gives evidence as to whether or not we're truly believers! Remember to be saved we have to “confess the Lord Jesus with our mouths?” We must call on the name of the Lord with our tongues to be saved and then confess Him publicly. There are no CIA Christians...undercover agents. You have to go public with your tongue to be saved. Listen, and then, once we're saved...we give evidence of it by how we talk. True believers are going to give evidence that they are followers of Jesus by how they talk.

The great preacher of yesteryear, J. Vernon McGee says:

“The tongue is a badge which you and I wear—it identifies us. It is the greatest index of life. It is the table of contents to our lives. Our tongues give us away; they tell who we are.” J. Vernon McGee

What does your table of contents say about you? How do you speak? How is what you're currently saying, your current manner of speech, how is it identifying you? That's how you are known...you are known by your tongue. I'll ask this: Are you bringing forth relief or pain? The tongue is a weapon of devastating power! It has the power to bring life and the power to bring death. It's been said this way by an unknown poet:

**A careless word may kindle strife;
A cruel word may wreck a life.
A bitter word may hate instill;
A brutal word may smite and kill.**

**A gracious word may smooth the way;
A joyous word may light the day.
A timely word may lessen stress;
A loving word may heal and bless.**

Author Unknown

Which one are you? Kindling strife, wrecking lives, instilling hate? Or smoothing the way, lighting the day, lessening stress...saying words that bless? Oh, the tongue...it can bring life or death...

Of late, I've been teaching Andrew and Clara how to drive! That's hard to believe! Over and over again as I've been teaching them, I've said: “Kids, this car is a weapon...it can kill someone if you aren't paying attention and get careless.” You have to be careful...You have to always pay attention and be in control and not be distracted or you can hurt someone or yourself. The same is true of the tongue...it's easy to get loose and careless.

In verse 3, James uses, not the car (they didn't have cars)...but a horse.

James 3:3

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

Talk about an amazing thing... A bit in horse's mouth can turn that massive animal the way you want him to go! See this beautiful horse...



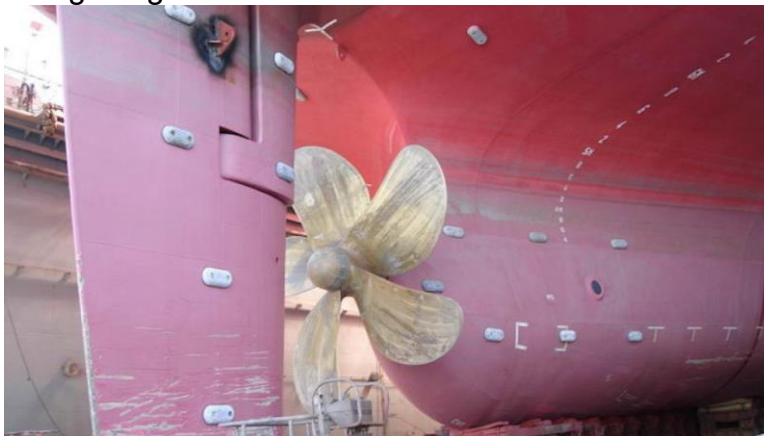
the rider can turn that horse by the way he/she pulls on the reins! Just a simple little wedge (bit) put into the horse's mouth. Think of it! Control the mouth of the horse and you control the entire horse. Hmm...that's what we're talking about isn't it. "Control the mouth"... "control the body!" A perfect illustration.

James offers another illustration: ships. What controls them?

James 3:4

⁴Look 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.

Rudders...they are amazing things...



it's astounding to think that a spinning fan and flat piece of steel can move a massive ocean liner... And you know what? You can't even see that thing under the water, can you? Yet, a captain can spin a wheel and turn the entire ship.



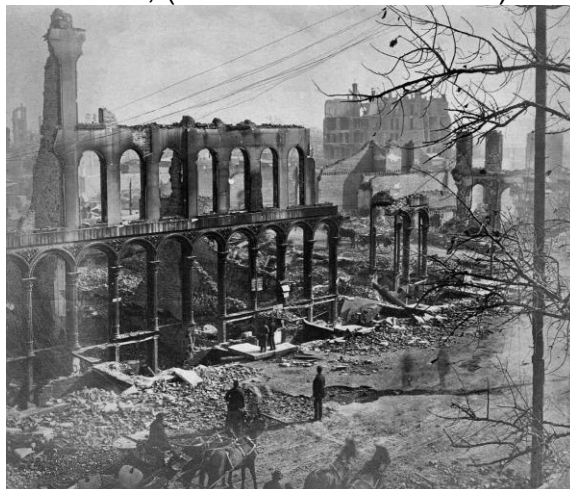
This man in the US Navy...He can turn the entire ship by spinning a little wheel... That's amazing! And that's how it is with the tongue...

James 3:5-6

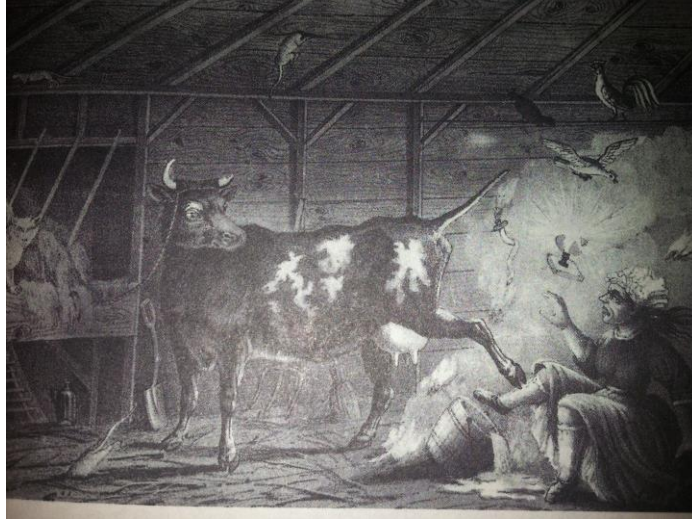
⁵ So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life and set on fire by hell.

Oh...the tongue boasts all kinds of things... It's easy to be arrogant isn't it? You see it sports...people running their mouths...boasting...taunting...Lord knows we see it in politics. I remember the days when a man would score a touchdown and he would hand the ball to the referee and say nothing. But today...oh...the wagging of the tongue... It bothers me...it really does. Look at the world of politics...all of these wagging tongues... And we've got a whole year of it before the next big election.

Yes, the tongue is fire...it can lead into tremendous unrighteousness... justlike a fire... Have you heard of the Great Chicago fire of 1871, (October 8th to be exact)? Here's a newspaper picture...



It burned 17,500 buildings...killing over 300 people. Over 100,000 people were left homeless. The fire left trail of destruction that cost \$400 million and that was in 1871. How'd it start? Get this...they believe it started in a barn when a cow kicked over a lantern...Mrs. Catherine O'Leary's barn to be exact... This is an unflattering picture that was painted to depict that scene...



She carelessly left a lantern in the barn filled with hay...and if that's true...and it did start in her barn...what a tragedy. One lantern...one cow...and entire city up in smoke. Church family, that illustrates so poignantly the power of fire, and the power of the tongue.

Listen to the Proverbs-they are full of wisdom about the tongue...5 of them...but, I could give dozens:

Proverbs 16:27

A worthless man plots evil, and his speech^[a] is like a scorching fire.

Proverbs 15:28

The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.

Proverbs 12:22-23

²²Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight. ²³A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims folly.

Proverbs 26:20-21

²⁰For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases. ²¹As charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.

Proverbs 17:27

Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.

Oh, how careless the tongue can be...like a cow knocking over a lantern. Have you ever said something you wish you could take back? You can't. Once it's spoken, it's the atmosphere forever. You know scientists tell us that our words echo through time forever. They say that our words, once spoken never really go silent...but the words remain in the atmosphere forever. Now, I don't begin to understand all of that; but, I know when God said, "Let there be light," that spoken word of God still resonates and gives us light, even today. Oh, be careful what you say, because you can't get it back.

Have you ever tried to put toothpaste back into a tube of toothpaste?



Impossible isn't it. Once it's out...it's out... It's like an arrow that's been released from the bow. And the same is true of our words. Oh, we can apologize...but, like a fire, the damage has already been done, scorching everything in its path. Oh...if we could tame the tongue like a bit in a horse, or a rudder for a ship! But, James says, we're not like animals...

James 3:7-8

⁷For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, ⁸but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

Full of deadly poison... Let's think on that a moment... Poison that kills...how can the tongue do that? Well, believe it or not...a sportswriter for the *Atlanta Journal*, might have said it best:

"I am more deadly than the screaming shell from a cannon. I win without killing. I tear down homes, break hearts, and wreck lives. I travel on the wings of the wind. No innocence is strong enough to intimidate me. No purity pure enough to daunt me. I have no regard for truth, no respect for justice, no mercy for the defenseless. My victims are as numerous as the sands of the sea, and often are innocent. I never forget and seldom forgive, and I deliver all this from my tongue, and it's called:_____."

Gossip. Gossip is like venom, like the bite of a coral snake...it can kill. In Florida they have to learn what a coral snake is...



Listen, I don't want to be confused as someone that YOU aren't sure if I'm going to bite you, harm you, cause you pain with my tongue. I want you to know I'm not going to harm you. Oh, it's true, the tongue, hidden behind our lips, it can be like a snake's bite, having the capacity to strike with venom and destructive poison! May that not be true of us. May we be as harmless as a king snake.

James 3:9-12

⁹With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers,^[c] these things ought not to be so. ¹¹Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? ¹²Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

Think with me about some of the most tender moments in your lives. Might those moments have been when someone used kind words to encourage you or inspire you? You know we have the power to use words to change people's lives by how we pour kindness into them. I think of my bride, my grandfather, my mom and my dad, my sister, my friends, you...how encouraging you are! Yes, think of the tender moments in your life. Think of the people who were tender with you. Now, think about those who weren't. What a stark difference. Life changing, perhaps on both fronts.

How about the words of Jesus? One day He'll say: "Well done good and faithful servant." But how about the flip side of that, "Depart from me. I don't know who you are." And you know what? You get to decide what words will be spoken to you.

A verse that we have spread all around our house on note cards and pieces of paper...bathroom mirror, refrigerator, door to the garage:

Ephesians 4:29

²⁹ Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Clara was about three years old when she pointed at that verse on the door going to the garage..., "No wholesome words..." That was a tender moment. I point out this verse because it's near and dear to my heart. Why? Because it's been used to help our family and we don't have to holler and scream.

We let the Scripture do the work. I say this because here's what we've got to do to tame the tongue...we've got to saturate our minds. We must meet with the Lord daily and learn from Him. Spend time in His presence. Allow His Spirit to teach us and guide us deeply in the Word. We must meditate and pray and permit the Lord to fill our hearts with His love. We must be like Jesus who said:

John 6:63

⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

I love Warren Wiersbe and I want to close with some rich insight from him. He said that for every word of Hitler's book, *Mein Kampf*...125 people were killed under his reign in Nazi Germany. Wiersbe said, instead of using words to kill, like Hitler, perhaps we could consider 12 words that could transform a life. Here they are:

**Please
Thank you
I'm sorry
I love you
I'm praying for you**

If we live by these words and they are on our tongue, we will bring life! Oh church, may we be very, very careful with this weapon caged behind our teeth.