



Introduction

James 3

We are in the book of James and we are on a journey to discover

the nature of true saving faith. James has really opened our eyes and helped us to distinguish between CLAIMS of genuine faith and genuine faith itself.

Just because someone claims something doesn't make it true. It's the difference between claiming that that an APPLE tree is an apple tree and claiming that a MAPLE tree is an apple tree. We need to evaluate all claims but especially our own.

So how can you tell if a claim is a false claim or a true claim? Well here's James' whole point. Get to the source. Get to the bottom. Look to the root. But there is a problem with roots; you can't see them. They are buried underground. The root is invisible. But for James, that's no problem. In order to make an assessment about the invisible root all one has to do is look at the visible fruit. Depending on the type of root, you'll get a certain type of fruit.

And so James has been looking at all sorts of evidences, but the particular fruit that James is evaluating in chapter 3 is our speech. Genuine faith has an effect on our words. Our words should be evaluated as an evidence of what's in our heart.

The Speech Challenge

Now this week I was reading about a challenge of the words. And it really seemed simple enough. For an entire week, you just had to follow these six rules:

THE SPEECH CHALLENGE

1. Do not complain or grumble.
2. Do not boast about anything.
3. Do not gossip or repeat a matter.
4. Do not tear someone down even a little.
5. Do not defend or excuse yourself, no matter what.

Now, I would love for you to try this like I did. It's super eye opening. Here's what you will discover. You will discover how absolutely impossibly freaking hard this is. Here I am trying to write a sermon on this subject. I have lots of motivation to really do something about this whole positivity in speech business. And you know how long I lasted? 3 minutes. Here's what happened

I come home and I see that the kids have dumped their backpack on the floor and they've basically just kicked off their shoes at random and as I looked around I just saw stuff tossed here and there I started feeling the annoyance meter rise; and I feel pretty justified in this feeling since Lisa and I have been working on this every day for approximately 22 years.

And normally I would make some sort of cutting remark to remind them of their sloppy habits.

But this time I said, okay, "

- I'm going to bit my tongue.
- I'm going to not say anything this time.
- I'm just going to encourage.
- I'm going to just take it in th chin.
- I'm going to redirect the conversation.
- I'm going to say something nice instead."

But then right at that moment, I rounded the corner and saw them playing video games with drink cups out and tipped over.

So I just blurted out, "Get off, right now and clean up your junk. I've told you 5 million times...."

And then I just stopped and I just stood there amazed. I can't believe I just said that. I told myself I wouldn't say that. You see, you can't tame the tongue. If the heart is evil, it's going to come out. There are dragons in there and you are trying to keep them out with a cardboard gate. I mean, they are just going to burn that thing through like tissue paper against a blow torch.

Even though I was consciously thinking about it, even though I told myself I wouldn't do it, even though I'm writing a sermon about it, I made it three minutes. Is that not embarrassing? 3 minutes.

And as I surveyed my speech throughout the week, I think I can honestly say, most of what I had to say fell into two categories: boasting or cursing. We are always trying to either build ourselves up or tearing others down.

Now, today we will have totally and completely failed if you don't walk away with a crystal clear understanding of WHY it is that we cannot tame the tongue. If you walk away with a resolve to 'try harder to be more positive' it would have been better for you to not

have even come. I really mean that. What we need to come to grips with is WHY. Why do we just continue to fail, day after day, week after week with our speech?

There is a REASON we are factories that churn out boasting and cursing.

Jesus said, out of the overflow of the mouth the heart speaks. Rotten things stink. Eventually our words reveal what's inside. We can't help it. In the same way that a man is what he eats, a man is what he speaks. So what do we do about it?

Review

Now really this is just part two of a message Josiah preached last week.

What we have in this passage, as Josiah so helpfully pointed out, is the reality that words are either either powerfully destructive like nuclear weapons or powerfully healing like medicine to the soul.

Proverbs 12:18 There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Those are the options: either POWERFUL blessing or POWERFUL cursing. Now I want you to understand why words are so powerful.

The fact that we can speak is clearly one of the ways that we are like God; no other animal can speak; it's one of the ways we are made in God's image. Think about it. In the beginning was the Word. There was nothing and then God spoke, the WORD spoke, and suddenly, there was something. The word is what created.

And in a similar way, our words create realities when we speak them. We can think to ourselves all we want but the second we speak those words, those ideas go out into the world and they create. They take on a life of their own.

Just imagine a father who says, “Why can’t you get good grades like your brother.” Or to his two daughters, “Your not as pretty as your sister.”

Those are not just sentences. Those words, when spoken, create, build and weave realities. Those spoken words create eternal identities. The creative moment when those words are released can never be undone.

Maybe you still carry in your soul hurtful words your parents said to you, your best friend how he just stabbed you to the core. The taunts you received, even as a little kid.

James compares those words to spark, just a little thing that slips out and it takes on a life of its own.

But they can also be powerful agents of healing and life giving. Perhaps you can remember an encouraging word given to you in moments of deep despair. Perhaps you can remember a compliment that struck you and stuck with you for life. You’ll never forget it.

Words are either POWERFUL swords or POWERFUL antiseptics.

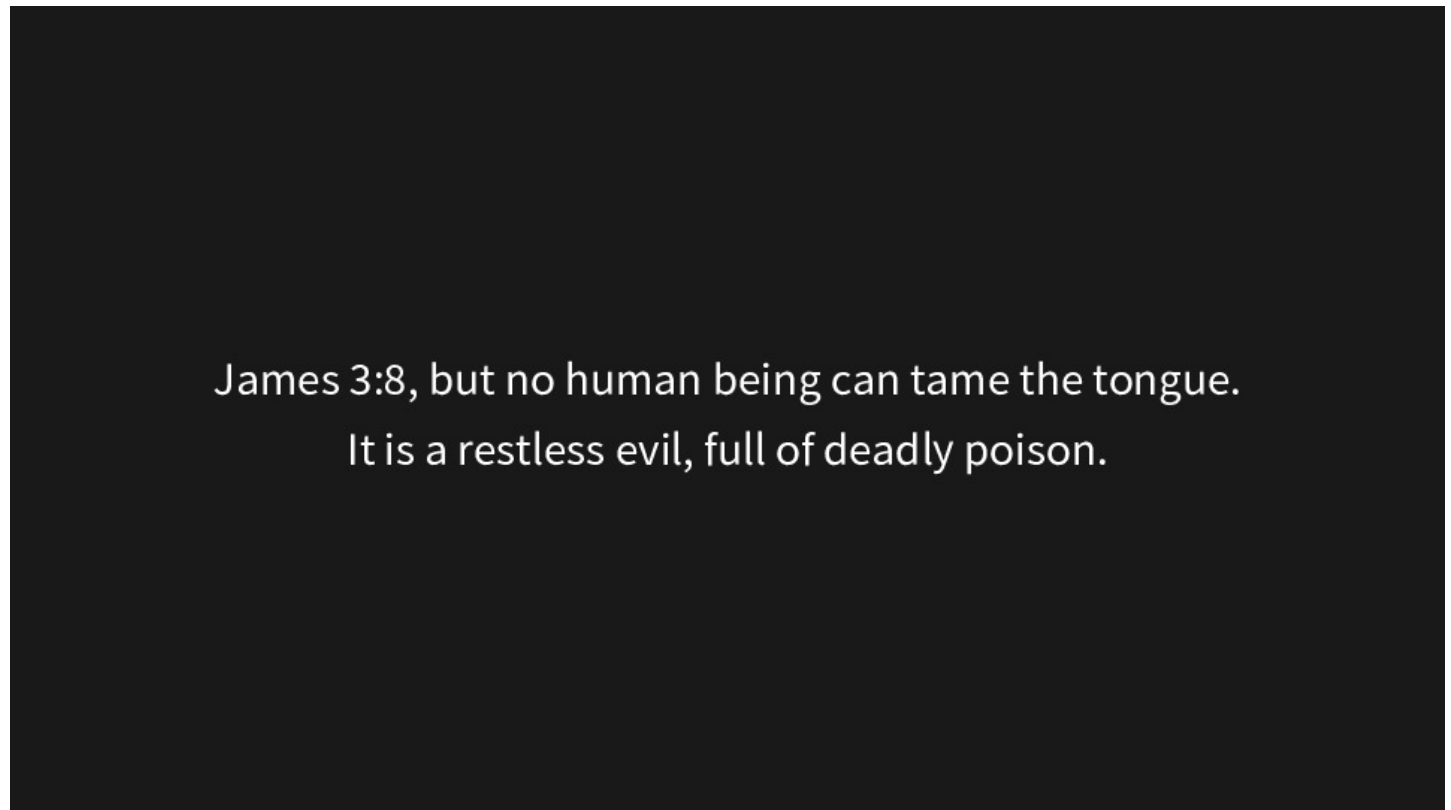
So of course the question we want to ask is this: if words are so powerful to destroy or give life, what do we do about the fact that so many of our words create and destroy rather than give life?

And as we observed from last week, a lot of the focus of James' writing is on diagnosis and not so much on remedies. So at first blush he's not that helpful.

James appears to be here to test not treat. A test tells you who you are. But here's the thing: a test doesn't tell you what to do about it.

A pathology lab report just tells you THAT you have cancer. It doesn't tell you WHAT to do about it. The book of James can sometimes feel like a cold, heartless, and even hopeless pathology lab report. James says your words reveal you have a terminal cancer of the heart. It's the worst kind. It's the deadly, lethal. No human being can tame the tongue. Okay, your copay portion is \$500 please.

It does feel hopeless. This is how the passage ended last week.



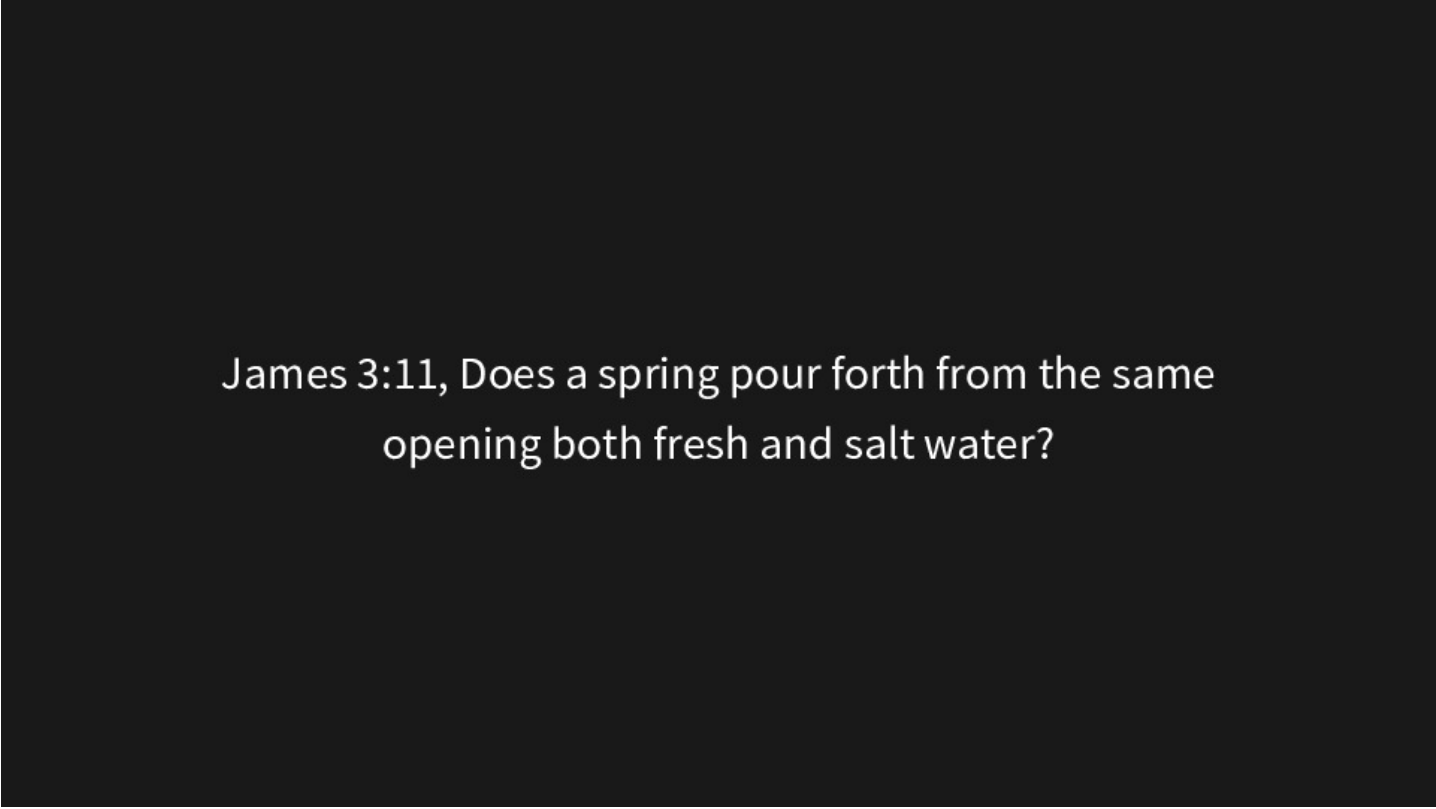
James 3:8, but no human being can tame the tongue.
It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

Where's the hope there? Nobody can tame the tongue. This is a

terminal case. Is that where James intends to leave us? Today what I want to do is focus a bit on the solution to the problem.

And the solution comes in the form of several analogies. In just a few verses we get four analogies all of which are helpful in GIVING US HOPE! What do we do about the cancer? Well the analogies he gives here contain the answer if we just spend a little time thinking about them.

Now here's the first analogy.



James 3:11, Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?

So the principle here is pretty basic. The source determines what kind of water you end up drinking, right? This is pretty obvious in the physical world but not as obvious when it comes to our hearts and actions.

James wants us to apply the analogy. If the supply of your words is filthy, then it's no wonder your words are filthy?"

If every time you turn on the faucet, you discover it's black and filled with moss and gardia and you get horribly sick, you aren't going to fix that problem by cleaning the cups in the cupboard or the outside of the faucet with dawn soap. The only solution to THAT problem, is change spring. Change the source. It's always a question of source.

And that principle is the key to understanding everything James has to say about the tongue. So here's our outline based on the text.

HOW TO CURE THE TONGUE

1. Confess it's Polluted.
2. Poison can't be Diluted.
3. So, Where you are Rooted?

That's where we are going. So, let's start with the first point. The first thing to do is to confess.

HOW TO CURE THE TONGUE

1. Confess it's Polluted.

Now this text really opened up for me when I realized what James is really trying to say. In fact, I think I read this text incorrectly my entire life until just this week.

When I would read these texts I would read them like this. Okay, God is comparing my mouth to a spring. And that spring spews out good things and then for some random reason it spews out bad things that hurt people. Goal - get that spring to be less bipolar. Speak more good. Speak less evil. Is that how you read it?

But that's not James' point at all. James' point is this. If there is a salty source mixing with a pure source, then the whole thing is salty. It's ruined. What well produces half good and half bad? If there's any bad, isn't it true the whole thing is bad? The tendency is for us to look at the good things and think, "Okay, sure some of my speech was a little salty.

- Okay sure, I'll grant that. Nobody's perfect.
- But look there. That one was good.

- I said some nice things to my kids.
- My prayers were pretty commendable.
- My counsel over here was pretty epic.

James is trying to get us to stop fooling ourselves. There is no such thing as a well that produces fresh and salt water. If there's any salt water at all, then you have a salty spring contaminator. That's evidence of the wrong source. You're kidding yourself if you think that you're connected to a pure well.

And that's a problem because if there's any salt, the whole thing is polluted.

You see the same principle back up in verses 8 and 9.

James 3:8-9, 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.

The tongue is being compared to deadly poison. Sometimes we bless people and sometimes we curse. And again, I used to read this as ok, do more blessing of God with my tongue and less cursing of men. But that's not what he's saying. **WHAT IS THE DEADLY POISON?** The deadly poison is the fact that both exist in the same tongue! In fact, that mixed reality is what makes it so deadly.

Consider a guy whose trying to hunt deer. He walks around with a gun. Every time he sees a deer he tries to shoot it. What is that deer going to do? He's going to run for his life. But what about the guy who puts a little feed out in his yard and the deer learns to trust him and then he brings the feed in a little closer and the deer learns to trust him. And then weeks later after the trust has been established,

he pulls out a gun and shoots the deer at point blank range.

Which of the two hunters was more deadly? You see the mixed nature of our words is absolutely lethal. We open up people's hearts with our good words so we can stab them with our hurtful words.

It doesn't matter how many beautiful words you sing on Sunday. It doesn't matter how many cool things you can say with your mouth in Bible study settings, it doesn't matter how religiously sounding your Facebook posts are....if any of your words are polluted, the whole spring is polluted.

And again, in some ways, the good words makes it way, way worse. All your good words are just bait, all the religious lingo is just luring in your victims so they open their heart up to you, they begin to trust you, so you can stab them.

That's why marriage hurts are the deepest. You trust, you let them in, you trust, you let them in further and then the knife!

That's also why sins like gossip are so, so incredibly damaging. With gossip you lure a person in through caring words. Concern. I just want to process with you about something... I don't know what to do, maybe I can tell you about my situation and we can pray about it. And rather than confront the person directly, there's all this indirect side conversations.

Even though the Bible says as clear as day, "If someone has a complaint against his brother, go to him privately. If he repents, you've won your brother."

Even though the Bible says that you say, "I'm just going to get

counsel from someone I respect” That whisper then goes out and destroys. I’ve seen so much damage from that seeming little sin.

So what’s the solution? If you hear evil words come out of your mouth, confess. The first step is always, repentance. It’s just confessing. It’s just good old fashioned repentance.

I think confessing that our language is evidence of an evil heart is one of the hardest things to do. That’s why there’s this second point.

HOW TO CURE THE TONGUE

1. Confess it’s Polluted.
2. Poison can’t be Diluted.

So many people try to apply this passage the way I tried to. Okay, let’s try and get the good words to outnumber the bad words.

- Let’s try turn up the positivity juice a bit.
- Let’s try and put some more smile sauce into our words.
- 10 positive word challenge

That’s crazy talk. Imagine going into a restaurant and being given a glass of filthy, black water. It smells like sewer. You could see the

settiment. You could even see bugs swimming around. *And so in a pretty upset voice, you ask the waiter, “Do you expect me to drink this?” This water is filthy.” And she said, “Oh, I’m so, so sorry. And she took out some fresh water and just topped off your glass.” That is almost an insult. That’s worse. Do you think that helps?

You see, until we confess, we are just topping off glasses. Let’s sprinkle a little positivity on top of our poison. But confession pours out the cup. Confession is that magic of just purging and eliminating the evil and yucky things and letting Christ be the one who takes care of them. And then we let Christ fill our cup.

1 John 1:9, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Do you see the cleansing part? Confession cleans the cup.

Without confession, we are just topping off glasses. With confession, we clean the cup.

That’s such an important distinction. I know you guys are thinking people. And because of that there’s something that is probably really bothering you. You might be thinking to yourself, “Self, how does this work? My speech is always mixed. My speech will always be both filled with CURSING and BLESSING. If mixed water is really not any different than bad water, in fact maybe even the worse kind of water, then I’m that guy, right? What does that say about me?

Well here’s what it says about you. You can never be righteous through your words. So stop trying.

The question is not, ‘do you have salty speech.’ Of course you do.

Why? Because you have a salty heart. So yes, of course it's mixed. The question is what do you do with it? Do you confess it or do you ignore it. There are two kinds of Christians. Those who speak fresh and salty water and confess it and those who don't. That's the only difference.

Don't think the Christian life is one-time repentance deal and then it fixes everything. The Christian life is a lifestyle of repentance. What is promised in this life is NOT the elimination of sin. What is promised in this life is FORGIVENESS when you do. The presence of sin remains. The power and penalty of sin has been removed. The corruption in us runs very deep and therefore will be surprisingly present even in our great moments.

Listen, I want to remind you that you just how possible it can be to walk in the Spirit one moment and walking in the flesh the next. Do you remember Peter's great confession. Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" Some say you are the great prophet. Some say Moses. Some say Elijah. Then Jesus turns to Peter and say, "But who do you say that I am?" You are the Christ, the son of the living God.

Flesh and blood did not reveal that to you. Those WORDS came from God.

Now the text continues

From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You."

But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." (Matt. 16:21-23 NAS)

Now what I want to illustrate here is that in a span of two minutes Peter went from walking in the Spirit and speaking words of life to walking in the flesh and speaking words of death. He went words set on fire by heaven to words set on fire by hell itself.

And does that not ring true in your experience? Wow that whiplash is sometimes so surprising. But here's the real issue. What do you do about it?

Now Peter has a choice. He either ignores that. He pretends like that didn't happen and now he's just topping glassess. Or he repents. And we have the promise, "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Which means we can start over with a clean glass.

yes, you can start clean, because of what Jesus did. You can dump it. You have to confess. You can't just ignore. You haven't dealt with the darkness. You have to receive Jesus' forgiveness.

So let's do that. Confession is where we say, that speech was evil. That speech is what Christ died for. God please forgive me for saying that. We start by saying what David said in Psalm 51. Against you and you only have I sinned. And then you talk to the person who you spoke to... maybe they said hurtful things to you.

Who cares. This is your confession. It's not a 50/50. Will you forgive me for the evil that came out of my mouth.

Right now, we need to do that.

- If you cut people down,
- if you constantly criticize,
- if you complain,
- if you argue every point,
- if you make excuses,
- if you have opened your mouth and spoken negatively about someone else
- if you have spoken carelessly about someone's body
- if you lie,
- if you bend the truth in your favor,
- if you conveniently leave facts out,
- if you nag,
- if you whine,
- if you try to win and explain how you are right.

Don't try to justify it. Don't try to explain how the circumstances made you do it. Don't try to point to the other good things you do. Don't say, hey look at this fresh water over here. For some reason, it's just so hard to repent of our words.

- If we lust, we usually blame ourselves.
- If we steal, we usually blame ourselves.
- If we overeat, we usually blame ourselves.

But if we burst out in anger, if we say hurtful words, if we complain, if we blame others, if we share a little morsel, try to find sympathy for our situation with our words, we almost always find a way to absolve ourselves of our responsibility.

When it comes to our words, it seems we can always find an explanation that exists outside of us. We dump the sin in the lap of someone else.

Don't forget when we talk about communication we are talking about not just words, but tone, non-verbal...all of it. Even the silent treatment.

Just repent. Remember the God-like power we have with our words? When we speak those words do something to others but they also do something to us. When we confess, when we actually speak those words, it does something to us. WE, WE are changed.

Do you know what confess means, literally, it means to say the same thing as. You use your mouth to say about yourself, the same thing that God says about you. You confess it. And what is God saying about us that we need to say? How does God's speech about us need to match up with our own speech about us.

We need to confess that without God we are evil. Without God, our hearts are so evil. We can't do this ourselves. It's just not possible.

One of the things that sets the Christian message apart from all other messages in the world is our utter helplessness. The gospel message is not very flattering. On the surface it's really crushing.

Jeremiah 17, The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

This is what God says about us. Confession is just agreeing with it.

Romans 3:10-14, as it is written: None is righteous, no, not one; 11

no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. 13 Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. 14 Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.

Look at your speech. This is what God says about us. Confession is just agreeing with it.

Romans 8:7, For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.

This is what God says about us. Confession is just agreeing with it.

Romans 7:18, For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

Do you see the point? We do not have the ability. The flesh, that part of you that exists without Christ, does not have the ability to do good with the lips. Confession, just admits that.

The only way to clean the bowl is to let Christ do it. You have to confess. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out

I am like a lame man trying to tell his legs to move. I can't do it.

Beautiful words come from a different spring.

HOW TO CURE THE TONGUE

1. Confess it's Polluted.
2. Poison can't be Diluted.
3. So, Where you are Rooted?

I want to emphasize so strongly, that the solution is not try harder. Try to get a better percentage of good vs bad.

So here's where this message really boils down. Change the source. We need to change where we are rooted. So he drives home this principle again with a couple more analogies.

James 3:12, Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

Have you ever found yourself trying to apologize and instead of an apology out comes excuses? Can a fig tree produce olives? No. Because it's a fig tree. It's nature is to produce figs. Our words are terrible because we haven't changed the source! Your just drawing from the SAME OLD stuff.

Have you ever tried to apologize and then out comes a complaint that the other person hasn't fully apologized so why should I apologize? Can a grapevine produce olives? No. It can only do what nature allows grapevines do. If your nature is bad, you need to change the nature. If your words are bad, you haven't changed the source. Same old stuff.

Have you ever tried to really work on your language, really just focus on being positive and changing those bad habits, and then just the smallest little trigger and bam, right back into it. Can a salt pond produce fresh water? In Israel, the obvious location of a salt pond is the dead sea. The dead sea is so incredibly salty. It's almost like

syrup it's so thick with salt. Can you stick your head in the dead sea and drink up some fresh water? You can't expect to get both. Why? Because the nature of salt water is that it will mix with all the other water around it. It's nature does not allow separation. If you drink from the dead sea, your going to puke. If your words are salty you haven't changed the source. Same old stuff.

And so with all these powerful analogies that James provides for us, let me present to you his point.

Now You have a tongue. And that tongue is connected to a heart. That heart has a nature. What kind of heart is it? Here's where this whole message is heading. Your heart, apart from Christ is corrupt. It's horribly corrupt. All you need to do is look at your words. As Jesus said, "Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks." What is that tongue producing? Is it producing poison?

If so, what do you think the solution is? Switch springs. You know how to do that? You know how to sink your roots into a new spring? Use your lips to praise the Father.

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. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

Notice that the dichotomy in the text is not bless men vs curse men. It's bless God and curse men.

Application: Walk in the Spirit.

What God wants you to do with your tongue is praise him. Yes, you need to confess your sin by confessing who you are but you also need to confess who God is. You need to say about God what he says about himself.

You see so much of our problems come from not confessing what God says is true. We need to say back to God what he says is true about himself and to us.

This is what the Bible means by a sacrifice of praise. When we sin, we have this instinctual response to offer a sacrifice. And that's good. But what kind of sacrifice? The Bible talks about offering a sacrifice of PRAISE.

Hebrews 13:15, Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

We acknowledge, I can't change the spring. You died for my salty spring. And now, because of that, I praise you. I rejoice. Remember when David sinned with Bathsheba, so many ugly words came out of his mouth. So many sinful words.

And so he repents. He confesses. Toward the end of the Psalm he says this.

Psalm 51:15-17, O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. 16 For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

In the temple system, Moses commanded Israel to offer sacrifices of thanksgiving. What are we thankful for?

We are thankful that God made the way. We can't do it. Jesus Christ is the Word we need. Yes, your sins are like scarlet. Yes, you have sinned with your mouth. Yes, your mouth is an open grave. But You are my beloved child. I love you. I died for you. You're my treasure. I adore you. You're my precious little one.

That has the power to heal and overturn all of the things that have ever been said about you before. It can change you. It can heal you completely. It scatters the vultures that have been pecking away at your mind all these years, all those pecking thoughts, what your dad said, what your mom said, what your friends said, what you have

said, all of those things that are haunting you. The Word, the Word comes in, the Word we need, the Word we have to have. And Jesus Christ says, "I love you." And because he spoke to you, you speak back to him.

Listen, FCBC, open your mouth. Let the words come out. Speak PRAISES back to God and others. Speak of his goodness. Speak of his character. Say it. If you don't say it, the words have no power over you or over others. Don't think it. Say it.

Maybe you aren't a man of many words. Maybe you don't like to talk much. Well, that's okay, but when this lands, you definitely have one thing to talk about. Just blurt out what God has done for you. Just speak. Just spill out your guts.

When Jesus is in our guts, what spills out is beautiful. It's life giving. The words heal. When Christ is inside, we discover that everyone around us is being edified by it.

God has given you a mouth to sing. God has given you a mouth to praise. God has given you a mouth to shout out words. And those words have power of you and others. SAY IT. SING IT. That's how we change the source.

What the Spirit of God does is shows you the beauty of who Jesus is and what he has done for you. And that unglues the tongue. That gets you to praise God the Father. And that solves everything. That blesses everyone.

So let's get out of our chairs right now, let's open our mouths, let's loosen the tongue and let's sing about the great, great beautiful love of Jesus Christ. Let's let the fountain of living water come out of us.

Now what worship leader doesn't love that setup for a closing song.

