



**Date:** 08-10-2025

**Sermon Title:** Taming What No One Can Tame

**Text:** James 3.1-12 NLT

**Anchor Verse:**

**James 1:7- 8 NLT**

“For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

**Proverbs 18:21 NLT**

The tongue can bring death or life; those who love to talk will reap the consequences.

Notes:

### **James 3:1–12 NLT**

Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly. Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way. We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself. People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring.

**A teacher's tongue can \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_.**

### **James 3:1–2a NLT**

Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly. Indeed, we all make many mistakes.

Notes:

\_\_\_\_\_ your tongue and \_\_\_\_\_ your life.

**James 3:2b–5a NLT**

For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way. We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches.

**James 1:26 NLT**

*If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless.*

**Matthew 12:34 NLT**

*You brood of snakes! How could evil men like you speak what is good and right? For whatever is in your heart determines what you say.*

Notes:

**A tongue on fire is a \_\_\_\_\_ on fire.**

**James 3:5b–12 NLT**

But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself. People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses

those who have been made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring.

***Acts 2:2–3 NLT***

*Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them.*

***Ephesians 4:29 NLT***

*Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.*

Notes:

**Next Steps**

**1. \_\_\_\_\_ Before You Speak**

“Pause before you post, preach, or pass judgment.”

Spend one day this week intentionally slowing down your speech.

Before giving advice, teaching, or responding in conflict, ask:

- Is this true?

- Is this helpful?
- Is this kind?

Use Proverbs 15:1 or Ephesians 4:29 as a guiding filter for your words.

## **2. \_\_\_\_\_ Where Your Words Have Wounded**

“Healing begins with humility.”

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal someone you may have hurt with your words—recently or long ago.

Write them a message or have a conversation to apologize and seek reconciliation.

As a teacher, parent, friend, or leader—own the impact, not just the intention.

## **3. \_\_\_\_\_ Your Tongue to the Spirit**

“Your tongue follows your heart—so give both to Jesus.”

Begin each day this week with a short prayer: “Holy Spirit, take control of my words today. Let my tongue speak life, not death.”

Memorize James 1:19 or Psalms 141:3: “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!”

Consider fasting from negative speech (complaining, sarcasm, gossip) for 24 hours and journal what you notice.

Notes:

## **JAMES 3:1–12**

### **Taming the Tongue**

Some while ago I was asked to give a talk about my early life and why I had chosen the path I did. I was surprised, when preparing the talk, to discover how many of the key moments in my first fifteen years were to do with my teachers. Like many others, I suppose, I had some good teachers and some bad ones; but among the good ones there were two or three who took the trouble to get to know me, to find out what made me tick, and to give me friendly words of encouragement and advice. Often that's all it takes. Someone you trust says one or two sentences, and a door opens into a whole new world.

That, no doubt, is why James says that teachers will be judged with greater strictness. One hint in the wrong direction, and someone else's life—perhaps a whole classroom full of other lives—can be sent down a wrong path. Now there are, of course, different kinds of wrong paths. Many people will realize something is amiss and find their way back. But in other cases the damage will be done.

How much more is this the case in the church! One sermon pushing a line, pouring scorn on a cherished doctrine or advocating something that's not quite right, and a whole churchful of people may set off in the wrong direction. One word out of place in a pastoral conversation, and the listener, at a vulnerable and impressionable moment, can be encouraged to make a false move. Teachers, beware! is the lesson here. Perhaps that's why many vocational advisors tell prospective ministerial candidates that if they can find anything else to do, they should do it.

From that rather sombre beginning, James proceeds to develop his theme. Having begun by warning about how difficult it is to come up to the mark as a teacher, he expands the point: taming the tongue in general, for anyone, is so difficult as to be almost impossible. Get that right and you've obviously got your entire self under control. The tongue, it seems, is the last bit of a human being to learn its lesson.

But how important it is! It may be small, but like a horse's bit or a ship's rudder it can determine the way the whole person is going. Let slip the wrong word at the wrong moment and a precious relationship can be spoilt for ever. A promise can be broken. A bad impression can be given which can never be repaired. No wonder the Psalmist prayed that God would place a sentry in front of his mouth, to check on everything that was coming out (Psalm 141:3). As he said before, any pretence of being devout that doesn't result

in a serious working-over of speech habits is a sham. This is a central and vital part of what it means to be truly human.

But it is more serious even than that. The tongue, declares James, is a fire, ready to set things ablaze. We know only too well, from the way the media eagerly trip up politicians and other public figures, that one word out of place can ruin a career or bring down a government. One unwise remark, reported and circulated on the Internet, can cause riots the other side of the world. So, says James, the tongue is like a little world all of its own, a country within a country: the larger area, the person as a whole, may be well governed, but in this smaller region corruption and wickedness reign unchecked.

This brings home the real underlying point. Why is the tongue like this? Jesus had pointed out that what comes out of the mouth is a sign of what is really there, deep in the heart (Matthew 12:34; Luke 6:43). James echoes this passage when he speaks of the fig tree bearing olives or the vine bearing figs. Things just aren't like that! If someone turns out to be pouring out curses—cursing other humans who are made in God's likeness—then one must at least question whether their heart has been properly cleansed, rinsed by God's powerful **spirit**. And if that isn't the case, it turns out that the tongue isn't simply a private world of injustice. It is getting its real inspiration from **hell** itself (verse 6).

What James is after, then, is consistency. He wants people to follow Jesus through and through, to be blessing-only people rather than blessing-and-cursing people. It's a high standard, but we should expect no less if the **gospel** is indeed the **message** of **salvation**. The danger, as always, is that people will take the bits of the message they want, and quietly leave the real challenges to one side. But it can't be done. The spring must be cleansed so that only fresh, sweet water comes out. For this we need help. That, fortunately, is what the gospel offers.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Wright, [\*Early Christian Letters for Everyone: James, Peter, John and Judah\*](#), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 19–22.