

Faith Controls the Tongue

James 3:1-12

OK, I must be honest with you. I am so glad that none of you live right next door to me. You see, I can get a little unruly when doing yard work. I tend to, well, let's just say I talk back to the yard when it isn't cooperative in the process.

Controlling my tongue can be a full-time job. Do any of you have the same issue? Since I was honest, you all can be honest as well. We all have a problem called the tongue.

The tongue can get us all into all kinds of trouble. And it happens to be James's 6th test for our faith. **Does your tongue reflect your faith?**

Today we will consider 3 elements regarding the tongue.

- I. The Tongue is the Most Difficult to Control
v.1-2

James 3:1-2, "Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that

we who teach will be judged more strictly. 2 We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check."

So how all-encompassing is the tongue? The first sin after the fall used the tongue when Adam slanders God for providing a woman that led him astray.

James mentions the tongue in every chapter of this book. Ultimately the tongue reveals who you really are. The tongue reveals what is in your heart.

What does our tongue reveal? Paul quotes the Psalms when he says this in:

Romans 3:13-14, "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips."

That doesn't sound too good, does it? Isaiah adds to this when he writes this:

Isaiah 6:5, "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

We see from Paul and Isaiah that we have a big problem with our tongue. But that isn't the only thing we do with our tongue. Check this out:

Psalms 8:1, "Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens."

Psalms 35:28, "My tongue will proclaim your righteousness, your praises all day long."

With the same tongue we curse, lie and blaspheme, we also praise and worship the Lord Creator of all things. Boy are we hypocrites. This is why James opens this section with the warning that not many of us should become teachers.

James gives this warning because we are all judged on our actions. A teacher will be judged more severely because of the power the teacher has with the tongue.

James isn't trying to discourage people from becoming teachers. Paul writes to Timothy about the role of a teacher when he writes in:

1 Timothy 3:1, "Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task."

Paul calls it a noble task, but James warns that it also has a responsibility connected to it. Paul continues in this same passage with the requirements for being an elder. Notice how many of the requirements require control of the tongue.

Temperate, self-controlled, hospitable, able to teach and not quarrelsome.

James tells us that one who can control their tongue is perfect. What he means here isn't being sinless, rather it is maturity that the one who controls his tongue is demonstrating.

In our world we have the added challenge of controlling our tongues in social media. I suspect that James would have really gone on about social media had he seen it.

Matthew gives us a warning about the tongue when he writes in:

Matthew 12:36-37, "But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for

every empty word they have spoken. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

James’s 2nd element regarding the tongue is:

II. Examples of Natural Control v.3-4

James 3:3-4, “When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. 4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.”

This is the second time James refers to how a horse is controlled. This time he takes it down to the small piece of metal called the bit which is connected to the bridle. Such a small item controls the horse.

Then James gives the example we all can relate to, the rudder. No matter how small the rudder may be, it controls the direction of the boat.

The tongue, even though it is so small, can wreck our day or a relationship or our testimony so easily.

Watch what David says about the tongue in:

Psalm 39:1, “I said, “I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth while in the presence of the wicked.”

How do we muzzle our tongues?

The 3rd element regarding the tongue in James 3 is:

III. The Power of The Tongue v. 5-12

James 3:5-6, “Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.”

The author of Proverbs uses the same concept when talking about the tongue in”

Proverbs 16:27, “A scoundrel plots evil, and on their lips it is like a scorching fire.”

On October 8, 1871, in the tiny town of Chicago there was a cow. This cow, Mrs. O’Leary’s cow, who with the flick of a leg knocked over the lantern and thus began the Great Chicago Fire. When it was all over

17,500 buildings had burnt down, 125,000 people had become homeless, and 300 people had died.

This all happened because of one little lamp.

Then there was the Great Hinckley Fire. On September 1, 1894, a couple of campfires got away and joined together forming the Great Hinckley Fire. The fire was so intense that the temperature was about 2000 degrees. Nails in a barrel melted into one block while train wheels melted to the train track.

The firestorm was so intense that in mere hours it had destroyed Hinckley and several surrounding towns. People escaped by getting into wells, ponds and rivers while others escaped with moments to spare on trains.

The heat was so intense that people on the train were collapsing from the heat.

When it was complete between 200,000 and 250,000 acres had burnt. Hinckley was completely destroyed leaving the 1400 habitants homeless.

Between 413-476 people had died. A final number was hard to establish as bodies were still being found

in the wood's years later as the native Americans and frontiersman of the area were not accurately known.

The Great Hinckley Fire is the 2nd deadliest fire in Minnesota history. The deadliest was Cloquet Fire. It is also the 3rd deadliest in US history.

On October 12, 1918, the fire was ignited by sparks from a passing train. When the fire was complete it had burnt 250,000 acres, destroyed 38 towns, caused nearly 1.5 billion dollars in adjusted dollars damage, injured or displaced 52,000 people and left 453 people dead. Caused by sparks from a train.

Like fire, the tongue has the power to destroy.

Proverbs 26:20-21, "Without wood a fire goes out; without a gossip a quarrel dies down. 21 As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome person for kindling strife."

Have you ever had to deal with a fire? If you have you will also know that whatever the fire doesn't destroy it's smoke contaminates thoroughly. It doesn't leave anything untouched. That is how it is with our tongue.

When James says that one's life is set on fire by hell, he uses the word "Gehenna" which refers to valley southwest of Jerusalem. It had become a place where animals and criminals were burnt, but before it was used for that it was a place the Canaanites and some Israelites would go to sacrifice children as burnt offerings to Molech, the pagan god.

This shows us how the tongue is a tool of Satan.

James 3:7-8, "All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison."

Animals can be tamed but no one can tame the tongue. The concept of deadly poison that James uses here is venom.

Proverbs 15:28, "The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil."

So, if we apply James's test what are we, the righteous or the wicked? Your tongue will tell the tale.

In talking about the ungodly Jude says this in:

Jude 16, "These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage."

Do you know a grumbler? How about a faultfinder? Have you ever witnessed someone flatter others just to see what they could get out of the relationship? You know what I mean.

These are things that can be done with the tongue.

When James uses the word restless here with the animals it holds the idea of a wild animal fighting against restraints. Have you ever seen a wild animal in a cage? That is what our tongues are like trying to escape bondage.

So, how are our tongues grumbling? When we don't get our way or if things aren't done the way we would do it grumbling can come out of an unleashed tongue. Unleashing its fire upon our surroundings.

How does this happen in your family? How about your workplace? How about here at church?

Listen to the words of King David's prayer.

Psalm 141:3, “Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips.”

Have you ever said something and immediately regretted it?

Paul, when writing to the Galatians, makes this statement.

Galatians 5:17, “For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.”

Ahh, Paul gets to the heart of the matter right here. We are not to do whatever we want.

James 3:9-12, “With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. 11 Can both fresh water and saltwater flow from the same spring? 12 My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.”

Here James illustrates how it is impossible to be both a worshipper and a curser. He illustrates it 3 times with the spring, the fig tree and the grapevine. What he is saying is whatever we are, that is the fruit we will bear.

Every believer has blessed and cursed; we are all guilty. But James tells us this shouldn’t be. So, what will we be?

When the Holy Spirit enters our lives at the point of salvation He begins the work of sanctification. That is the process of making us holy. James’s question here is has the Holy Spirit gotten ahold of your tongue yet?

Has the Holy Spirit got your tongue? Is there work that needs to be done yet? If you are like the rest of us, you have a way to go.

How are you giving your heart to the Lord? How are you giving Him your tongue?