

James 3:1-18

Week 4 - Taming the Tongue

Learning Objectives

- To recognize the power of the tongue
- To firmly understand “wisdom”
- To connect wisdom and the tongue’s power (or words) - that what comes out of our mouths is an indication of what is in our hearts

Introduction

? Think about the power words have had on you in your life, whether good or bad. How have others’ words impacted your life? When have you utilized this power of words?

James 3:1-18 (NIV)

¹Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ²We 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.

³When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴Or 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. ⁵Likewise, 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. ⁶The 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.

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

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

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

¹⁷ But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

Part I: verse 1-2

? Why would James single out teachers as it relates to “taming the tongue”?

Possible answers: Teachers are the ones who proclaim the word to an audience—they are highly influential. Teachers know more and are known for having wisdom, but like all people, they stumble. Their words have lots of power over people and reach a wide spectrum of people.

? With this in mind, why do you think James would point out that not many should become teachers?

Possible answers: Not many believers should become teachers because teachers’ words are taken very seriously, and their words are most liable to be judged. They are held to a higher standard.

Proverbs 26:18-19 (NIV)

¹⁸ Like a maniac shooting
flaming arrows of death
¹⁹ is one who deceives their neighbor
and says, “I was only joking!”

Proverbs 16:24 (NIV)

Gracious words are a honeycomb,
sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

? Looking at the Proverbs verses, what stands out to you about the power of words?

Possible answers: The vivid imagery ex: flaming arrows of death, honeycomb. It shows how damaging words can be, but also how healing gracious words can be.

Part II: verse 3-12

? What do you think James is trying to communicate through the metaphors in verses 3-6? How do these relate to what the text says about the tongue?

Possible answers: These metaphors are trying to communicate the immense power of a small thing. The tongue is so small but has a lot of great power for good and evil in the same way the rudder is small but controls the whole boat.

? In verse 8 it says that “no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.”

This sounds rather bleak-- how do we have hope in the midst of being unable to control the tongue?

Possible answers: No human can tame our tongue, but our creator can! God renews our hearts, and from our changed hearts, we can ask for His intervention within us and for what comes out of our mouths.

Matthew 12:34-37 (NIV)

³⁴ You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. ³⁵ A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. ³⁶ 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.”

? In your own life, how have you seen your words reflect what is in your heart?

? Why is it inconsistent to have praises and curses coming from the same mouth?

Possible answers: Because when we give our hearts to God, our hearts have been changed and they can't go back. Once we've given our hearts to Him, they're His.

? How are you doing in this area? In what ways do you see yourself falling into the pattern of both praising and cursing like it talks about in verses 9 and 10?

Potential topics: encouragement, gossip, etc.

Part III: verse 12-18

Proverbs 9:10 (NIV)

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

? What does wisdom look like that doesn't come from God?

Possible answers: It is envious, selfish, and boastful. It is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic.

? Reflect on some of the “wisdom” that our culture prescribes. What are some of the “wisdoms” you feel tempted to listen to and act out?

Possible answers: Listening to the words of successful and powerful people vs. listening to what God has to say-- success looks like making a lot of money, problem solving looks like digging deeper into ourselves, that having a lot of knowledge equates to wisdom.

? How are you able to tell if wisdom is from God vs. earthly wisdom?

Possible answers: When it produces humility, things that are pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, and good fruit. When it is impartial and sincere. When it's not out of envy and selfish ambition.

For Discussion and Accountability

? Is there an area in your life that you need to control what comes out of your mouth? How can we help keep you accountable?