

Trouble Maker

James 3:1-12

The Christians that James wrote to apparently had some issues with their tongues. James 1:26 “If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.”

The power of speech is one of the greatest powers God has given us. Think about it, we can praise God, pray, preach, lead people to Christ, but with that same tongue we can tell lies that could ruin a man’s reputation or break a person’s heart. The ability to speak words is the ability to influence others and yet we take this ability for granted.

James gives us some pictures of the tongues capabilities if it’s controlled or if it is out of control. Let’s take a look.

1. Power To Direct: The Bit And Rudder (3:1-3)

Christians must admit that we all stumble in many ways and sins of the tongue seem to head the list. The person who is able to discipline his tongue gives evidence that he can control his whole body.

Have you ever heard the term “Loose Lips Sink Ships?” Loose lips also wreck lives. A person makes an unguarded statement and suddenly finds himself involved in a fight. His tongue has forced the rest of the body to defend itself.

James gives two examples that are small but has great power just like the tongue: a bit and rudder. A small bit controls a large horse and a small rudder directs a large ship.

The bit must overcome the wild nature of the horse and the rudder must fight the winds that would drive the ship of course. Our tongue also must overcome contrary forces. We have an old nature that wants to control us and make us sin. Think about it, sin on the inside and pressure on the outside is seeking to control of our tongue. This means the bit must be under the control of a strong hand.

David said in Psalms 141:3 “Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips.”

So the bit and rudder have the power to direct, which means they affect the lives of other. A runaway horse or a ship could mean injury or death to those who are close enough.

2. The second picture gives of the tongue is the power to destroy: The Fire And Animal (3:5-8)

A fire can begin with just a small spark but it can grow to destroy a city. A fire reportedly started in the O’Leary barn by an overturned lantern in Chicago on October 8, 1871 and over 100,000 people were left homeless, 17,500 buildings were destroyed, and 300 people died. It cost the city over \$400 million.

Our words can start fires. In some churches there are members who cannot control their tongues or won’t, and the result is destruction. Psalms 39:1,3 “I said, I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin, My heart grew hot within me, and as I meditated, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue.” A hot head and heart can lead to burning words that later we will regret.

No wonder Solomon wrote, “A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even tempered. Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he hold his tongue,”

Not only is the tongue like a fire, but it is also like a dangerous animal. It is relentless and cannot be ruled.

Have you ever been to an animal park where you drive through? There are signs that say stay in your car, keep your windows rolled up. Those peaceful animals are capable of doing great damage, and even killing. Some animals are poisonous, and some tongues spread poison. The deceptive thing about poison is that it works secretly and slowly, and then kills.

James reminds us that animals can be tamed, and fire can be tamed. When you tame an animal you get a worker instead of a destroyer. When you control a fire you generate energy. These things are good when put in its proper place.

If God lights the fire and controls it, then the tongue can be a might tool for the winning the lost and bringing life and not death.

3. The third picture is The Fountain and Tree (3:9-12)

In undeveloped countries water is gold. We need water not only for drinking but also for cooking, farming, and a host of other things necessary for life.

Water is life giving, and our words can give life, but if water is not controlled, it brings destruction. Water is also cleansing. Our words ought to be like that river in Ezekiel 47 that brought life to everything it touched. The tongue is also like a tree. The most important thing about the tree is its root system. If the roots do not go deep, the tree will not grow in a healthy manner. But, if we are rooted in the things of the Lord, then our words will bear fruit.

If you and I are going to have tongues that delight, then we must meet with the Lord each day and learn from him. We must get our spiritual roots deep into his Word because if the tongue is inconsistent, there is something radically wrong with your heart. So the problem isn't the tongue, it's the heart. The Bible says
"The heart is the wellspring of life."

As we fill our hearts with God's Word and yield to the Holy Spirit, He can use us to bring delight to others, and we will be refreshing fountains and strong trees of life.