

Title: James – Taming The Tongue

Text: James 3:1-12

So you have just heard another exhortation from the Letter of James in the New Testament.

-And James is picking up on a theme that was he first introduced back in chapter one: the taming of these tongues of ours.

It's an important part of our discipleship, says James.

And the first thing I'd like you to notice in today's verses, is that James is actually talking to me today.

-He is specifically addressing those disciples of Jesus who presume to be teachers and preachers of the faith to others.

James says here that we preachers and teachers will be judged more strictly in this area of how well we discipline these tongues of ours.

And why is that?

-Because we preachers and teachers belong to a talking profession.

-I am talking to you right now this morning, even if it is a pre-recorded message.

-And you are listening to what is coming out of my mouth.

-Or at least, I am assuming you are.

And James says that we teachers need to be especially careful about what comes out of our mouths

-because we will be judged more strictly.

And there are four simple little lessons James gives preachers here to be mindful of.

-Little lessons you are welcome to listen to and apply to your own lives as well,

-but just know he is really talking to me today. Ok?

1. The first lesson is a positive lesson on how much good these tongues of ours can do when it comes to teaching and preaching the good news of the gospel.

James reminds us of how a "bit" in the mouth of a horse can easily turn the whole big animal this way or that,

-with a simple pull on the rein.

And how a simple rudder on a ship can steer the whole vessel

this way or that.

I brought in a rudder today as a little object lesson for you today.

-This is the rudder for my Sunfish sailboat, and it even kind of looks like a tongue, doesn't it?

-And it's only two feet long and 10 inches wide, but it can steer a 20-30 foot boat and make it turn on a dime.

And James' point is, that the tongue, though it is just a small part of the body, can do amazing things.

-The tongue used for the proclamation of the gospel is a wonderful thing.

-And the tongue used for teaching believers to grow in their faith is awesome.

-And for encouraging people, and loving people, and building others up, and communicating with others.

-These are all good things.

When you think about it, some of the best things that have ever happened to you or me have come through words spoken to us:

"I love you... I am proud of you... will you marry me?"

-It's a girl or it's a boy "

Or how about when someone's tongue told you that Jesus had died for your sins, and you can be forgiven by God, and made a new creation.

Faith comes by hearing the good news the Bible says, and we hear because someone's tongue speaks gospel words to us.

The tongue has incredible power for good in our lives.

2. But James' second lesson is warning that the opposite is also true:

-These tongues of ours also have great power to harm.

And preachers and teachers who stand up and dare to speak to people in God's name about God's word,

-can do great harm in all kinds of ways.

We can misrepresent God. We can misinterpret His Word.

-We can dishonor God's name by being hypocrites and not practicing in our own lives what we preach to others.

We all know preachers and teachers who are manipulators, deceivers, and charlatans.

- Some of the worst moments in the history of the Church have come from preachers and teachers of the faith who have led people astray by false teaching,
- or who have been exposed as adulterers, child molesters, or embezzlers.

You see, preachers and teachers do a lot of talking, and can sound all biblical and holy in church on a Sunday.

- But if our lives the rest of the week don't back up what we are saying on Sunday mornings,
- then it not only calls into question everything we have said, it ends up hurting people who listen to us.
- People often lose their faith in God because of the way preachers and teachers have failed them.

James says the power of the tongue cuts both ways.

- The tongue can do great good, and can also do great harm.
- He says a whole forest fire is started by a small spark, and a world of evil can be started by the words we speak.

And we know that is true for all of us, isn't it? Not just preachers.

- We have all been on the receiving end of someone else's sharp tongue.
- People's words can hurt.
- We may say that "sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me," but it's just not true.

And we know we have also hurt others by words we have spoken,

- words of hurt, words said in anger, words of defiance, words of hate.

3. Which brings us to James' third lesson today.

There is no one on earth save Jesus himself, who has ever been able to completely tame their tongue.

In verse 7 he writes, "All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and creatures of the sea are being tamed, but no one can tame the tongue."

We just can't do it on our own.

- Back in chapter 1 when James challenged us to be quick to listen and slow to speak,
- everyone of us could have confessed that we have a hard time with that.
- Most everyone of us is the opposite, slow to listen and quick

to speak.

-We can't seem to help ourselves.

-Stuff just comes out of our mouths.

-This past week I asked Nancy one day if there was anything she needed me to do that day to help her out.

-She told me a couple things I could do and I didn't respond very well to either one of them.

-I asked why she would need those things done, and thought I had a better idea of what needed doing.

She was irritated, and rightly so.

-And I had to apologize. I mean, I had told her I wanted to help, and then I wasn't in the least bit helpful in the way she needed.

-I was quick to speak and slow to listen.

-And my initial reaction to what she needed just came out of my mouth.

Now thankfully, when that happens, we can all of us use our tongues to repent and confess and apologize and ask forgiveness.

But controlling these tongues is a daily exercise.

-And thankfully, God is in this with us.

-It was God at the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9 who was able to scramble every human tongue,

-and also God on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, who was able to unscramble every human tongue

-so that people from every nation could hear the gospel in their native language.

God can control the human tongue, even if we can't.

-So we need to turn to God and ask for help, and depend on it.

4. And the James' fourth lesson is about the inconsistency of our tongues.

-That one minute we use them to bless and the next minute to curse.

And he says that inconsistency is really an issue of our hearts and minds and emotions.

The tongue we are trying to control may be the instrument of our speech,

-but the content of our speech comes from a deeper place within us.

In v. 11 he writes, "Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree

bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

And we know that if in our own homes we turn on the faucet,
-and dirty water comes out into our glass,
-it doesn't do any good to take a hammer and smash the faucet, does it?

It's not the faucet's fault that dirty water is coming out.
-The problem lies somewhere deeper at the source.

And this is why we so need God's help when it comes to taming the tongue.
-It is only God who can clean up these hearts and minds of ours which is the source of what we end up saying with our mouths.

When hateful, angry words come out of someone's mouth,
-it's a sure sign of the pain and fear and hurt that are in their soul.

When foul, dirty words are coming out of a person's mouth,
-it's a sure sign that cynical and rude and snide feelings have been fed into that person's soul.

Jesus said it is from the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

His younger brother James says it is through the tiny tongue that what is inside us is most easily displayed for all the world to see.

So in this week to come, be quick to listen to yourself.
-Listen to what is coming out of your own mouth.
-Pay attention to the responses or reactions you get from other people to what comes out of your mouth.

Do they taste salt water coming out of your faucet, or fresh water?

If what is inside of our hearts and minds is gratitude to God for all that He has done for us, and all that He has given us of his grace and goodness,
-then the flavor of what comes out of our mouths will generally have the taste of God's Kingdom about it.
-Even if you are simply speaking with the checkout person at the grocery store.
-There will be a flavor of grace, of gratitude, of kindness, or acceptance.

And if that's not the flavor of what you hear and taste coming out of your own mouth,
-then it's time to go to God and get your heart and mind back in tune with His goodness and grace.

And you see, it's not that we will never have a bad day, or never say a cross word, or never act hypocritically.
-We all will do all of those things at various times.
But even then, we can turn to God and ask for forgiveness,
-and ask for help with these tongues of ours.

And we who are teachers in the church, need to be the most careful about all of this.
-Not that I will be any more perfect than any of the rest of you.
-But I need to make sure that I am repenting daily myself, and preaching and teaching the good news of God's forgiveness for imperfect people just like me.

You see, the way of discipleship isn't about becoming perfect in ourselves.
-It's about following Jesus in the way of the cross.
-Living lives of repentance and faith in Him.
And we need teachers and preachers who are not just talking about this, but living it out in their own lives.

When you become a pastor, you don't suddenly get past your need for repentance and faith.
-James says we then need even more repentance and faith than we did before.
-Because now your hypocrisy and sin will be even more evident than it was before,
-and the consequences of your hypocrisy and sin will be even greater than they were before.

So we preachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,
-we need to be taming these tongues of ours,
-but what we really need to be doing is making sure our hearts and minds are continually being cleaned through repentance and faith
so that the source of what comes out of our mouths will be a fresh spring of water from which others may freely drink and be refreshed.

Let us pray.

