

“Faith That Speaks”

Week 5 - James 3:1-12, 4:11-12

February 13, 2022

Tim. Pastor. **Parents Night Out - 9 families, 15 kids - thank you. James 3.** Pray.

Seminary Sandwich. About 6 years ago, I made one of the stupidest comments I have ever made in my entire life. Lindsay and I had been married for just a couple of months, we were living in Louisville and attending seminary up there. And one day I was eating lunch on campus with my friend Tyler. And we sat down to eat, and we both pulled out our lunches. I pulled out my kind of squished together PB&J, good enough, I'm a simple man. Tyler, however, pulls out the most immaculate homemade sandwich I've ever seen in my entire life. I mean perfect bread, tomato slices, lettuce, cheese, bacon, turkey - even avocado!! Avocado on a sandwich! - I mean that thing was incredible.

And so I asked him - did you make that yourself? We had such an early class, how'd you have time? To which he replied - “oh no, Kalie (his wife) makes my sandwiches for me each morning.” Tyler and Kalie had been married about a year at that point, so my thought wasn't - oh, that's nice good for y'all. It was - oh, this is something I didn't know should take place in marriage, I need to go talk to Lindsay...

So I go home, and you know, new bride, wonderful woman of God - asks me how my day was. And I tell her - you know it was good, class was good, lectures about the trinity, blah blah blah. You know one thing though. I ate lunch with Tyler. And I'm just kind of upset because you know, Tyler's wife makes him sandwiches every morning and they're awesome looking, and I have to slap together my own PB&J. So...that gonna change?

Two things I realized in that moment:

- (1) My inability to control my words
- (2) The power that my words have to harm or to heal

We're talking today about our speech.

If you remember back at the end of chapter 1, v26-27, we said that James gave three aspects of what he calls pure and undefiled religion - that is a living faith.

1. **Keep ourselves from sin**
2. **Care for the poor and needy**
3. **Control our speech.**

This is how he says it in James 1:26 - If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

That is what James is interested in addressing in today's passage → How does our living, vibrant, alive with works, faith in Christ affect how we talk. *How does living faith speak?*

Now the weight of our words is a terrifying thing to consider given that, according to most experts, the average person speaks about 1 million words per year or almost 3k/day. And idk, maybe you're not like me, you never say stupid or sinful things that you know you shouldn't say, never respond in anger, always keep a tight reign on your tongue. But at least for me - that's a lot of words - that's a lot of chances to say something I shouldn't.

What James is going to show us today is that dead faith has no control over the tongue, but...

Living Faith Controls Our Speech

Living faith keeps our words in check, it uses words not to tear down, but to build up. Living faith is able to control what comes out of our mouths for blessing and not for cursing. That's the goal.

The What - Control Your Tongue

Let's look at it together:

James 3:1 - Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

James is about to warn us about how powerful and dangerous the tongue is, how difficult it is to control - but he starts by warning that not many of us should become teachers. Well that makes sense, right? If our speech is so powerful and so dangerous, we should be wary of becoming teachers because people who teach God's Word talk a lot.

2 For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

Pause there → Sometimes when we see that word perfect in Scripture, it has more of a meaning of "being mature, being whole." James uses "perfect" in that way in chapter 1 when he says that if you remain steadfast under trial you will be "made perfect" - matured in your Christian character.

Other times, it means sinless perfection. And that's actually what James means here - If you're able to control your tongue, be perfect in how you talk, only ever bless, praise, build up - never say anything you shouldn't, to anyone you shouldn't, in a way you shouldn't - you're a perfect human being.

Because chances are - If you can control your tongue, you can probably control the rest of your body and you'll be perfect.

That's how big of a deal this is to James. Get your tongue under control - your life will be under control. Hold that thought, we'll come back to it.

Now let's ask this question → why? Why does James care so much about our speech? Why does James make such a big deal out of controlling what we say?

It's because James knows and is about to show us, the tongue is powerful, dangerous, and destructive.

The Why - The Tongue is Powerful and Dangerous

Let's talk about this → Let's look first at the power of the tongue.

1. The Power of the Tongue - v3-5a

3 If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. 4 Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.

James gives two illustrations for the power of the tongue - though it's small, it has a lot of power. A small bit which is able to direct a giant horse. A small rudder able to guide a large boat.

And James says that's what a tongue is like. With both analogies it's the same message: **Your speech is intricately connected to your direction.**

That's the power of the tongue. Just like a bit in the mouth of a horse or a rudder on a ship, the direction of your tongue, sets the direction of your heart and life. **Where your speech goes, your heart and then your life will go.**

For example:

- If you talk constantly, day in and day out about how annoying your **spouse** is, how needy, how frustrating, how emotional, even in a joking manner (the ole ball and chain) - it's not going to be long before you actually start to really view them that way. Don't be surprised when you wake up in 6 months hating your spouse.
- If all you ever say about your **kids** is - "they're so frustrating, always disobeying, always in my way. Little bundles of evil!" - Don't be surprised when your love for them and patience with them doesn't grow.
- If anytime anyone asks how your **job** is going and your first response is - what can I complain about? How hard it is, how tired I am, how busy I am? - that's going to set the trajectory of your heart and life toward your vocation.
- ***The **opposite** of all of those are true as well - speak beautiful things about your spouse, your kids, your job - even when it's difficult, hard, tiresome - shifts your heart.

Just like a bit in the mouth of a horse or a rudder on a ship, the direction of your tongue, sets the direction of your heart and life. **SO...Control your tongue, control your life. This thing is small, but powerful.** So James says - you have to learn to control it.

But not only is it powerful, it's incredibly dangerous....

2. The Danger of the Tongue - v5b-6

He keeps going with his illustrations, it's a horse's bit, it's a ship's rudder, now:

5 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!

All it takes is a small spark to set a forest up in flames.

El Dorado Fire. On September 5, 2020 a wildfire started in inland Southern California. I don't know if y'all remember reading about this - Over the course of 2 months this wildfire spread over 22,000 acres, destroying 16 buildings, killing 1 person and injuring 12 more. It came to be known as the El Dorado Fire. You know how it started? An accident at a gender reveal party. One of their colored smoke machines malfunctioned and a small spark set their backyard on fire, and then it spread, and spread, and spread.

All it takes is a small spark in the right setting to start a wildfire. James says - the same with our tongue. Our tongue is incredibly powerful and incredibly dangerous.

And when you combine that power and that danger James says - **you have a recipe for destruction.**

3. The Destruction of the Tongue

6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.

Our speech has the power to lead to absolute destruction.

We can do so much damage with our tongues. Our speech, just like a spark at a gender reveal party, can be so small - a word here, a comment there, a joke, a dig, but wreak so much havoc and destruction - next minute it's the el dorado fire.

Proverbs 18:21 - Death and life are in the power of the tongue...

Two Ways Our Tongues Destroy

**And that's what James begins to hone in on and where we'll spend the rest of our time.
How our tongues, our speech, can destroy...**

Two ways our tongues destroy:

1. How we talk to people

Skip down to verse 9 of James 3:

9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? 12 Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

The first way our tongues can destroy is how we talk to people.

Notice his wording in verse 9 - With our tongues we bless our Lord and Father - we praise Him, we give Him glory and honor, we worship Him...And then with that same tongue we turn around and curse people who are made in his likeness. We curse people He loves. We curse people He died for.

Blessing and cursing are two mega themes in Scripture - Both in how God relates to His people, and then calls us to relate to one another.

To bless someone means to speak life over and into them. It is to declare over someone a welcome, privilege, favor, To impart strength through our words, to call them up and out, to encourage, to build up. This is part of how we live into being an image bearer of God - when God speaks in the Scriptures, life comes forth. So when we too have the power to speak life in the blessings of our words.

So if I were to bless Harper, my daughter, I would speak life into her, I would say things like - "I'm so proud of you. You're a good daughter. I love you no matter what."

While cursing is the exact opposite. When we curse someone, we don't use our words to build up, we use our words to tear down. We speak words over people that are meant to bring harm, to lead to destruction, that are meant to destroy. "You'll never amount to anything. You're a screw up. You're a failure."

When you consider the power and danger of our words - you know the power of a curse or a blessing, right?

If you've been on the receiving end of this you know what I'm talking about. I don't know when or where we decided to teach our children an untrue rhyme.

Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.

How untrue is that? Right? If you've ever received the brutal force of words, you know the rhyme, more accurately should be:

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but wounds from words last much longer.

Some of us, we're still operating out of response to curses pronounced over us years ago. We know the power of the tongue. We're still driven by that thought in the back of our minds of that thing that person said to us 5, 10, 15 years ago that just lodged in there and won't go away. And so we've been driven our whole lives by the desire to prove them wrong.

I still have words that were spoken over me that I have to consistently put to death believing - curses that I have taken and believed and operate out of. Failure, broken, blind.

But here's what's also true → There are blessings that have been spoken over me in my life that I can still run off years later as well.

- I still remember being 15 years old and being pulled aside by my pastor at the time and his deeply encouraging words that God wants to use me for His kingdom.

The tongue is powerful and dangerous - and can easily be used to curse and destroy.

But he doesn't just address in this book how we talk to people, he also later addresses how we talk about people.

2. How we talk about people

Hop down to chapter 4:11-12.

4:11 - 11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers.

This can be translated as - do not slander one another, brothers. Do not slander, do not gossip.

- **Gossip - saying a true thing to the wrong person.**
- **Slander - saying a false thing to the wrong person.**

Gossip and slander have always been HUGE problems within the church from the very beginning all the way up till today.

And honestly - we should expect that. Christ cares so much about the unity of His Church. Our unity puts the gospel on display to the watching world. How we love one another gives evidence to non-Christians of the way God loves us. There's 55+ "one another" commands in the NT where we're told to pray for one another, love one another, serve one another, care for one another.

So if our unity is so crucial to God getting the glory in the world and the gospel advancing - why wouldn't that be a target of our enemy? Why wouldn't the devil, the Father of Lies, the one who lives and dwells in deceit, want to swoop in and do whatever he could to make us question each other, doubt each other, hurt each other, mistrust each other → all leading to gossip and slander.

This is an **incredibly big deal to God. It's all over the Bible. Let me give you a couple:**

- **Ephesians 4:31 - Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you...**
- **Romans 1:28-32 - And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done....They are gossips, slanderers...**
- **1 Peter 2:1 - So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.**

Gossip and Slander wreck the church. It's a danger of the tongue. Because here's what James says in 4:11-12 happens: **11 The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. 12 There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?**

When we gossip or slander - we become the judge over our brother or sister in Christ. We become the judge:

- Can you believe so and so did that...
- Let me tell you what they said, how dare they....

We put ourselves over them as authority, as judge - they are on trial, we are right. To slander is to appoint yourself in a position of superiority. You go against the law (by not loving) while trying to accuse someone else of breaking the law. It's pick and choose obedience. They are wrong, but it doesn't matter that I'm wrong in talking about how they were wrong.

This is the exact opposite of what the Bible calls us to do - someone sins against you, does you wrong, then you don't run around and gossip and slander and make yourself their judge, you [Matt 7] (1) check yourself first, no posture of self-righteousness but then (2) GO TO THE PERSON IN LOVE.

Our slander is an incredibly big deal to God. It kills the church from the inside out. The small spark of one offhand comment to someone we shouldn't - that's all it takes.

Ways we justify our poor speech

It's worth noting in all of this that James' view of the tongue is much more powerful and dangerous and destructive and important than ours.

Because we don't take our speech very seriously. If we use our tongues for destruction, our first thought is not - there it goes again - that world of unrighteousness set on fire by hell.

That's not what we do at all. First, that'd be sort of weird, but second, that would require us to be honest about our sin...

We don't think our words are powerful. We don't think they matter that much. We think we can separate ourselves from what we say. We don't think they're able to set the forest of our lives or community on fire and destroy.

So because we don't think our words are that big of a deal, when it comes to our unrighteous speech, instead of repenting, being honest with ourselves, asking for the H.S. to help, we:

- Minimize/Excuse (I didn't really mean it like that...)
- Justify (I said that because I was hurt...)
- Deceive/lie (That's not what I actually said...)

SUMMARY:

But James says our speech is not a game, it's not a joke, it's not something to dismiss or minimize, it's not simply "words" separate from us - our tongues are powerful, they destroy. They can set on fire and cause destruction to our lives, our community, our church, our homes...

So the invitation then (3:2) is to control it. That's what living faith does. Living Faith controls the tongue.

The Problem: You Can't Control It

Here's the problem: Verses 7-8, we skipped over them earlier....

7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

Control your tongue! Here's the problem → You can't...James says that humans have figured out a way to tame just about everything - whales, eagles, lions, those are the ones that come to mind for me. They've tamed all of these wild creatures - beasts and bird alike - but no human being can tame the tongue.

- You know how much those words 15 years ago still mess with you, and yet tomorrow you're gonna speak cursing over someone else.
- You know how much it hurts when someone gossips or slanders you, and yet tomorrow you're going to say something about someone to someone you shouldn't.

You can't control the tongue on your own.

Here's why that is:

Matthew 12:33-35 - 33 "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. 35 The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil."

You can't control your tongue, because it's ultimately not a tongue problem, it's a heart problem.

Because our hearts are evil, our speech is evil. What comes out of us is what is inside of us. So you don't change your speech by trying to change your speech - no gossip, no more, stop it tongue. You change your speech by changing your heart.

The problem is not ultimately our tongue, it's our heart. We need new hearts.

But here's the freeing and good news - just like you can't change your tongue, you also can't change your heart.

Gospel - Jesus changes our hearts

That's why we need the changing power of Christ. It is Christ who changes our hearts. It is Christ who makes the bad tree good, the dead tree alive. It is Christ who removes our heart of stone and gives us a heart of flesh.

I love the specificity of James in 3:8. Look at what he says – **but no human being can tame the tongue.**

Not - no one. No *human being*. But you know who can tame the tongue? Jesus. The God who became man. Jesus can change our tongue because Jesus can change our hearts.

Augustine - "James does not say 'no one can tame the tongue,' but 'no man', so that, when it is tamed, we admit that it was done by the mercy of God, the assistance of God, the grace of God."

Our tongues are evil...We can't control them...Our hearts are evil, they lead to evil speech...but praise be to God because He changes our hearts and gives us more grace!

Salvation → New creation - not just forgiveness but a new heart.

So today is about giving yourself over to the grace of God.

1. First, if you're not a Christian to become a Christian - because your speech won't be changed until your heart is changed, so you need a new heart - which Christ promises to give you when you put your faith and trust in Him.

2. Second, by letting every mess up you make with your speech lead you back to your sinful heart and your deep need of God's grace. Not a chance to excuse, minimize, deny, avoid - but a chance to repent. To go back to - I need Jesus.
3. Third, if you're a follower of Jesus - recognize and live in the reality that your heart is changed and you are a new creation in Christ Jesus, so you don't have to live with your old ways of speech. You can say no to gossip. You can say no to slander. You can bless. It will take grit. Effort. Discipline → all fueled by the powerful grace of God and working of the Holy Spirit, deepening your dependence on Him for greater change. (resolutions for the tongue)

PRAY. COMMUNION.