

Sunday Morning Message

November 14, 2021

Putting Your Faith to Work – Study of The General Epistle of James

Demonstrating Faith Through Our Words

Text – James 3:1 - 12

Congregational Reading – James 3:1 - 12

Introduction

We have been taking our time going through this General Epistle of James, which was the earliest New Testament Book, originally written to a predominantly Jewish Church; but through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God, it was also intended for a much broader audience – Jew and Gentile alike - and designed to be applicable for many generations to come, including the time that we are in right now.

James is a very practical Book, which shows very plainly and bluntly how God's people should behave themselves. Back in chapter one, we examined two kinds of temptation and the wisdom that's available to us in order to overcome them. We also studied about the Word of God, and the fact that we need to be doers of the Word and not just hearers only.

There are two key verses in chapter one which revealed three tests that the Bible gives for people who truly belong to God. James is talking about people who really know God, and whose lives are truly being influenced by the Word of God. People who have real religion, not just people who have go through some sort of external ritual or ceremony, should be able to pass these three tests at least most of the time.:

"(26) If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. (27) Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:26-27)

Basically what James was saying is that true religion, which comes from a real relationship with Jesus Christ will impact your life in three ways:

1. It will cause you to control your tongue.
2. It will cause you to care about those who are less fortunate than yourself.
3. It will cause you to live a separated life.

Chapter two of James further developed that second test regarding how we treat others who are less fortunate than ourselves. James states that God's people should be impartial regarding the treatment of others. It does not matter if the person is rich or poor, cultured or uncultured, educated or illiterate, from the same race or a different race – everyone is equal in the sight of God, and should all be treated equally within the church.

Chapter two drove home the theme of the Letter – Faith without Works is Dead. Our faith needs to impact the way we live and treat other people.

Transition

Today, we will further develop that first test regarding the tongue that was introduced back in James 1:26:

"If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." (James 1:26)

He also gave us a very important principle regarding the tongue in James 1:19:

"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:" (James 1:19)

Again in chapter two, James reminded us that the words that we say will someday be judged:

"So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty." (James 2:12)

God's people need to get control of the things that they say. This passage of Scripture will show us the importance of *Demonstrating Our Faith Through Our Words*.

There are literally dozens of verses in the Scripture that speak of controlling the tongue:

"My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit." (Job 27:4)

The Psalmist, David, said:

"LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour." (Psalm 15:1-3)

"I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me." (Psalm 39:1)

"Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue." (Psalm 120:2)

*"The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth."
(Proverbs 10:20)*

"The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness. ... A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit." (Proverbs 15:2, 4 KJV)

"He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding." (Proverbs 17:27-28)

"Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles." (Proverbs 21:23 KJV)

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." (Ephesians 4:29)

Jesus said to the religious leaders:

"O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." (Matthew 12:34-37)

Spurgeon said:

"Tale-bearing emits a threefold poison; for it injures the teller, the hearer and the person concerning whom the tale is told."¹

By far, the foremost passage of Scripture dealing with the tongue is found here in James 3.

I. The Teacher and His Tongue (vs. 1 - 2)

¹ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996), 527.

The word for “masters” here is διδάσκαλοι (from διδάσκαλος – *didaskalos*), which is the word for “teacher.”

“Be not many masters” literally means “Many of you should not be teachers.” There is a higher level of accountability for those who lead others spiritually.

Jesus said: *"For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."* (Luke 12:48b)

Verse two indicates that a person who has the ability to control his tongue, is also able to control other areas of his life. But, the converse is also true. If a person, especially a teacher or preacher, is unable to get his mouth under control, then he will not likely be able to bridle other areas of his life.

A mature (“perfect”) man or woman will have some degree of control over the things that they say. They will use their words to build up and strengthen people spiritually, not to tear them down.

Practical Point - I want to encourage those of you who are in positions of influence over others – teachers, preachers, parents, older brothers and sisters), choose your words wisely. Think before you speak.

II. The Taming of the Tongue (vs. 3 – 8)

In vs. 7 – 8, James tells us that just about every kind of animal has been tamed, but the tongue is very difficult to tame – even impossible to tame – without God’s help.

Practical Point – If we are going to get control of our tongues; if we are going to only use our tongues to bring glory and honor to God, and to be a blessing to others; we are going to have to surrender our tongues daily to the Lord. Our prayer every morning should be: “Lord, Help me to control my tongue.”

"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer." (Psalm 19:14)

"Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips." (Psalm 141:3)

A. The Tongue Can Direct (vs. 3 – 4)

James illustrates with two very small devices, like the tongue, which are mightily used to control large things.

In v. 3, he talks about the bit, which is put in a horse's mouth and is used to steer and stop him.

In v. 4, he discusses the rudder of a ship, which is also very small in relation to the ship; yet, it controls the steering of the ship.

Practical Point – You and I need to use our tongues to steer conversations in the right direction.

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." (Philippians 4:8)

B. The Tongue Can Also Be Deadly (vs. 5 – 8)

Notice in these verses the illustrations of fire and poison. Both of these things can destroy life. Fires all start with a little spark.

Illustrate – Back in 1871, a little fire broke out in the O'Leary barn in Chicago, and before it was all over 100,000 people were left homeless. That little flame caused a great deal of damage.

The tongue also can destroy life.

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof." (Proverbs 18:21 KJV)

"Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth." (Proverbs 26:20)

Practical Point – Stop putting wood on the fire of strife.

Notice also the reference to boasting in v. 5. Generally speaking, all boasting is wrong, unless you are boasting about the Lord:

"My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad."
(Psalm 34:2)

"In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever. Selah." (Psalm 44:8)

III. The Twofold Nature of the Tongue (vs. 9 – 12)

Our words can be used to be a tremendous blessing to others as well as a help to the cause of Christ, but unfortunately, the things that we say can also cause a great deal of harm.

Wiersbe said:

“The power of speech is one of the greatest powers God has given us. With the tongue, man can praise God, pray, preach the Word, and lead the lost to Christ. What a privilege! But with that same tongue he 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 accomplish tremendous tasks; and yet we take this ability for granted.”²

Let’s use our tongues to be a source of blessing to others:

"The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked." (Proverbs 10:11)

"The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters, and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook." (Proverbs 18:4)

Again, even the illustration of water is appropriate here. Water is essential for life and is a tremendous blessing to all of us. But, water can also be a curse. It can be very deadly.

Illustrate – Johnstown Flood 1899 killed 2,200 people and destroyed several towns.

Conclusion

1. Pray before you start your day, asking God to guard your words.
2. Speak less. Much of what we have to say is either vanity or even harmful.
3. Think before you speak.
4. Determine that your words will be used to help people not hurt people.
5. Determine that your words will not hurt Christ.
6. Use your words to de-escalate strife. Don’t repeat things that will make the situation worse.
7. Use your words to bring healing and forgiveness to people who are at odds with each other.
8. Use your words to point people to Christ.

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 358.