Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Taming the Tongue, Part 2
Scripture: James 3:5b-12
Code: 59-18

1986

Tonight for our Bible study, we go back to James chapter 3 and look again at the subject of "Taming the Tongue." I can see by the attendance tonight that it was a little too convicting last week. No, these are very busy days and I know how it is with the holidays and family and all kinds of enterprises going on. I wish it weren't so, but sometimes the teaching of the Word of God sort of takes a second place, certainly at this time of the year it ought to be the first thing in all of our hearts.

But as we come again to James chapter 3, as I was looking at this, I was just thinking about the whole idea of the tongue. And I looked back to my own childhood and one of the things that I remember in my mind very vividly, echoing through the halls of my memory, is a statement my mother used to use frequently to me. It went something like this, "Johnny, if I ever hear you say anything like that again, I'm going to wash your mouth out with soap." Have any of you heard that? Good. I don't know that that's being said much today. I'm not sure that anybody is drawing lines as to what is acceptable speech and what isn't, at least in the way they did when I was a child.

But in our family, any bad words, any unkind words, any ungracious words might have been somewhat rare but when they occurred, when they were unfit, my mother was likely to wash my mouth out with soap. I want you to know that I can still taste it; it was Fels Naptha, that's the kind she chose to use. Very bitter, lye kind of soap and it really had an effect on me. In fact, to this very day, I have absolutely no tolerance for evil speech, bad speech, foul language and I think it may relate not only to my theology but the fact that I had my mouth washed out with soap on several occasions.

Now I might say that my mother stood in a long line of people who have wanted pure speech. And James is certainly at the head of that line, from a human viewpoint, because it's his passage here that is the most definitive in all of the Bible in regard to pure speech. And if James were alive and perhaps could speak to us today, he would emphasize today perhaps as much as ever in the history of the world the necessity for people to wash their mouth out spiritually, if not literally.

And I'm sure that James was greatly exercised about this matter of pure speech because he understood that his Lord was also exercised by it. He understood what we saw last week in Matthew chapter 12 where Jesus said that we will be accountable to God for every idle word. Not just evil words, but idle words, careless words, words that serve no good positive purpose. And knowing the

way the Lord treated evil speech, gave him great impetus to treat it in the same manner. And so, just as Jesus taught that speech was to be pure, James taught that speech was to be pure. And just as Jesus taught that the heart is revealed in the mouth, so James is teaching the very same thing. And I want you to understand that. In Matthew 12:34 to 37, as we saw last time, Jesus says that you will be justified by your speech or you will be condemned by your speech. In other words, your speech is such a revealer of your heart that based upon the way you talk, your eternal destiny can be determined. The tongue provides the evidence of what your heart really is. Very, very important.

The new birth, regeneration, salvation with its attendant transformation and sanctification makes you a new creation. And part of being a new creation is new speech. Christians talk differently than other people talk...not perfect, but certainly different. Listen to what the Apostle Paul said in Colossians, very important text, chapter 3, "If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth, for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." Now Paul says you have died and you have a new life hidden with Christ in God. Therefore, with your new life you are to set your mind on things above, not on things that are on the earth.

"Consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and greed which amounts to idolatry, for it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come and in them you also once walked when you were living in them." The implication is now that you're a new creation, you have a whole new approach to life, a transformed nature and transformed behavior.

Then he says in verse 8, "Now you also put them all aside, anger, wrath, malice, slander and abusive speech from your mouth." Put them all away, they have no place in the life of a believer. "Do not lie to one another," that's another kind of illicit speech. "Since you have laid aside the old self with its evil practices and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the one who created him."

So, now that you are a believer, you have a new heart. Now that you have a new heart, you must have a new behavior. That new behavior also involves a new speech, a new speech. In fact, your speech is best defined down in verse 16, "And let the Word of Christ dwell in you with all wisdom, teaching, admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." So your speech is dramatically effected by your new nature, by your transformation. The new man in Christ has a new mouth, has a new tongue, new speech.

So, the tongue then becomes a genuine sort of litmus test for the heart. Back in chapter 1, do you remember verse 26? "If any man among you seems to be religious, or thinks himself to be religious,

or presents himself as being religious, but does not bridle his tongue, he is deceiving his own heart and his religion is useless." Unless your supposed salvation manifests itself in the way you speak, your salvation is nothing but self-deception. So, we would say then as James said in chapter 2, that faith produces works. One of the works that faith produces is speech to the honor of God.

Now I want to talk about this for just a moment so you understand clearly some theological distinctions. True believers, mark this, here's the word, true believers will have a sanctified tongue. Did you get that? True believers, true Christians, totally transformed people, those who have been made new in Christ, will have a sanctified tongue. Let me add something to it. True believers must have a sanctified tongue. Did you get that? True believers will have a sanctified tongue. True believers must have a sanctified tongue.

You say, "Well, wait a minute. If we will have, then why do you tell us we must have?" Because one is a sovereign reality in the new birth and the other is a human responsibility that's really ours to fulfill. And that's the amazing tension and paradox of our Christian experience. If we're truly new in Christ, we will have a pure speech. And if we're truly new in Christ, we will take the responsibility to be sure we have a pure speech. That is a constant biblical paradox. If you understand that, and we hit that a lot of times in our Bible study, but if you understand that, you really are on the way to understanding a mystery.

You can't fully understand it but let me give it to you this way. We are saved by sovereign grace, right? Chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, yet we must believe. We are kept by the security of God in His sovereign decree, yet we must persevere. We live by sovereign power, not I but Christ living in me, yet we must obey. And as James would put it, because we are new creatures, we will endure trials and we must endure them. We will receive the Word and obey it and we must receive the Word and obey it. We will be gracious to the needy without partiality, and we must be gracious to the needy without partiality. We will produce good works and we must produce good works.

In other words, you'll never really be able to resolve the fact that what God says will be true of you, must be true of you. Just because God said it doesn't mean we can lie down flat on our back and hope it happens. And that's really the mystery of the apparent paradoxes of the Christian experience. Where there is genuine living faith and true regeneration and transformation, these things will be the result and they must be the result. God will produce them in us but He produces them in us through our commitment to them. You understand that? That's the best we can get at it.

So, when James speaks of the tongue, he speaks of the truth that the tongue will reveal the heart condition and at the same time calls us to do everything we can to see to it that it in fact does that. So that we cannot just sit back and say, "Well, God says I'm a new creation, it will all take place by itself." God says you're a new creation and it will all take place, but not by itself but through your Spirit-

energized commitment. Very basic. So while this passage, note this, is a statement on the character of living faith as revealed by our speech, it is also a call for us to correct our speech because the two go hand in hand. What God says will be true of us, must be true of us. God takes care of the "will be" and we in submission to His power take care of the "must be."

Now James then sets out five compelling reasons for controlling our tongue. Five compelling reasons...do you remember what the first two were we went through last time? Number one, it's potential to what? to condemn. Verses 1 and 2, "My brethren, let not many become teachers knowing that we shall receive the stricter condemnation for in many things we all stumble or offend." And here James says the tongue has tremendous potential to bring judgment. And he uses teachers as his illustration. He says let no one hurry into the teaching ministry because the tongue has so much potential to condemn you, you don't want to get into any kind of situation where you are using your tongue unless you understand the potential danger there. Don't hurry to be a teacher of Holy Scripture because no one can avoid offending with the tongue. And when you're a teacher and you offend with the tongue, the ramifications are far reaching.

Now notice, please, he doesn't say "let no one be a teacher," he says "let not many be a teacher." Those that are called, those that are gifted and those that are prepared, fine. But the rest, you better stay away from it because of the tremendous potential of the tongue to speak the wrong thing, to misrepresent God's truth and therefore bring upon you great judgment.

Now let me be personal for a minute. It's really my conviction, and I don't say this very often, but it is my conviction that there are far too many people teaching the Bible today...far too many. And I'm not...I'm not saying that there's some biblical passage that I can look at to prove that, but I think what James is saying here assumes that a lot of folks are going to flood into the teaching ranks who really don't belong there and who are going to bring upon themselves some very severe circumstances in terms of God's punishment, chastening or whatever. It is my conviction that there are far too many people teaching God's Word who are ill-advised to be doing it, who are ill-equipped, who are ill-prepared and by virtue of the errors in their teaching are bringing upon themselves a stricter judgment than they would ever experience if they never taught at all. We need less teachers. I am convinced we need less churches. We need more excellent teachers and more excellent churches. And James is calling for the same thing...a sense of the seriousness of the matter of teaching because of the potential of the tongue to serious and grave error.

So, the tongue must be controlled because of its potential to condemn. Secondly, the tongue must be controlled because of its power to control. If you don't control it, it can control everything. Verse 2, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man and able also to bridle the whole body. Now we put bits in the horses' mouths that they may obey us and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships which though they are so great and are driven by fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so, the tongue is a little member and

boasts great things."

Now James here says, "Look, the tongue has tremendous power to control. It's like a bit that by pressing against the tongue controls the whole body of the horse. It's like a rudder that guided by the helmsman turns the entire great ship. The tongue is a small member, it boasts great things. And it has every reason to boast great things because it can accomplish far reaching effects though it is small. And only an absolutely perfect sinless person will never offend with his tongue and only Jesus was able to fulfill that. A mature believer if he walks in Christ's likeness as much as is humanly possible, will control his tongue. But we who are in this human flesh will all sin with our tongue and the tongue has tremendous power to control.

In fact, what we saw last time is that James says control your tongue and that is the greatest sinning member of you and if you control your tongue, you'll control all the rest because the spiritual dynamics that control your tongue will therefore control all the lesser spiritual battles with the various other parts of your humanness. So when you apply the means of grace to the discipline and sanctification of the tongue, it will cover all other areas because the tongue is the leader in sinning. You sin with it more frequently than any other part of your body. You can sin with your tongue by simply saying something. As I said last time, you can't do everything but you can sure say anything. You sin most easily with your tongue, so do I. We sin most readily with our tongue. We sin most potently with our tongue.

So, we must control the tongue because of its potential to condemn and its power to control. Now thirdly, and this is where we want to pick up from last time, very interesting, verses 5 and 6...because of its peril to corrupt. The tongue is very dangerous. In verses 2 through 5, he was simply saying the tongue controls. He didn't say that was bad. He didn't say that was good. He just said the tongue is a controlling member. It dominates a person and is the key to their behavior. And because of its power to control, it must be controlled. Now he shows that the tongue because of its power to control is a tremendously dangerous thing. The power to control that the tongue has is not always good. In fact, very often it is bad. And a definite negative tone dominates James' words as he talks about the power of the tongue and its danger.

Look at verse 5 again. He had said even though the tongue is small, it boasts great things. Then he says, and here's where the verse ought to start, with the word "behold," it's clearly a break. "Behold how great a matter," the Authorized says, "a little fire kindles." Now this is an exclamation at the danger of the tongue. It has a fearful potency for destruction. The text actually says...get this...."How great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire," or literally, "What sized forest, what sized fire kindles."

The contrast is staggering. A forest fire, you can take one little burning cigarette and set thousands and tens of thousands of acres ablaze. Fire is a fascinating thing. You can take one little tiny flame

and set a whole city burning to the ground. Fire has an amazing capacity. Water cannot multiply. If you have a cup of water and you pour it out, it won't become a flood. It can't. But if you have a match, you can light a forest fire or burn down a whole city because fire has a way of multiplying. And the tongue is not like water, it is like fire. What is says can set a whole forest blazing. And the imagery here is vivid because in the dry brush of Palestine, a small spark flying off of a fire in the cold evening could touch the dry ground in the dry season and set a blaze that would literally cover the landscape and destroy everything in its path. We know about that in California because the terrain here is almost the same as it is in the land of Palestine.

In Psalm 83, "O my God, make them like a wheel, like the stubble before the wind as the fire burns a forest and as the flame sets the mountains on fire." The psalmist there alludes to the fact that a small flame can set a whole mountain, a whole forest ablaze. Now that's a truism. That's what we call an axiom or a truism. Behold, what sized forest, what sized fire kindles?

In Chicago October 8, 1871 at 8:30 P.M., a spark started in Mrs. O'Leary's barn. And before it was over, that one spark from supposedly that one cow in Mrs. O'Leary's barn burnt 17,500 buildings, 300 people were burned to death, 125,000 people were homeless. And in 1871, they estimated the damage at 400 million dollars...one spark. I was reading in 1903...I wasn't reading in 1903, I wasn't even around in 1903...I was reading THAT in 1903, I want to get that correct, I was reading that in 1903, a pan of rice boiled over onto a charcoal fired stove in a small home in Korea and before that little charcoal fire had done its damage, 3,000 buildings were totally burned to the ground within a one square mile area.

Now that illustrates the power of fire. And you understand that. And so, what James says in verse 5 is, "Wow..." behold means "Wow," exclamation, "how great a fire, a little flame can kindle." And then in verse 6 he makes his point, "And the tongue is...what?...a fire." The tongue is a fire. Proverbs 15:28 says, "The mouth of the wicked pours out wicked evil things." And it sees the mouth of the wicked as a fire. In Proverbs 16:27 it says "An ungodly man digs up evil and in his lips there is a burning fire." Everything his fiery mouth touches is set on fire and the fire spreads. Proverbs 26:20 says, "Where no wood is, there the fire goes out. So where there is no tale bearer, the strife ceases." And the picture here is that the tale-bearer or the one who passes on the evil report of the slander or the gossip or the lie is like the wood that fuels the fire. The same Proverbs passage, verse 21 says, "But as coals are to burning coals and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife." The word "kindle" means to burn up. The picture again of gossip and slander and contention being a fire that devastates.

In Psalm 52:2, the tongue devises mischief like a sharp razor. That's a fascinating picture, too. The tongue is like a razor, it cuts. I will never forget picking up the Los Angeles Times while I was a college student and reading about a guy who picked up a girl who was a prostitute on a street in East L.A. and took her out to indulge himself with his flesh and he leaned over to kiss her and she had

between her lips a razor blade with which she instantaneously sliced off both of his lips, his top lip and his lower lip. An absolutely unbelievable thing, that was her way of getting back at men who somehow had injured her in the past. And I never thought....think about that without thinking about the fact that the only thing more devastating dangerous and powerful than that razor blade is the tongue. the tongue is a razor blade, a sharp razor is says in the Psalms. The tongue is a fire that kindles and burns. That same Psalm 52:2 that says the tongue is a sharp razor also says in verse 3 and 4, "Thou lovest evil more than good and lying rather than to speak righteousness. Thou lovest all devouring words, O deceitful tongue. God shall likewise destroy thee forever. He shall take thee away and pluck thee out of thy dwelling place." God will judge those whose tongues do damage.

Psalm 57:4, the psalmist says, "My soul is among lions. I lie even among them that are set on fire. Even the sons of men whose teeth are spears and arrows and their tongue is a sharp sword." Job 19:2, Job says, "How long will you crush me with your words?" The devastating power of a tongue to start a rumor, to spread a malignant lie, evil in its intent, it's a wildfire that cannot be stopped.

I remember so many times my father saying to me, "My greatest fear in the ministry is what people might say." That is...and still, I'm sure, is his greatest fear, that someone might say something that isn't true and totally destroy his ministry. And he used to say to me, "People can say anything. People can say anything. Pray that God protects you from the evil of people's tongues who slander you and you can never recover the damage they do." The tongue is a fire. It is a devastating thing, the tongue, and must be kept under control.

Morgan Blake, a sportswriter for the Atlanta Journal, wrote I think an interesting statement. He said, "I am more deadly than the screaming shell from the Howitzer. I win without killing. I tear down homes, break hearts and wreck lives. I travel on the wings of the wind. No innocence is strong enough to intimidate me. No purity pure enough to daunt me. I have no regard for truth, no respect for justice, no mercy for the defenseless. My victims are as numerous as the sands of the sea and often as innocent. I never forget and seldom forgive and my name is gossip." And that's why Proverbs chapter 10 verse 19 says, "He who restrains his lips is wise." Don't be fuel for anybody's fire. Don't be the wood or the coal that keep the fire going.

And then notice verse 6 again. And here, I believe, is the strongest statement ever made on the danger of the mouth. In fact, the statement is so strong, I'm not sure that I can convey to you everything that I wish I could. My skills in language are not good enough for me to be prosaic enough to get this across. But I'll trust that the Spirit of God will do it. This is the most powerful statement on the danger of the tongue ever made. It says, "The tongue is a fire," and then this, "A world or a system, a cosmos of iniquity." It is a cosmos of iniquity. There are four elements here. "So is the tongue among our members that it defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course or the wheel of nature and is set on fire of hell."

The statement is so overwhelming. It has four parts and I want you to follow carefully because they warn us about the peril of the tongue. Number one, it is a system of iniquity. Now that's a strange title for a tongue...a cosmos. Cosmos, we often translate that "world," but it's world not in the sense of the earth, not in the sense of the physical earth but the system of evil. And what he is saying is the tongue is an iniquitous system. It is an unrighteous hostile rebelling order within our humanness. It is a whole potential evil that falls short of God's standard. It is the focal point of behavioral unrighteousness within man. It inflames all of our capacities in its effort to bring the whole person into its wicked system. Jesus then sees the tongue, get this, as the focal point of a vast system of iniquity. One commentator said it is the microcosm of evil among our members. The tongue is a vile wretched wicked system in its fleshly humanness. No other bodily part has such far-reaching potential for disaster as the tongue.

So, first of all, in itself and by itself, it is a system of iniquity. It is a network that breeds evil. Secondly, notice how this begins to expand now. Secondly, the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body. It in itself is a system of evil and then it defiles the whole body. It's like smoke from a fire, stains everything that doesn't burn. It stains everything. I remember when I was in college, a store burned down and everybody said, "Hey, they're having a fire sale." And I went down and I needed a sport coat and didn't have much money so they had one there for $9.00. They said it was smoke damaged. And I figured that's all right, I'll just take it out of the store and wear it a few days and it will go away and I'll hang it out in the cold air, or whatever. And I'll never forget as long as I owned that coat which I came to detest, but having a limited wardrobe frequently wore, I smelled like I was on fire. And I know that everyone I met thought I was a heavy smoker. And like smoke from a fire, I even remember the color, light blue...it was ugly to start with. But it was like smoke that stains everything that doesn't burn. So the tongue is a raging fire and what it can't consume it will stain with its putrid foul smoke. And so you have right in your body behind your teeth and walled in by your mouth, this system of iniquity that wants to run off...and you've heard it many times. And what it does is stain your whole person with the foul smoke, if not the flames of its evil intent.

James says it is set among our members. It is placed among our members or our bodily parts. That is to say it is included within all of our human capacities and the tongue stains it all. He uses the word "defiles." That’s a very vivid word, it means...it's used in Jude 23 and it means to pollute, it says others save with fire...with fear, rather, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garments spotted or defiled by the flesh, something that has been made gross or evil or wretched. So mark it, a filthy tongue results in a filthy person. A filthy tongue stains the whole person. What world of iniquity is set loose in your mouth either burns or smoke-stains your whole person. It's what Mark 7 verse 20 talks about. "That which comes out of the man defiles the man."

Verse 23, "All these evil things come from within and defile the man." And what are the things? Well, he mentions among them deceit, lasciviousness, blasphemy, pride, foolishness and those involve

sins of the tongue. And even the other sins can have relationship with the tongue. So a person is morally blackened by one brush of the tongue. The word "body" here, it says there it defiles the whole body, simply means the whole person. Body is used in the same way soul is used. It doesn't just mean your physical body, it means the total person.

So, first of all, in your mouth you have a system of iniquity. Secondly, it will stain and burn your whole person. And look at thirdly, this is really incredible, it expands again. "And it sets on fire the whole course of nature," says the Authorized. A better translation, "It is setting--present tense--on fire the circle of life." What does that mean? The thought is expanded. First is the system of wickedness. Second, it stains the whole person. Now it sets ablaze, and the Greek is, "the wheel of birth" or "the circle of life." What does that mean? The whole machinery of your life. It not only stains you, but it touches everything you touch. It affects the whole machinery of your life. It goes beyond the body to touch every participant in the circle of your life.

People know you by how you talk, right? They know you by how you talk. The tongue reaches beyond your mouth to stain your body. It reaches beyond your body to touch the whole network of people that are touched by you. Gossip, that repulsive thing, rumors, slander, false accusations, lies, evil speech can stain and pollute and destroy a whole family, a whole group of people, a school, a church, a community.

And then he speaks of a fourth factor in this the most devastating statement on the danger of the tongue. He says finally at the end of verse 6, "It is set on fire of..or by hell." Present tense, it is habitually being lit--as it were--by hell. Boy, what a vivid, vivid thought. The word here "hell" is “Gehenna.” And that term “Gehenna” needs to be explained. It is only used in all the New Testament in the gospels with this one exception, this is the only time it appears outside the gospel, Matthew, Mark and Luke. The Lord used it at least ten times recorded and He always used the word “Gehenna” to refer to the eternal place of burning where damned souls will go. And you can read in Matthew and in Luke the times that He used it. It is the place where the fire never goes out, where the worm never dies, where the thirst is never quenched. It is that eternally burning place.

But what does the word "Gehenna" mean? It's translated "hell" but it could simply say, "It is set on fire by Gehenna." What is “Gehenna?” South-southwest of Jerusalem, I have stood on the precipice of Mount Zion. And if I look to the south and some of you have been there, you see a deep valley that goes straight down from a cliff, a deep low valley that is known as the "Valley of Hinnom." “Gehenna” is the Valley of Hinnom. It is the Greek word for the Hebrew "Valley of Hinnom," ge-hinnom.

Now let me tell you about that place. In 2 Kings 23:10, you don't need to turn to it, but in 2 Kings 23:10, King Josiah--you remember young Josiah came along and brought a great revival, bringing the people of Israel back to God? One of the things he did was abolish idolatry. One of the forms of idolatry was human sacrifice. The worshipers of Moloch, M-o-l-o-c-h, were worshiping this false idol

by offering their children in a fire to be burned, literally human sacrifices. When Josiah became the king in Judah, he went and stopped all the worshipers of Moloch from burning their children alive. By the way, the god Moloch was a bull, a bull which had outstretched arms and those outstretched arms were containing a fire and the little children were laid upon the arms of Moloch and burned in human sacrifice.

Josiah stopped those sacrifices and they occurred in the Valley of Hinnom. So from the very earliest, the Valley of Hinnom was a place of burning, a stench of the flesh of little children. The Jews then came to regard the place with deep hatred. And that very deep valley plunging off the plateau of Jerusalem became the city dump. Garbage, refuse, the dead bodies of animals and criminals were pitched into the Valley of Hinnom or Gehenna.

Now in order to burn this garbage, and Jerusalem had plenty of it, and in order to burn the dead bodies of animals and criminals that were thrown there, the fire burned all the time. It had a sickening stench, the combination of garbage and burning flesh, and became known as "Gehenna of Fire" because the fire never went out. And so Gehenna became a fitting symbol of the ever-burning fire and the crawling worms to illustrate the future hell of the ungodly. Only in that hell, Jesus said, the fire never consumes finally. And we might say that hell then is the eternal rubbish heap of the universe.

And so, notice then, the tongue is a system of evil on its own...but it effects the whole person by spewing out its filth and it sets its filthy stain and fire on the whole machinery of life as far-reaching as the network of the influence of a person and the thing that starts it all, it is set on fire by hell itself. In other words, behind it all is Satan. That tongue that you have and that I have is a tool of Satan to pollute your whole person, to corrupt your whole circle of life and it all comes right out of the pit of hell and it all leads right back to the pit of hell.

Boy, I mean, that's a pretty strong description, isn't it? What a description of the peril of the tongue to corrupt. So dangerous, so dangerous. And no wonder James is so greatly concerned that we bring the tongue into control to the honor of God...because of its tremendous potential. You remember Psalm 55:21, where David says the words of his mouth were smoother than butter but war was in his heart. His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords. Sometimes the tongue is so subtle we think that it intends well when it intends evil. It must be controlled. And every believer realizes that in his fallenness, in his flesh, in his humanness, there still remains the power of the tongue to devastate. Your tongue, dear friend, is not yet glorified. Won't it be wonderful to have a glorified tongue that does nothing but praise God and speak righteousness?

So we must control the tongue because of its potential to condemn, its power to control and its peril to corrupt. Fourthly, will you notice verses 7 and 8? Just a very brief and direct point and I try to illiterate in these last two just to kind of keep your thought in line, and I call this one its primitiveness to combat. Now what I mean by primitiveness is it is primitive, it is wild, it is untamed, it is savage, it is

uncivilized, undisciplined, irrepressible, irresponsible and the tongue will combat every effort to control it. Have you noticed that? It wants to control, not be controlled.

So notice what he says in verses 7 and 8. "For every species of beast and of birds and of serpents and of things in the sea is tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but the tongue can no man tame, a restless evil full of deadly poison." Now what he's saying is the tongue is untameable. It is primitive in that sense. It is uncivilized..undisciplined, humanly untameable, that's why it's so dangerous. And unregenerate tongues are all the more dangerous. It's amazing...it's amazing how one man who wanted to sue Grace Community Church could use his tongue to set a fire across the world to discredit everything we stand for. But that's in effect what happens.

And the tongue cannot be tamed. And James says God gave man the power to control animals, go back to Genesis chapter 1. And even after the Fall, God reiterated to Noah that he'd be able to get all the animals in the ark. When God said you're going to bring them in two by two, God gave Noah the ability to control those animals to make sure they got in there two by two. And today, man still dominates, man still is able to tame animals. You've been to the circus and you've seen lions that are tamed. You've seen a guy stick his head in the mouth of a lion, you've seen people ride killer whales, I mean, for the most part, man is able to tame the wild animals...ferocious, large, strong beasts, the fiercest of them, the deadliest of them. I've even seen people, and you have too, with snakes crawling all over them...able to tame them.

And so he says in verse 7, every kind, phusis, every species. And then he names two that walk and fly and he names those that walk and fly and then those that swim and crawl. Those that walk and fly are beast and birds, and those that crawl and swim are snakes and things in the sea. Of course, the most noble animals are those that walk and fly and the least noble are those that swim and crawl. Beasts, that word "beasts" therion is always used of quadrupeds and wild animals, never used of domesticated animals. But man can tame the wild animals. And he can tame the birds and he can tame the reptiles and he can tame the creatures of the sea. We all know that. They're all tamed, present tense, continuously being subdued and they have been all through man's history subdued.

But no one can tame the tongue. No one among men can tame the tongue. No one is able to do it, dunati, no one has the power to do that. Even in believers, the tongue breaks out of its cage, right? You can't tame it. We can't control it. James doesn't say...mark this...doesn't say it can't be tamed, he says man can't tame it. There's a difference, did you get that? He doesn't say it can't be tamed, he says man can't tame it. Who can tame it? God can by His power. If the first recorded sin after the Fall came from an untamed tongue, and it did, where Adam blamed God, then the first act of the new creation and the church was the taming of the tongue because the first thing that happened after the Holy Spirit came was everybody received, as it were, cloven tongues of fire and they all immediately spoke the wonderful works of God. The first sin was a sin of the tongue and in the birth of the church, the purified tongue spoke the wonderful works of God.

But here James says the seriousness of man's inability to control his wild savaged tongue is because it is a restless evil. It's always ready to break out. It fights against restraint. It doesn't want to be held back. Restless is the same word translated unstable in James 1:8, akatastatos. And then he says it's an evil poison, or a deadly poison. It is not only like a caged animal, a monster of inconsistency wanting to break out of its restraint, but when it breaks out, it carries a death dealing venom, like a snake's tongue. Romans 3:13 says the poison of asps is under their lips.

You remember Psalm...is it 140? Verse 3, "They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent, adder's poison is under their lips." The tongue is like a deadly snake, it spews out deadly poison. The tongue...the tongue is an assassin.

In Psalm 64, just the ten verses in this Psalm, listen to what they say, "Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer. Preserve my life from fear of the enemy, hide me from the secret council of the wicked, from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity, who whet their tongue like a sword." That's to sharpen. To whet means to sharpen a sword. "Who sharpen their tongue like a sword, who bend their bows to shoot their arrows even bitter words that they may shoot in secret at the perfect...the perfect ones, the righteous ones. Suddenly do they shoot at him and fear not, they encourage themselves in an evil matter, they speak of laying snares secretly, they say, Who shall see them? They search out iniquities, they accomplish a diligent search, both the inward thought of every one of them and their heart are deep. But God shall shoot at them with an arrow, suddenly they shall be wounded, so shall make...so they shall make their own tongue to fall upon themselves and they that see them shall flee away." And he goes on from there.

God's going to turn their tongues against them. But their tongues are like arrows, spears and swords. The tongue is an assassin.

Do you remember in Genesis chapter 31? Listen to these, the poisonous tongues of Laban's sons, telling lies to Laban about Jacob which resulted in Jacob being driven out of the land and totally devastating Laban's home and family life. And the snake- mouthed princes of Ammon spoke lies against David, accusing him of hypocrisy in honoring Nahash their king and his son Hanun. The result was that the king put together an army of his own thousands and added mercenaries numbering 30 thousand foot soldiers, plus others, and sent them to destroy David because of that lie for no reason. And the result was a terrible slaughter of 700 Syrian charioteers and 40,000 horsemen and their commander, all because of the lie of one man.

And you remember vile king Ahab of Samaria wanted the lovely vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. And he refused, he was refused that vineyard. And he told his wicked wife, Jezebel, so she designed a plan to get the vineyard that Naboth had. They would have a special palace feast and they would invite Naboth to be the guest of honor and they would seat next to Naboth, two evil men and in the

middle of the feast in his honor, these evil men would stand up and accuse Naboth of cursing God and cursing the king. And then immediately everybody would be in horror about his blasphemy, they would pounce on him and kill him. And that is exactly what they did. Killed by a lie. The evil slander resulted in the murder of Naboth. It resulted in the devastation of Ahab and his house by God. It resulted in the death of Jezebel whose body was eaten by mongrel dogs in the street...all because of a lie.

And you remember the poisonous tongue of Haman was to be the Satanic tool for the extermination of the Jews by the Medo- Persians in the book of Esther. And God saved them through Mordecai and Esther. And Haman who plotted it all with his evil tongue was hanged on the gallows he had made for the Jews.

And you remember the savaged-tongue men who lied to King Zedekiah about Jeremiah so that they threw him into a pit where he sunk into the muck, Jeremiah 38. And you remember the restless wagging poisonous lips of the Jewish leaders who accused the greatest prophet ever, John the Baptist, of having a demon and accused the spotless Son of God of being a glutton drunkard friend of outcasts and a demon-possessed sinner. And the result of it was both John the Baptist and Christ were murdered.

Many people have died because of the deadly poison of the tongue. Even our own Lord. Fiery tongued haters of the gospel secretly induced men to lie about Stephen and say he spoke blasphemy against Moses and against God. And they stirred up the people with their words and stoned him to death, Acts chapter 6 tells us. And when Paul arrived in Jerusalem in Acts 21, the Jews from Asia stirred up the people against him, falsely accusing him of bringing a Gentile in the temple. And they dragged Paul out to kill him but he was rescued by the Romans as they were trying to beat him to death. He spent the next two plus years in prison. And it goes on and on...the power and peril of the tongue, it is a deadly, deadly poison...a deadly weapon, killing reputation, killing joy, killing peace, killing love, killing everything in its wake.

So, the tongue must be controlled because of its potential to condemn, its power to control, its peril to corrupt and its primitiveness to combat, it fights against everything. Finally, and this was a very tough "P" to find in our outline, "perfidy," means treachery, means deliberate, means a breech of trust...a delivered breech of trust. It means faithlessness, hypocrisy, inconsistency, duplicity. The tongue and its perfidy to compromise...the tongue is a hypocrite. Oh, is it a hypocrite. It will say one thing one time and another thing another time. Will it not? Has it not? Of course.

Notice that the tongue can be noble, verse 9, "therewith," that is with the tongue, "we bless God, even the Father." Isn't that wonderful? Your tongue, my tongue can be used to bless God even the Father. This is very relevant, by the way, to the Jews to whom James writes because whenever they mention the name of God they always followed it with these words "Blessed be He, Blessed be He." And so

with their tongue they were ever and always blessing God. Three times a day they had to repeat the Sheminah Esra, the eighteen prayers called eulogies or benedictions and every one of those eighteen prayers that they said three times a day ended "Blessed be Thou, O God." And it was customary for the Jew with his tongue to be blessing God all the time. The Psalms are full of such blessing.

And the most wonderful function of the tongue is to bless God so in verse 9 he says, "Therewith bless we God, even the Father." Yet...follow further..."And therewith curse we men who are made after the likeness of God." There is the duplicity. There is the hypocrisy. There is the perfidy of the tongue, its treachery. The same tongue that blesses God, curses those made in His image, slanders them, criticizes them, accuses them, abuses them in anger and jealousy and envy and hatred and bitterness. To "curse" means to wish evil on someone. And man is made in the likeness of God. It is, by the way, an indestructible likeness. It has been marred but it is an indestructible likeness, even fallen sinful man is still in the likeness of God...in what sense? In that man like God is rational, man like God is personal, man like God is moral, man like God is self-conscious, man has a will, a conscience, reason. Man can know, man can love, man can act on the basis of rational thought and motive and intent. And so he is made in the image of God and how can man bless the God and curse the man when the man is made in the image of God?

And so, in verse 10 he says, "Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing...out of the same mouth, blessing and cursing." That's right. And there is illustration after illustration about that. Not only in the Scripture but certainly in the lives of all of us. Why the same mouths of the Pharisees that in one breath blessed God, cursed Christ. And then I always think of the mouth of Peter who says, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God," and a few weeks later is cursing venomously saying, "I know not the man." The same mouth. The mouth of the Apostle Paul speaks glorious wondrous truth and then in Acts 23 curses the high priest of God in language that has no place in the mouth of a servant of God, "God smite you, you whited wall," he says.

From the same mouth, my mouth, your mouth, the mouth of all of us comes blessing and cursing. And so he says at the end of verse 10, "My brothers, these things ought not so to be." It isn't right. That's a strong negative, by the way. It's used only here in the entire New Testament...very strong, oichre(?), it isn't right, he's saying, it's not right. Any profane speech is inconsistent, it's unacceptable, it's a compromise. God has saved us and when God saved us He transformed us and when He transformed us, He gave us a capacity for new speech and He expects us to speak that way. It's an impossible compromise to tolerate.

And James illustrates the obvious with three pictures. Verse 11, "Does a fountain send forth at the same place sweet and bitter?" What's the answer? The answer is no. Does a fountain send out, the verb "send out" means to burst forth or to gush, from the same opening the same hope, the same hole or split in the rock fresh water and bitter water? Of course not, it's impossible. And the question

here expects a no answer, meti expects a no answer. It can't be “glukus,” that's "sweet" in the Greek and also “pikron,” "undrinkable." That's a simple illustration, isn't it? You can't have one fountain sending out sweet and bitter water.

Verse 12, "Can the fig tree, my brothers, bear olives?" How about this, "A vine figs?" Utterly impossible...utterly impossible. Let nature teach you what is obvious. You can't have sweet and bitter water coming out of the same fountain, you cannot have olives on a fig tree and you can't have figs on a vine.

And then comes the statement of fact that ends the passage. Verse 12, "So, so...conclusion...no fountain can yield both salt water and fresh," that is a conclusion, my friends, not a question. He is saying a clean heart, a fresh heart can't produce bitter water. And a bitter heart can't produce fresh water. So the taste of the product tells the nature of its source, right? So he's right back to where he started. True believers will be revealed in their speech. And if you're a true believer, it should be able to be seen by your speech, it will be seen by your speech.

You say, "Well, wait a minute, once in a while there's a little...there's a little bitter water among the fresh." I know that. But James is drawing exact lines for us and he is saying it's a truism that salt water can't come out of a fresh fountain. And it is a truism in your life that if you have been transformed by Christ, your speech will show it. That's what he's saying. A fig must have a fig tree at its source. A grape must have a vine at its source. An olive must have an olive tree at its source. Salt water has salt as its source. Sweet water has sweet water as its source. Bitter words come from a bitter heart. Critical words come from a critical heart. Defamatory unloving speech issues from a heart where the love of Jesus is a stranger. True believers will be revealed in their speech and must be revealed in their speech.

And so, James comes at this with the tension in view. One time he's saying if you're a Christian, this is how it will be. Another time he's saying if you're a Christian, this is how it must be. And so while saying it is true, he calls us to be sure that it is true. And that's the tension we have to live in.

In Luke 6 verse 43, Jesus said, "A good tree brings not forth corrupt fruit, neither does a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by its fruit, for from thorns men do not gather figs, nor from a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good, an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth that which is evil, for of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." And I believe James had that passage in mind when he wrote this. He was really referring to what our Lord had said.

The true believer is known by his speech. A true believer speaks with a tongue that is under control. Peter says, the true believer will love life, 1 Peter 3:10, see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil and his lips that they speak no deceit. On the one hand, we will. On the other hand, we must.

And so does James warn us about two things. One, that we are revealed by our mouth, two, that our mouth has tremendous potential for disaster. And so he calls for us to have a tamed tongue. And if we do, it's evidence that we're a Christian. And if we do, it's evidence that we're walking in obedience.

And as you look at your life, beloved, if you see those things coming out of your mouth that ought not to come, you need to confess it as sin and turn from it. And how you react to those times when bitter water comes out of the sweet fountain is the key to your spiritual strength, the key to your spiritual effect and power.

Well, much more to be said but let's pray.

Father, we thank You again tonight for Your Word to us. Help us to control the tongue. Give us power to do that. May we be the good men who ought of the good treasure of our heart bring forth good things, sweet fountains who bring forth sweet water. May it be that every time we open our mouth, we minister grace to the hearers. O Lord, we're reminded of that wonderful, wonderful passage of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4 where he says, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth but that which is good to the use of building up that it may minister grace unto the hearers." And we remember that the Scripture says, "Let your speech be gracious, seasoned with salt." Lord, may they know us not only by what we do, but may they know us by what we say. And may we be characterized by holy speech and thereby known to be the children of God. And we thank You for enabling us to do that because You've given us a new heart and with it a new tongue. We bless Your name, for the Savior's sake. Amen.

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