

Reflection Guide - James 3:1-12

THORNS: How are we sinning with our words?

[1] Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. [2] For we all stumble in many ways.

- James knows he hasn't "arrived." He is conscious of his own shortcomings.
 - maybe he remembers how he misspoke about Jesus, demeaning him during the days of his ministry. Was James among those who said, "He is out of his mind" (Mark 3:21)?
- "Stumble" = verbal recklessness, damages people...maybe misleading statements about someone, careless or insensitive assertions, abusive language

And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

- "Perfect" - not sinless, but complete, mature...same word as 1:4
- Alluding to the significant challenge that controlling the tongue is
- How we use our WORDS is clear reflection of where we are spiritually.

Your Tongue Is More Powerful Than You Think

It's effect on us is disproportionate to its size...more powerful than you think

[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.

Your Tongue Is More Destructive Than You Think

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! [6] And the tongue is a fire,

- Massive devastation started by 1 flammable spark
- Out in the woods, a little carelessness with fire can cause enormous damage.
 - *A scoundrel plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire...stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.* (Prov. 16:27-28)
 - *As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.* (Prov. 26:21)

Your Tongue Is Worse than You Think!

a world of unrighteousness. (character)

- Calvin - *"a slender portion of flesh contains in it the whole world of iniquity"*
- Has a capacity for evil like nothing else
- All the evil characteristics of a fallen world find expression through our words, our tongues.

Your Tongue Is More Influential than You Think!

The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, (influence, -6b)

- Every aspect of our life is impacted by it...nothing is beyond it's impact
 - *How careful you are as you put on a dress for a wedding, especially if it is your own. The spot need only be a small one, but it ruins everything. So it is with the tongue and its words. No matter what graces you may have developed, if you have not gained tongue mastery, you can besmirch them all by an unguarded and ill disciplined comment - Ferguson*

setting on fire the entire course of life, - It's reach and it's duration...NO NEUTRAL WORDS

- *How do we speak to our kids? Friends? Spouses? (burned down w/words of anger, selfishness, bitterness, condemnation)*

- Like that chain dragging behind the truck...sparks flying everywhere constantly...
 - Sparks seem innocent...innuendo, gossip, harsh word, sniping, exaggeration, etc...*"what a great forest set ablaze..."*
 - A few careless words, deliberate or accidental, can result in untold damage
 - Marriages, careers, friendships, self-loathing...holocaust, Jim Crow, abortion

Your Tongue Is More Active than You Think!

8b - It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

- Restless - never satisfied...
- Rm 3: The "venom of asps" is under the lips of sinners, *"Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive"*
- *"In the search for weapons of mass destruction you only need to look in the mirror and open your mouth"*

BAD ROOT: What heart issue lies at the root of these sinful responses? What new HEAT is created by our sinful response? What about God are we failing to believe in our THORN responses? What are we showing is our "overdesire"?

Your Tongue Is More Uncontrollable Than You Think

[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.

- Animal videos rule the internet...water skiing squirrel, skateboarding dogs, painting elephants, etc.
 - What we can do with a lion, a horse, we can't do with our tongues
 - It's Beyond you
- You need to, desperately, you want to...but you can't.
 - Humbling passage...need to feel it's force...confess it's truth
 - Have to recognize the extent of the problem

Your Tongue Is More Inconsistent Than You Think - It's Exposing.

[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.

- Already warned about double-mindedness
 - Delight in God and curse one made in His image
 - Singing can be / feel heartfelt...the gossip shared on the playground out there, the subtle criticism in the car...feels just as heartfelt

My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

- Need to recognize this inconsistency and not make peace with it
- But we don't even notice it most often

Then we get these illustrations...they illustrate the problem and lead us to a response.

[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.

What we say is a reflection of what's happening on the inside

- If you want to know what someone is like just listen to them...our speech, especially about others, exposes the kind of people we are

THEREFORE: THE PROBLEM ISN'T YOUR TONGUE, IT'S YOUR HEART.

You can't simply decide to control your tongue and believe that through determination you will have any real and lasting transformation. If the problem rests in your heart, the only way forward is through the Grace of God. Augustine explains that 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."

Pastor James knows that if we are to have any real and lasting capacity to tame our tongue, you and I must first recognize the depth of our sin and need, that our tongue is driven by our heart (like the horse and ship) and that our words give us the clearest evidence of our need for God's Grace.

- James has laid it out b/c you and I have to be taken to the place where we can realize how dangerous and destructive our tongues are and have been...it's only then that we cry out to God in repentance and run to Him in tears seeking forgiveness.
- What do your words reveal about you? Let the Word serve as a mirror for you.
 - Are you angry? Are you jealous? Are you bitter? Are you desperate? Are you sad? Are you needy? Look, you can try to spin it and justify all you want. Your mouth has betrayed you.

It's good news...grace...without the exposure you would be left to your own self deception and think your just fine! But God loves you too much for that.

- *"Do you see how you constantly seem to hurt people, wreckage in your path...have to be seen as the perfect parent, most fit, most successful...defending yourself"*
- We tear people down b/c our identity is threatened...ROOT of SO MUCH DAMAGE
 - *"I love the way she mothers her kids, just love to watch her"... sinful heart wants to say, "yeah, watches them like a helicopter, one of those kids is going to grow up and snap one day"*

CROSS: How is God or his grace displayed in the text?

We need to see that we live by every word that comes out of God's mouth. God's Word sanctifies us. The more you feed yourself with the Scriptures and the more you are saturated with the Word under a biblical ministry, the more the word of Christ will do the sanctifying work in me and on me, and consequently the more Christ will train your tongue as his Word molds and shapes you.

Jesus came into this world to bear the judgment of God against the sin of our tongues. When He stood before the High Priest and acceptance the sentence of guilt, it was His guilt He was taking, it was mine. He bore in His body on that cross the sins of my tongue.

Do you want to bridle your tongue?

Do you want to follow the example of Jesus?

Then you need to come to Him fully aware of the sin of your lips and say:

"God be merciful to me, a sinner."

I thank you that Jesus came and was silent in order that he might bear the penalty of all my misuse of my tongue.

And when you know that he has taken God's judgment and wrath against your every sinful word, you cannot but come to him and say:

GOOD ROOT: What should I believe about God because of the cross? What could I desire now MORE than before? How does Christ enable me to obey his commands? How is Jesus the solution / motivation for transformation and action?

Need to Repent...Need to Confess --To God and those we have hurt

- If God has exposed your heart this morning, He's giving you the chance to confess your need before Him, *"God I'm angry, help me to not take it out on my family anymore"* and you need to take

the opportunity to go to your family and say *"I'm angry and I've been taking it on on you...ask your spouse, kids...friends, whoever to forgive you"*

- Your sin against others with your words will find you out...if you have torn down, gossiped, minimized...confess and repent to those you spoke to and to those you spoke about
- The gospel is big enough...be less concerned for what they would think, strain it may place than the effects on your own soul before the Lord

FRUIT: What would the expected fruit of the gospel be in this situation? What does obedience look like for you personally? Does it speak of this in the text? Where else in the Scriptures is this?

Sin has twisted the use of your tongue, but God has begun the redeeming work of transforming you into the image and likeness of His Son in whom there was no guile! This work of God is creating in you new desires, new affections, that are meant to translate into new habits and patterns of speech.

As we anchor ourselves in who we are in Christ, what God has said about you b/c of Jesus...that he loves you, accepts you, is for you, that all of your sins were dealt with on the cross...that begins to change how you think and feel...*frees you up in how you relate to others.*

- Celebrate their wins and success b/c you're not threatened...don't have to tear someone else down b/c they seem to be hogging your identity
- The gospel frees us to celebrate with them and for them and to be who God has made us to be
- What if this church became marked by edification and encouragement?
 - Lists of people we wanted to speak to and encourage, note things you saw in them...weren't worried when you contacted them