

# What Did you Say?

James 3:1-12

9/6/2025

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Announcements:

## Scripture

James 3:1-12 (NKJV) [1] My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. [2] For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. [3] Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. [4] Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. [5] Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! [6] And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. [7] For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. [8] But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. [9] With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. [10] Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. [11] Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? [12] Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

Intro:

Faith works itself out in various ways, as we have seen. Faith leaves tracks to let us know that it's actually there. As we have seen, faith works itself out in: How we deal with trials How we deal with money How we handle temptation How we react with our words and our actions And how we put what we learn from the Word into practice How we serve the weak How we keep ourselves pure In how we treat people of all social status or wealth In how we love our neighbor as ourselves In how we work out our faith in practical ways.

The Bible and the tongue:

James was an appropriate person to write about controlling the tongue. The Bible tells us that when Jesus started his public ministry and was declaring himself to be the "Lord of the Sabbath," his family (including James) went out and told all the people that Jesus was "out of His mind." Then he realizes, after the resurrection, that his brother was God, and he was calling him crazy. Oops! The Bible's central message is all about Jesus, the good news of what God has done for us in bringing us salvation through Christ. But the Bible is also a guide and manual for life. Out of the many issues of life that the Bible discusses, the one issue that it gives extra time and emphasis to is how we use our tongues, our speech.

## Scripture

Scripture Proverbs 18:21 really sums up God's perspective on our ability to speak: Death and life are in the power of the tongue. From just what I counted, the book of Proverbs alone has 90 passages that deal with the tongue, words, or how and what we speak.

## Illustration

It reminds me of the tombstone that read: Beneath this stone, a lump of clay, Lies Arabella Young, who on the 24th of May, began to hold her tongue. When you die, many people will remember your legacy by what came out of your mouth. You don't want to be remembered as: The one who couldn't be trusted because whatever you told them was sure to be gossiped around town. "A talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter" (Proverbs 11:13). The one who was never a joy to be around because of the dirty jokes, snide comments, or constant complaining? "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29). The verbally abusive husband or the continually nagging wife. "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." (Proverbs 15:1). The negative, critical person who was always saying something judgmental. Wouldn't you rather be remembered as: The constant encourager or the edifying friend? "A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!" (Proverbs 15:23). The one who didn't speak much, but when you did something wise and useful came out. "In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise" (Proverbs 10:19). The encouraging wife or the loving and affirming husband. The one who always had some useful godly advice for a situation? "The lips of the righteous feed many" (Proverbs 10:21). All of these things lie within the power of our words.

You see, Proverbs speaks intensely about the negative effects our words can have, but it also speaks to what the Bible calls "Wholesome words." In no particular order, here are some of the qualities of wholesome words:

They reprove. They are wise. They are righteous. They are practical. They are correct. They are guarded. They are discreet. They are discerning. They are pleasant. They are soft (not weak). They are authoritative. They are timely. They are truthful. They are brief. They are encouraging. They are excellent. They are faithful. They are gentle. They are gracious. They are humble. They are bold. They instruct. They are kind. They are peaceful. They are prepared. They are thoughtful. They are upright. And that's only in the book of Proverbs!

The tongue: When we talk about the tongue, we are really talking about the realm of human communication, that which comes out of the heart in the form of words, writing, and communication, both verbal and non-verbal.

## Main Point

### Point 1

The Accountability of our Speech

## Scripture

Jam 3:1 NKJV - My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

In the early church and in the synagogue, any man could stand up at any time and give their input on the scripture or topic being taught.

The problem with us is that the problem is not usually in our ability to instruct, but our ability to do the things we instruct. James warns us that simply because we know the answer doesn't mean we should be quick to say the answer.

According to Ephesians 4, there are some in the church who are called to be teachers and are gifted to be teachers; however, this calling comes with a great weight of responsibility and accountability before man and God.

The problem in the realm of the pulpits today:

Many people view the position of teacher as a means to promote their own agendas, sell their products, or build their name and kingdom. Many seek the position of teacher because of the notoriety or because they crave a place of authority over others. This is why James warns us so adamantly. It is so easy for flawed people to twist a word, isolate a scripture, or manipulate communication with charisma to achieve a certain selfish desire or outcome.

James reminds teachers that there is not one idle word that will not be brought into account, and as a teacher, we speak the Word of the Lord as a voice for the Lord to the people of the Lord... And that is not something that God takes lightly.

## Scripture

Mat 12:36 NKJV - "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment."

He is not saying that we shouldn't have pastors or teachers; he is just saying that someone who desires to teach should ensure they are called to do it and carefull with what they teach.

## Scripture

2 Timothy 2:15 (NKJV) [15] Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Stricter judgment - Krima - the decision (whether severe or mild) that one passes on the faults of others.

I've heard many teach that preachers will have a stricter judgment before God. While there might be some truth to that at the bema seat judgment, I think the context here is for the teacher to realise that they will come under greater scrutiny and judgment from other people.

## Illustration

IllustrationWhen I was young, we used to own snakes. We always had a couple of clear glass tanks (terrariums) for when we caught a lizard or snake. This is the kind of life a pastor should anticipate! One in a glass house with people looking and making assessments. This comes with the territory of teaching god's word. This doesn't mean you should expect your pastor to be perfect. If that happens, you will be let down very quickly. But anyone who willingly steps into a role of speaking God's truths had better just realize that they signed up to be criticized and watched with a high level of scrutiny. EXAMPLE: having people over from the church to play games This warning aims to discourage those who might casually seek opportunities to share their knowledge and teach others without recognizing the accountability that comes with it.

## Quote

— Pastor Josh

Many people become teachers because they like to hear themselves speak, but are often surprised when others decide to watch how they live.

## Main Point

### Point 2

## Scripture

James 3:2 (NKJV) [2] For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

We all stumble in many things:

James includes himself in this statement. We are all stumblers. We blow it and we fail frequently. James understands that the Christian walk and race are often marked by moments of stumbling and blundering. But when he gives us the benchmarks of measuring our true spiritual maturity, he doesn't go to what we often consider "the big sins." He goes straight to what is actually the smallest troublemaker — our tongue.

The tongue is always waiting and ready to be used. You might be really proud of how you are following the Lord in other areas of your life, but what about your mouth? Perfect - mature man - If you find someone who thinks and considers before they speak, you will usually find that person is able to have self-control in other areas of life. Bridle the whole body - To hold in check or restrain. Some might say that they just can't control what comes out of their mouth! I think you underestimate yourselves!

## Illustration

Fighting at home, and then the phone rings. How quickly you can change your attitude and your tone!

## Scripture

James 3:3-5 (NKJV) [3] Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. [4] Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. [5] Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!

## Illustration

The analogies: Horses - power, authority, and strength. Horse raising is interesting. The smallest people have control over the strongest animal. You've heard the term "unbridled strength." That's from the sheer power a horse can display. You don't want to get in the way of an angry, uncontrolled horse. It could easily kill you. (We learned to never walk behind a horse, because you might get kicked!) Yet, when you put a small metal rod into that horse's mouth, the entire beast can be controlled, settled, steered with pinpoint precision. Ships - A ship is a large vessel. It has many moving parts to make it move. Its sails harness the power of the wind to push it forward. Yet a massive, powerful ship that has no rudder is certain to veer off course and become shipwrecked or ruined. A small rudder can set the direction of the large vessel and force it to go exactly where the navigator intends. Here's the point:

## Quote

— Pator Josh

Those with the greatest strength are those who can control the smallest things.

In the same way, the small tongue can boast of great ability and strength: the body without a controlled tongue can get itself into trouble! A life can be ruined, cause great harm to others, or become shipwrecked simply by what comes out of its mouth.

Words have the power to control a situation and set direction. Words can turn the tide of hearts, marriages, politics, nations, and churches. This little fleshy part of the body can boast as the rudder or the bit that really has control.

vs. 5 - See how great a forest a little fire kindles!

## Illustration

Remember old Smokey: "Only you can prevent forest fires." When I lived in NorCal, we had to evacuate multiple times. The air would be thick with smoke every summer. It set everyone on edge. The reality is a few small words out of one small mouth can have widespread and devastating effects on entire families, churches, cities and nations!

## Scripture

[Proverbs 26:20] (NKJV) [20] Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; And where there is no talebearer, strife ceases.

Sadly, it's often our words that keep destructive relational fires ablaze. It's also our words that have the power to extinguish the flame before things are irreparably damaged.

## Quote

It's been said that "The tongue is the only weapon that grows sharper with constant use."

There's always another fan to flame, always another spark to ignite. This is why self-control in the area of our communication is so vital.

## Main Point

### Point 3

The Outcome of our Speech (6-12)

## Scripture

James 3:6 (NKJV) [6] And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.

Not only does speech have an effect, it also has a source.

The Effects:

Defiles the whole body: You can do a lot of good with your body, and say one out of place, inappropriate comment, and everything you just did no longer holds any validity. Sets on fire the course of nature: The course of life - Genesis; generation, or the cycle of life. Societies, governments, politics, work places, families, circles of friends, and churches are all ignited by the communication from the lips. There are many recorded historical documents about Hitler's involvement with the occult. He would speak of the spirits that would enter his room and give him his speeches and material. He came up with things like: "The Ten Commandments have lost their validity, and as for conscience, that was a Jewish invention, a blemish like circumcision." "I will crush Christianity under my boot like a poisonous toad." We can still see the effects of his words in people's paradigms today.

The Source:

The tongue can literally be set on fire by hell. That is, Satan can use carnal and wicked words to set things ablaze.

## Illustration

It's not something that's safe or smart, but there would be times as a teenager when we would take a can of hairspray, spray it, and light a lighter over the aerosol fumes to see them burst into flames. This is the picture; our words can be set ablaze from hell itself.

## Scripture

Isa 50:4 NKJV - "The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens me morning by morning, He awakens my ear to hear as the learned."

When we speak, we need to speak in wisdom. We need to speak "in season." Sometimes the best thing we can do with our mouth is shut it! Before the tongue can speak, it must first lose its power to wound. We want our words to be set ablaze by the Holy Spirit, flowing from a well of purity, not used by hell to destroy.

## Scripture

James 3:7-8 (NKJV) [7] For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. [8] But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

Animals are more easily tamed than words! It's easier to teach a dog to sit than it is to teach the tongue to stop. The tongue is unruly and poisonous when it comes from a bitter, resentful, vengeful, and selfish heart. It's been rightfully said:

## Quote

— *Anonymous*

"All parts of the human body get tired eventually - except the tongue."

## Main Point

### Point 4

The Irony of Our Speech

## Scripture



James 3:9-12 (NKJV) [9] With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. [10] Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. [11] Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? [12] Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

This concept is rooted in the idea of how we love one another, as introduced in Chapter 2.

If we bless God with a song at church, and then go and gossip about a friend, or tell off that one guy at work, or let that girl have a piece of my mind, or have no filter with my spouse, then my praise to God becomes of no effect.

Verses 11-12:

Everything in nature seems to operate the way God intended it, except man.

There have been several lawsuits against water companies that have advertised their “Natural spring water” as free of impurities, but upon testing, discovered that they were full of contaminants and carcinogens. Trees bear fruit that is characteristic of their seeds. Here is the picture of irony, and how unnatural it is for someone who claims to be transformed from the inside out, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, producing his fruit, and overflowing with his living water to actually have poison fruit and saltwater spewing out of their lips.

## Scripture

Luke 6:45 (NKJV) [45] A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

So here it is. Be intentional in how and what you communicate.

## Illustration

One study showed that in a lifetime, the average person will have a significant impact on at least 163 people. What you say is a huge part of that. How you say what you say is another huge part of that. And how you act on what you say is probably the biggest point of impact out of the three.

Our words can be used to tear down or build up, speak lies or expound truth, manipulate or inspire. What will you use yours for?

## Scripture

Ephesians 4:29 (NKJV) [29] Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.