

Sermon: James: Inside / Out: The Power of the Tongue

IN Opportunities to connect and pray as a group

1. When has someone spoken words of encouragement to you?
In what way did that benefit you?
2. Pastor Henry used the illustration of not getting the toothpaste back in the tube as an example of how we cannot pull back our words. What other illustrations can you think of that suggest the same concept?
3. What God-given gifts and talents do you take for granted or have not thanked God for?

UP Time that is devoted to the Word of God

1. Whom does James consider 'a perfect man' according to 3:2?
What is the paradox in this statement?
2. In the passage, how many times does James use the word 'evil' and 'hell' when talking about the tongue? Compare what he also says in 1:19, 26; 4:11.
What focus does he put on the power of the tongue? Why was James, 'pillar of the church' (Galatians 2:9) so concerned about the 'tongue'?
3. James uses several metaphors when he describes the power of the tongue in this passage. List them. What does each illustrate about the tongue?
3. How do Prov 18:8, 21; 20:19; Matt 7:1,2 ; 12:34, 35 support what James writes about the tongue?
4. What hope do we have in controlling our tongues (3:8).
Why does James say that?

OUT Seek to be the Community of God's people in your community

1. How do you rate yourself (scale ☺1 - ☹10) using James' comment in 3:8?
2. How will vv 2, 10 prompt you to pray about your tongue this week?
How do Psalm 51:10; Gal 5:22,23 and Philippians 4:8 provide some necessary steps to take?
3. Who are some people whom you can bless (support, encourage, affirm, challenge) with your words this week? Who are some people you can thank for blessing you with their words?
Is there someone to whom you need to ask forgiveness for words spoken?

UP – IN – OUT reflect a balanced life including a focus on our personal relationship with the Father (UP), staying connected to the Body (IN), and reaching our world (OUT).

THE WORD (NIV)

Proverbs 18:8

The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts...²¹ The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

Proverbs 20:19

A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid anyone who talks too much.

Matthew 7:1,2

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ²For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Matthew 12:34,35

You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. ³⁵A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

James 3:1-12

Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ²We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check. ³When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. ⁷All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, ⁸but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. ¹¹Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹²My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

Sermon Study Summary

Often in life we take people and things for granted and we don't realize what we have until it is gone. Our voice and being able to talk is a good example of a true gift that many of us forget to thank God for. Our voice gives us the ability to pray, lead meetings, and communicate with love ones, but according to James, we do not always use our tongues wisely. (James 1:26, James 4:11) James spends 12 verses devoted to the subject of how we use our tongues. The tongue is powerful! Proverbs 18:21 says the tongue has the power of death and life. Our words can nourish or they can destroy. That is why it is important to be wise with our words.

Our tongue can impact a person's destiny. Just as the bit in a horse's mouth can enable a 60 pound boy to control the direction of a 2000 pound horse, or a small rudder on a ship can control its direction, the tongue, a small member of our body, can influence the direction of person's life. (James 3:3, 4) A hurtful word can negatively impact a person and the direction of their life. On the other hand, life giving words or teaching has the power to change a person's values and behaviors and direct direction of their life in positive ways. This is why James points out the awesome responsibility that teachers have and how they will be judged more strictly. (James 3:1) It is important that anyone who teaches the Bible to others needs to be careful about what they say and how they live. This includes parents, youth group leaders, and anyone involved in sharing the gospel with others. James is quick to add that no one is perfect and we all stumble in many ways. (James 3:2) That said, we need to ensure that what we teach with our words and our lives is based on God's Word. We must remember that what we say and do can impact a person's destiny.

Our tongue can destroy. James uses the metaphor of a small spark igniting and setting a great forest on fire. (James 3:5) A mere spark, from an ill-spoken word can produce a firestorm that ultimately destroys a marriage, a reputation, a career and even a life. In James 3:6, he writes, "The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell." In other words, everything within us that we have not repented of or submitted to God will over time make its way out of our mouths, and wreak havoc in our relationships. Dishonesty is a good example of this. Dishonesty destroys trust and shows up in many forms including lying and not being able to keep a confidence. Proverbs 20:19 tells us "A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid anyone who talks too much." Who wants to be a close friend to someone who is dishonest? Slandering gossip has the power to destroy someone's name, character, or reputation (Prov. 18:8). Hundreds of young people in North America are taking their lives because of incessant belittling, mocking, tearing down by other people and peers via social media. Words come so easily out of our mouths and it is next to impossible to take back the destructive impact of negative criticism, slander and gossip and it hurts everyone involved. It hurts Christ, the witness of the church, the credibility of the gospel and it has a destructive effect on the speaker himself (Matt. 7). Paul tells us that whatever we sow, we will reap.

Our tongue can bless. Our tongue can praise the Lord. (James 3:9) Through words of affirmation and encouragement we can set people's hearts soaring. We can use our words to lovingly challenge and direct those close to us to become what God wants them to be.

The tongue reflects what is in our hearts. James uses two metaphors to illustrate this – a well producing water and a tree producing fruit. A salt spring cannot produce fresh water just as a fresh water spring cannot produce salt water. Neither can a fig tree produce olives or an olive tree produce figs. (James 3:9) Jesus tells us in Matthew 12:34, "For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of." Ongoing slander, gossip, breaking of confidences, dishonesty, profanity, criticism or grumbling coming from our tongues tells us that we are on the throne of our lives, that we are the god of our universe. We are defining our identity on the basis of how we compare to others and that is why we are using our words to hurt others. The truth is – we are worshipping ourselves. If, on the other hand, our tongues are praising God, blessing, encouraging and affirming others, it is likely that God is on the throne of our lives.

James says that no human being can tame the tongue. (James 3:8) We cannot tame our tongue because we cannot change our hearts. Only God can do that. What we can do is humble ourselves and follow the example of King David by praying, "Create in me a pure heart, O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me." (Ps. 51:10) Then we need to focus our thoughts on "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy- think about such things." (Phil. 4:8)