

WELCOME

Alright, if you've got your Bibles, and I hope you do, please open them up to James chapter 3. James 3. That's where we're going to be.

We want every person to have a hand on their Bible. You can open your phone or tablet to James 3. If you open one of the hard-backed black bibles under your seat, James 3 will be on page **1012**.

INTRODUCTION

So, I didn't really grow up in the church. But in 8th grade a friend invited me to go to youth group with him.

- And after youth group we'd always go to this pizza place,
 - Louie's, for cheesy bread.
- And I quickly realized that the shotgun game...
 - was how we determined...
 - who gets to ride in the front seat of the car.

But, we played it a little differently in our group,

- because instead of calling out "shotgun,"
- we played that the person who touched the car first
- was the one who got to ride in the most prized seat.
- Which lead to many a heated foot race!

Well, it must have been my first month in youth group

- and we were going to Louie's,
- and I was racing another guy in my group for the car.
- And I might not look like much, but I'm quick.
- But he beat me by just one step.

And when I realized that I had lost...I used a very choice, explicit word.

- And my youth leader came down on me like a plague.
- *“We don’t use those kinds of words here.”*
- Which was somewhat surprising to me...
- cause they were pretty much the only words I knew!

And they had a cussing jar,

- where you had to put a dollar in
- every time you said a cuss word
- and then the youth pastor would buy us
- more Louie’s cheesy bread with the money.

But later in a bible study, I came to find out that they used James 3 as the reason why we weren’t allowed to cuss. We were taming the tongue!

CHRISTIANS CUSS WORDS

But I soon realized that my youth group friends actually did cuss...

- they just did so with some safe,
- made-up Christian cuss word.
 - *Ding flambit!*
 - *Son of a Bathsheba!*
 - *Holy Shadrack!*
 - *Bull Chip and Joanna!*
 - *They didn’t use that one, I just thought it was funny!*
- So, it was like, *“Um...do those count or not?”*
 - *Cause you sound like you’re cussing...*
 - *but you’re just kinda lame.”*

And then we plant this church,

- and we had some rough crew
- coming to Fathom...
- who apparently didn't know the "Christians don't cuss" rule.

And, some of y'all are still here, ok?

But no joke, I had a guy come to me in the hallway after church.

- And he said, "*Great effing sermon, pastor!*"
- But he said the real word!
- The 'F' word!
- In the hallway...
- To the pastor...
- What is that, like \$100 in the cuss jar?

But, like, that's where I came from...so it kinda felt like home.

My mouth started watering for cheesy bread!

EXPLAIN: THEME IN JAMES

We're talking about the tongue today.

- About our mouths.
- About our speech.

And while I don't really think you should cuss...

- I think sometimes Christians
- have taken the punch out of this passage
- by simply watering it down to mean
- that we should just clean up our language.

Is this the biblical equivalent of washing your mouth out with soap?

Well, actually, the tongue is one of the major themes in the book of James. In fact, the tongue, or the mouth, or our speech is mentioned in every single chapter.

- James 1:19 – be quick to hear, slow to SPEAK, slow to anger.
- James 1:26 – If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his TONGUE...that person's religion is worthless.
- James 2:12 – So SPEAK and act as those who are to be judged.
- James 4:11 – Do not SPEAK evil against one another.
- James 5:12 – Do not SWEAR, either by heaven or by earth.

So, these all have to do with our speech...

James is VERY concerned with what we do with our mouths.

EXPLAIN: THE BIBLE

Additionally, the tongue is all over the Bible!

PROVERBS 18:21

[21] Death and life are in the power of the tongue,
and those who love it will eat its fruits.

ROMANS 3:13–14

[13] “Their throat is an open grave;
they use their tongues to deceive.”

“The venom of asps is under their lips.”

[14] “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”

I mean, think about Genesis 3 and the fall.

- The first sin is disobedience to God's command
 - by eating the forbidden fruit.
- But right on the heels of that comes the second sin...
 - and what is it?
 - It's a sin of the mouth.
 - Adam slanders God by blaming God for his sin,
 - *"That woman you gave me..."*

And then, in Isaiah 6,

- when Isaiah is given a vision of the Lord,
 - high and lifted up,
- what is Isaiah's response to this majesty?
 - He says, *"Woe is me! I am a man of unclean lips!"*

And I could go on and on...

TRANSITION

Did you know the average person speaks about 25,000 words per day?

- Now, just for a frame of reference...
- one sermon for me is approximately 5000 words.
- So, you're preaching five sermons of words each day!

You will, if you're average, spend one-fifth of your life talking! One fifth!

- We'd better take seriously what 20% of our life will be spent on!
- The tongue...our mouths...our speech is a HUGE deal.

So, let's dig into our text today, and I hope to show you that this whole taming the tongue business has WAY more for us than simply not cussing!

JAMES 3:1

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

EXPLAIN: TEACHERS

So, James starts with a warning about teachers.

- Now, what does he mean “to become a teacher”
- because we are all called at some level to teach. Right?
 - This is the great commission from Matthew 28:
 - go make disciples,
 - baptize them,
 - TEACH them.
- So, what kind of teacher is James warning about here?

Well, the Greek word here can be translated *teacher* or *master*.

- So, we could conclude that he’s talking here about
- a recognized teacher in the community.

So, he’s saying,

- *“Don’t rush into the teaching office,*
- *don’t rush into the preaching office.*
- *Don’t hurry into some official ministry*
- *where you become a proclaimer and a teacher of God’s Word.”*

Now, for some of you here,

- God has for you to become preachers...
- and pastors...
- and church planters!

But this also includes...

- bible study teachers
- and small group teachers,
- and youth group teachers,
- and kid's Sunday School teachers.

And James isn't saying DON'T PURSUE THOSE THINGS...

but rather, he's saying DON'T PURSUE THOSE THINGS LIGHTLY!

I mean, remember back to what I said a few weeks ago in that quick to listen, slow to speak section:

- be quick to hear God's Word,
- and slow to start speaking it.
- To expound upon it.
- To be a teacher.

He's saying...

- be very cautious when you embark upon the role of teacher
- at any level,
- whether it's official or unofficial,
- because of the tremendous problems
- an errant tongue can bring about.

POINT 1

So, here's where I think we can bring it to all of us. I'll make my first point:

SLIDE BE CAREFUL WHO YOU LISTEN TO

- There is a greater weight of judgment laid on those
- who take up the mantle of teaching...
 - but some of this is on you, too.

There's a whole host of crazies out there spewing God-knows-what.

And you have to be careful who you listen to.

- So, when you hear a sermon,
 - or read an article,
 - or watch a video...
- just be careful to note how much of it
- is from a person's opinion
- and how much it's rooted in the word of God.

Man, there's so much out there cloaked as *Christian*,
but it's much more someone's opinions.

This is why picking a Biblically sound church is so important.

- It's just not good enough for you to "find a church that I like".
- Man, there are churches out there who center
 - on hype
 - and self-help
 - and project self.

And they really aren't...

- centering on God's Word...
- pointing us in the way of Jesus...

But they're more about

- you doing you...
- with a little Jesus flair added on.

So, BE CAREFUL WHO YOU LISTEN TO.

BLANK SLIDE

Let's keep going: Verse 2.

JAMES 3:2

[2] For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

So, James just said that

- we all stumble with our tongues.
- This is a sin that is common to us all.

Some sins you won't be tempted to commit,

- either because of your situation,
- or because of your wirings and compulsions.

But to sin with the tongue is common to us all.

ILLUSTRATION: TONGUES IN THE BIBLE

John MacArthur lists all the Bible references where either directly or indirectly, the disaster of the mouth is mentioned. Here's the list:

- a wicked tongue,
- a deceitful tongue,
- a lying tongue,
- a perverse tongue,
- a filthy tongue,
- a corrupt tongue,

- a bitter tongue,
- an angry tongue,
- a crafty tongue,
- a flattering tongue,
- a slanderous tongue,
- a gossiping tongue,
- a back-biting tongue,
- a blaspheming tongue,
- a foolish tongue,
- a boasting tongue,
- a murmuring tongue,
- a complaining tongue,
- a cursing tongue,
- a contentious tongue,
- a sensual tongue,
- a vile tongue,
- a tale-bearing tongue,
- a whispering tongue,
- an exaggerating tongue.

Did you see yourself anywhere in there? You see, it's universal!

He says,

- no wonder God put your tongue in a cage
- behind your teeth,
- walled in by your mouth.

Somebody once said, *“Remember your tongue is in a wet place, and it can slip easily.”*

The easiest way to sin...is to sin with your tongue.

BUT, James says,

- if anyone gets their tongue under control...
- they'll get control of their whole life.

More on that in a minute, but look at verses 3-5, because they elaborate on these things.

JAMES 3:3-5a

[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.

EXPLAIN: HORSE

So, these are illustrations of small things that affect big things.

And the first one is of a horse.

So, every Labor Day my family goes to Lost Valley Ranch where we spend time riding horses.

- Now, I know by looking at me
- you have no problem believing
- that I can actually ride a horse.
- I mean, my life just screams, “COWBOY!”

But I can!

- I even have some boot-cut jeans...
- And some cowboy boots...
- I've drawn the line at cowboy hats thus far...

But here's the secret...

- You don't have to be especially good at riding horses
- to control a well-trained horse.

You see, when I get up on the back of a 1000-pound quadruped

- I don't control it with superior strength...
- I don't control a horse with verbal cues...
- I don't control it with my superior athleticism...
 - Which I know is shocking to you all!

No! I'm nothing...a horse could throw me and break me if he wanted!

What allows me to control and ride a horse,

- is a little piece of metal called a bit...
- laid on the tongue of the horse.

And with that, I can control the whole body of this magnificent animal.

EXPLAIN: POWER OF SPEECH

The second illustration is a ship.

- Compared to the size of the boat,
- a rudder is a very small part.

But the rudder is what allows the pilot to set the course of the ship.

Both examples here emphatically illustrate the power of speech.

- If it is controlled well,
 - it is effective and wonderful,
- but if not controlled or controlled poorly,
 - the disaster can be enormous.

POINT 2

So, let me make my second point here.

SLIDE YOU ARE WHAT YOU SAY

You probably remember as a child. But whenever you went to the doctor, the first thing the doctor would say is, *“Let me see your tongue.”*

- And James is saying the same thing,
- *“Let me see your tongue.”*

You put a thermometer under your tongue to tell your physical temperature.

James says your tongue itself will take your spiritual temperature.

Our words reveal what’s really going on in our hearts.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU SAY!

ILLUSTRATION: SELF-IDENTIFY

Now, our world is simply obsessed with “finding oneself”.

We are obsessed with identity!

- How do you identify? That’s the question.
- And the world wants you to “self-identify”, right?
- Define yourself...find yourself...

And in the extremes we talk about sexual identity, or gender identity...

But, I can see this in my life:

- *“I want to look this way,*
- *I want to be perceived this way,*
- *and I even want others to be envious of this thing in me.”*

Right? So, we self-define as suburbanites:

- *“I’m the upper-middle class...*
- *drive-an-import...*
- *have a four-bedroom house...*
- *with a great yard...*
- *and a ski pass...*
- *kind of guy.”*

But don’t get too comfortable if that’s not you, because there’s the blue-collar version,

- *“I’m not some,*
- *foreign-driving...*
- *fancy-coffee-drinking...*
- *skinny-jean-wearing sissy!*
 - *I’m a Ford driving...*
 - *kill-my-own-dinner...*
 - *knows how to ride a horse...*
 - *kind of guy.*
 - *‘Merica!’*

APPLICATION

But James just said,

- *“You want to know who you are?”*
- *You wanna know what direction you’re headed?*
 - *Look at the rudder.*
 - *Look at the bit.*
 - *Look at your tongue.”*

Now think about how good of a gift this is from God!

- You don’t have to wonder if you’re materialistic.
- You don’t have to wonder if you’re obsessed with your looks.
- You don’t have to wonder if you’re a jerk.
- You don’t have to wonder...
 - **Because your words reveal YOU.**

Your heart is on display every single time you open your mouth.

- Every word you speak,
- every text message you send,
- every comment you post...
- that’s WHO YOU ARE.

ILLUSTRATIONS

But you’re like, *“No, that’s not the real me...I’m just sarcastic...witty...blunt”*

- Really? Listen, you better realize that those comments you post on Social Media are a reflection of your WHO YOU ARE!
 - They reveal something about your heart.

- Your neighbor gets a great promotion at work...you say,
 - *“Yeah, but I hear they’re really struggling in their marriage.”*
 - Maybe...
 - but you’re a gossip!
- Your friend gets engaged...you say,
 - *“Well, it sure seems like she’s settling.”*
 - Could be...
 - but are you bitter?
- Your buddy gets a new truck...
 - *“Cool, but I’ll bet the gas mileage is awful.”*
 - Bro, you’re jealous!

ILLUSTRATION: ME

Here...I’ll be honest about one of mine:

- as a pastor, man it’s super easy for me to reveal my heart.

Just ask me about another church or pastor in town.

And I’ll say,

- *“Oh, yeah, good church...good guy...”*
- *I’m just not so sure I want to stoop to an attractional method of growth.*
- *I’m glad we don’t do topical messages like that.*
- *Yeah, they baptized a bunch of people...but are they really discipling them?”*

And I'll often reveal my heart

- by not even being able to celebrate
 - people doing kingdom work...
 - when they're successful!
- CAUSE I WANT THAT!

My words are exposing the jealousy and covetousness in my heart.

TRANSITION

YOU ARE WHAT YOU SAY.

BLANK SLIDE

But James gives us hope that we are not destined to be frozen forever in our present condition. Verse 5...

JAMES 5:5b-12

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! [6] And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. [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. [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. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. [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.

EXPLAIN

Now there's a lot here, and some of it overlaps with what we talked about last week.

- But our words are to be like a spring of fresh water.
- Our words are to be like sweet fruit.

This is right along the lines of the hypocrisy theme we have seen throughout the book of James thus far.

- You can't be merely a hearer of the word...
 - you MUST be a doer of the word.
- You can't have faith without works...
 - you need faith THAT works.
- And now, you can't speak words that tear others down...
 - AND words that build others up.
- You can't, from the same mouth, utter curses and slander and gossip...
 - and then go to church and utter praise and prayers and worship.

This is the seriousness of the tongue.

The seriousness of our words.

ILLUSTRATION: FIRE

And James uses the illustration of a forest fire.

- And here in Colorado,
- we know how great and destructive a forest fire
 - can come from an errant firework...
 - or a careless flicking of a cigarette butt...
 - or a campfire not properly extinguished.
- And all of a sudden, an entire mountain is consumed.

POINT 3

But let me make my last point here, because as negative as this might sound, there is a positive.

SLIDE YOUR WORDS CAN CHANGE YOU

Our words...our speech...the tongue...

- It is a powerful instrument.
- It can tear down people.
- It can tear down churches.
- It can destroy relationships.
- It can wreck a marriage.
- It can devastate a family.
- It can rip apart a nation.
- It can lead to murder.
- It can lead to war.

But, on the other hand,

- it can build up.
- It can create love,
- enthusiasm,
- encouragement,
- comfort,
- peace,
- joy.

It's a powerful, powerful thing.

And back to verse 2 once more, **if anyone can bridle their tongue, they can bridle their whole body.**

You know what that says to me?

- That says if I want to focus my Christian life on one thing...
- if I want to get my act together...
- if I want to bring my whole spiritual life into control...
 - I ought to work on my what?
- My tongue!

Now, we realize that it's not possible to have a perfectly holy tongue,

- but to the extent that one controls his tongue,
- he will control his body.
 - Why?
 - **Because the spiritual dynamics needed to control your tongue**
 - **will therefore work to control the rest of you.**

It's not about perfection...it's about progression!

And if we get a hold of it...and control it...it can change all the rest of us.

- If you want to change your LIFE...
 - learn to control your LIPS.
- If you want to change your WORLD...
 - learn to control your WORDS.
- If you want to change your SPACE...
 - learn to control your SPEECH.

You want me to keep going?

- I'm a preacher...
- I can alliterate with the best of them!

If you want to change your DIRECTION...

learn to control your DECLARATION.

WORDS CAN CHANGE YOU.

ILLUSTRATION: FIGHT FIRE

So, let's end with one of the illustrations that James uses.

He talks about fire. And he uses the negative.

- On our worst days,
- our tongues are set on fire from hell,
- and can spark such destruction
- that we could hardly imagine.

But the secret is that:

- one of the best ways to fight fires,
- is by starting fires.

So, my mom used to live in Colorado Springs.

- And in 2012 the Waldo Canyon Fire affected her.
 - It was the most damaging fire in Colorado history at the time, destroying 346 homes.
- And her home was right along the foothills.
- It was literally within eyesight of some destroyed homes.

She evacuated and come up to Denver to stay with us,

- but when we got let back in,
- there were homes less than a block away from her home
- that were total losses.

Now, one of the ways that fire fighters battle blazes like the Waldo Canyon Fire is what's called a burn line.

- They will do control burns
- to form a burn line
- in hopes that it will contain a fire
- since there is no longer any fuel for that fire to consume.

Now, that's overly simplistic in firefighting terms, ok?

So, sorry to all the firefighters out there. But the illustration stands.

One of the best ways to fight fire, is with fire.

- And if the problem here is VERBAL ARSON...
 - setting blazes with harmful or careless words.
- Then the solution is getting some tongues set on fire by heaven!

And if you know Acts chapter 2, you know this is one of the signs on the day of Pentecost.

- Tongues of fire fall on God's people
- showing that the Holy Spirit had fallen on the church,
 - and then what does Peter do?
- He preached a sermon
- and three thousand believed on Christ
- and were baptized that day.

And the fire of the Gospel has been spreading since that day.

CONCLUSION

What does your mouth reveal about 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.

- But your mouth has betrayed you.

This is actually good news!

- because if you were left just to wonder...
- what was going on in your heart,
- you would always think you're incredible!

But God loves you too much for that.

- What if we just started being kind with our words?
- What if we just started encouraging with our words?
- What if, instead of tearing down, we built up with our words?

YOU ARE WHAT YOU SAY...you don't like what you're seeing?

- Change your words...
- change your speech...
- change your declaration....
- change your lips...
- and you WILL change your life.

Let's pray. **LYRICS SLIDE W/PADS**

RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – fathomchurch.org/give
- PRAYER - fathomchurch.org/prayer
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.

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