

"The Power of Words"

James 3: 1-12

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Background

This Sunday, James meditates on the small, but mighty tongue - a part of ourselves that carries the potential for both praise and cursing, for great good and great harm. He exhorts his brothers and sisters to not be double-tongued, or hypocritical, in their treatment of others. As modern Christians, we also must ask: In what ways are we praising God at one moment, and then cursing fellow human beings at another? What does our speech reveal about our hearts? Join us as we, together, lay our hearts before God's Word.

Sermon Text: James 3:1-12 (NIV)

¹Not 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.

³ When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴ Or 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. ⁵ Likewise, 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. ⁶ 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.

⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. ¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹² My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

Discussion Questions

1. Preparation

- What is one thing you hoped to talk about today/tonight?
- What question(s) did you come away with from the sermon?
- What is the best thing you heard on Sunday?

2. Sunday Questions:

1. James compares the tongue to fire, a rudder, and a bit in a horse's mouth—small things with outsized influence. In your own life, can you recall a moment when a single word (spoken to you or by you) redirected the course of a relationship or decision? What does that reveal about the hidden power of speech?
2. James warns that teachers will be judged more strictly. In today's world, where nearly everyone has a platform (social media, podcasts, etc.), how should we think about the responsibility of influence? Does this passage suggest that "teaching" is broader than just formal roles?

3. James highlights the contradiction of praising God while cursing people made in His image. What are some modern examples of this kind of double-mindedness, and how can communities of faith cultivate speech that reflects integrity rather than hypocrisy?
4. James uses the imagery of springs and trees to show that words flow from the heart. What practices or disciplines help you examine the deeper source of your words, and how can communities encourage one another to cultivate “fresh water” speech?
5. If every person bears the image of God, what does it mean to listen well to “the human behind the words”—How can we as believers of our Lord Jesus Christ are called to an integrated life, united from the inside out?