

## James Part 7

Bless / Curse

*James 3:1-12*

*Memory Verses: James 3:10*

### MANUSCRIPT

#### Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

So far in James we've seen how our faith is defined by our works. If we truly believe what we say we believe then our actions will coincide with what we say we believe. The issue isn't do we believe in our heads and with our mouths... the issue is do we believe to the point of it becoming real with the way we live our lives... and if it doesn't then it is not saving faith. Saving faith works & faith without works is dead. In chapter one we saw that what we believe determines how we handle trials and temptations. In chapter two we saw that what we believe determines how we treat people.

This morning as we begin chapter 3 it is important to note that James is once again showing us what real faith looks like when it is put into action, but he is ramping it up another level, moving into a portion of his letter of very practical and pointed application on some very particular areas. If you have real faith... then this is what it does in these various scenarios. In the verses we will read this morning, James takes on the very specific area of our speech. In essence he is saying; "if you have been saved, then your faith will look like this, and sound like this, when you speak. Read with me in **James 3:1-12**.

Did you get that... words are powerful. We can bless with our words or we can curse with our words. So we have to be very careful with our words, right? Do you ever struggle with words? I do all the time. I have this common thing where I want to say one word but before I say that word, I think of another word that could mean the same thing as that word, and then when I actually say the word... it comes out a hybrid mutant of the two words. For example... I coach soccer. And the other day I was giving our team this big pep talk about how to give it their all and work hard and after my little talk was over I was wanting to say... now let's go do some drills... but at the last minute I thought I could also say... now let's go practice... and it came out... now let's go do some pills. Let's go do some pills? What does that mean? Does coach want us to take supplements for a U15 soccer team? Are we that concerned about winning a championship?

Or maybe you don't jumble up your words like I do... but maybe you have a problem with saying things too quickly... you know like things that should stay in the brain and not ever come out of the mouth. Things like, "when's your baby due." Like... you hear the words coming out of

your mouth and just as they are coming out... you wish you could suck them back in. Cause you know that there is a 50/50 shot that the next thing you will hear is "excuse me but what baby?" or the sound of a purse crushing against the side of your head.

When we lived in Michigan we lived in an area without much diversity at all. So when we moved to Danville, my children had not had much experience with people of color. So we go to the mall one day and an African American family is leaving the mall and one of their children is holding the door for our whole family... which was super nice of course. And I'm the last one to go through the door with Hudson, who was 5 at the time, right in front of me, and just as innocently as he could, he held up his hand to give the boy a five and said, "thanks brown dude." And of course I was embarrassed, and said I'm so sorry, and later that night we had a talk with Hudson about how that statement could have seemed disrespectful. But it made me smile just a little bit to imagine what was going through Hudson's head at the time. Here is family who looks different than us. Do I just give a five and say thank you? Or do I address the fact that I know they look different from me? And that was the conclusion his little 5 year old brain came up with; "thanks brown dude."

Now we laugh at that... but shouldn't we be a little bit better with our words than a 5 year old? Shouldn't we know how to use our words in ways that bless people, encourage people, and show people the love of Christ, rather than tearing people down, and discouraging them. James is being very clear here this morning... if we can't talk in a way that encourages others and blesses our God... then we don't necessarily have a talking issue... we have a faith issue.

Mother Teresa says this, "Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless." Nathaniel Hawthorne said this, "Words, so innocent and powerless as they are, as standing in a dictionary, how potent for good and evil they become in the hands of one who knows how to combine them." Today our main point is this... **the things you say tell us who you really are**. The tongue will let us now if you are a person who blesses others... or a person who curses others. Let's look at the passage today and see six different illustrations and three different ways we can see how the tongue tells us who you really are.

#### Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

So the first is this... **Your Tongue Tells Us Who You Really Are Because It Shows Us Where You Are Headed**. Look again at **vs. 1-5**. In verse 1 we see a warning to think twice before becoming teacher of the Word, because teachers will be judged with greater strictness. Why? Because they use their words to guide others. The words they use to guide others show us both where they are going and where they want others to go.

If their words guide people in the wrong direction there will be spiritual consequences. If they themselves head in the wrong direction it could lead to destruction.

For example... A mega church pastor, Rob Bell, in Grand Rapids Michigan, where I used to live, came out with a book about 16 years ago called Velvet Elvis. It was a catchy positively worded evangelical book that sought to repaint the Christian faith. And even though it wasn't overtly heretical, there were some things in it that just made you think... theres something off here... this guys' going in a different direction. Low and behold... after a couple other books including the wholly heretical "Love Wins," where he makes his case that heaven and hell are figurative instead of literal.... it became clear that he was indeed going in another direction... a direction away from the God of the Bible. Not only did Rob Bell's words reveal to us where he was going astray... it also scares me to think of how many other people, were being led astray as well.

Then in verse 2 we see that the ability to keep from stumbling in our speech is a huge indicator that we will be able to keep from stumbling in our actions. **Faithful talk is an indicator of a faithful walk.** But you may say, what about those hypocrites who can talk the talk but can't walk the walk? Aren't we supposed to be skeptical of those who's talk seems, "too good to be true?" Yes, there are many who can present themselves as something they aren't by talking the talk and refusing to walk the walk... we talked about this in detail a couple of weeks ago. But, the point is... if you spend enough time with someone and you vet their talk to be trustworthy... you will find more times than not that their walk matches. This is another example of **Luke 16:10** where Jesus says that if you are faithful in the little things you will be faithful in the bigger things. Learn to control your tongue and you will learn to control your whole body.

James gives us two illustrations to show us that our speech indicates our direction. Whether we are going down the road of blessing or whether we are going down the road of cursing. First, in verse 3, we see that our speech is like a bit in the mouth of a horse. The rider pulls on the reins, tugging at one side of the bit or the other, which in return turns the horses head and thus his whole body, in the direction of the riders choosing. Secondly, in verse 4, we see that our speech is like a small rudder on a ship. Regardless of it's size, wherever it turns, the giant ship will go. So also our tongue, though it is small like a bit or a rudder, has the power to direct our whole body or send others in the direction of our choosing. We can either leave the bit and the rudder alone to go where they may... or we can attempt to steer them in a righteous direction. But be assured... controlling the tongue is no easy task. Both the bit and the rudder must overcome opposing forces. The bit must overcome the wild will of the horse while the rudder must overcome the wind and current of the sea. Likewise the tongue must overcome the

opposing force of our sinful desires. We desire to respond with anger and vengeance at those who have wronged us. We desire to spread gossip, and slander our enemies. They deserve a good tongue lashing don't they. More than anything, we just want to speak what's on our mind. And this is where we confront one of the biggest lies of the devil that the body of Christ has swallowed hook line and sinker. I can't tell you how many "Christian" funerals I've attended where one of the best things the pastor has to say about the person is... "and you know... they always spoke their mind.' And of course that always gets a laugh and some nods from the crowd. And I just don't get it. You've just told a room full of, supposedly Christians, that one of the greatest virtues of their dearly departed loved one is that they simply could not control their tongue. Let me just make this clear... if speaking your mind means demeaning someone, discouraging someone, belittling someone, or attacking someone because you didn't like what they had to say.... then speaking your mind is not a good thing.. it's a sin.

Instead of speaking whatever you want to say... submit to another rider and another captain. If we can't control our tongue, perhaps he can. Of course I'm speaking of Jesus. The expert cowboy can break the restless spirit of the wildest bronco and the experienced captain can steer the ship through any storm. Since we can't control our tongues... let's hand the reins and the rudder over to Christ. Then our prayer becomes that of David in **Psalm 141:3**, "set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth and keep watch over the door of my lips." Surrender your tongue to Christ and he will lead you in the right direction. **The things you say tell us who you really are.**

Secondly, **Your Tongue Tells Us Who You Really Are Because It Shows Us Who You Hate.** Look at **vs.5-8**. **Proverbs 18:21** tells us that "death and life are in the power of the tongue." **You don't have to stab a knife in someone to prove that you want them dead... you can merely allow the fire and poison of your tongue to spread.** The two illustrations here are fire and poison. Just like the embers of a poorly put out cigarette can set an entire forest ablaze, all it takes is one small word to set in motion a fire which stains the entire body of Christ. One small word of gossip can seem innocently meaningless, but as it spreads from one person to another it gains steam. Before you know it it is a raging inferno that consumes everything and everyone it touches. Who can escape it?

It reminds us of the great Chicago fire of 1871 which started when a small lamp tipped over in Mrs. O'Leary's barn. Fire spread from home to home and before it was over 100,000 people were left homeless, 17,500 buildings were destroyed, and 300 people were dead. And just as fires kill people... unchecked gossip kills churches.

Gossip is not a unique sin to our church, it exists in every church, and every organization in our world. But, when I came to Third Avenue Church 5 years ago... it was clear that the sin of Gossip was already trying

to burn everything God wanted done here, to the ground. Even before I had set foot in the church there was a group of people who were convinced that they could not follow me as their pastor, because one person in particular didn't like me and decided to spread lies and gossip about me. And instead of removing that person immediately I tried to win that person to my side, but I failed. Instead, that person was allowed to infect many people in our church with his poison, to the point where our church split and Stone Creek almost never even happened. Now, it is hard to deny that God is moving here and that what He is doing here is a blessing, amen? I know you all are thankful for this church because you are Covenant Partners, because we have experienced unprecedented unity for almost 3 years now, and because you have adopted the vision of Stone Creek as your own. Now think... what's if Stone Creek never happened... all because one person decided to use their tongue for cursing rather than blessing? How important is it for our speech to reflect **Colossians 4:6**, "always full of grace, seasoned with salt."

That's why our tongues must be tamed. To save us from the scorching infernos and venomous plagues that can be set in motion with just a few words. And more so (vs6), to save us from the fires of hell. Here's the bad news... you can't tame your tongue. No man can tame the tongue. Here's the good news. Jesus can. Once again... give him control of your words... and he will take away your hate. He will replace your cursing with blessing. Because... **the things you say tell us who you really are.**

And lastly, **Your Tongue Tells Us Who You Really Are Because It Shows Us Your Heart.** Look again at **vs.9-12**. The passage asks a very blunt question; "if the heart of a Christian is righteous, how can it produce both blessings and cursing?" This is a contradiction. Look at **verse 10** again. Brothers, Christians, this ought not be... this cannot be... this must not be the case. The tongue is like a spring which cannot produce both fresh and salt water. Fresh water which is a blessing to those who thirst, salt water which if drunk causes even more thirst. The point being... the words we speak should refresh, restore, and satisfy those who hear them. The tongue is also like a tree which cannot produce two different types of fruit. It either produces figs or olives but not both. Figs are sweet, olives are salty. Again, the point being how can the tongue produce good fruit and salty fruit at the same time... it can't! It can only produce one or the other.

And notice that a spring is the source of the river... just as the tree is the source of the fruit. What is the source of our words? **Matthew 12:34** tells us that out of the abundance of our heart the mouth speaks. **Matthew 15:18** says the same. The tongue is tool for blessing or cursing... but the source is the heart... and the heart reveals who you

really are. We know who your heart belongs to... because we can hear it through the words you speak. **The things you say tell us who you really are.**

### Application

The goal is to be people who can control our tongues in a righteous manner, and if we do we will head in the right direction, we will refrain from hating and destroying others, and we will reveal a heart for God. But we also now that left to ourselves we will steer the bit and the rudder in the wrong direction, we will spread our fire and poison through gossip, and we will reveal a spring of salt water and a tree of olives rather than a heart of sweet refreshing water of life. And that's why we desperately need Jesus. He is the Word... he holds the words of life... and if we surrender our hearts and tongues to him we will find blessing rather than cursing.

### Conclusion

Warren Wiersbe suggests that we learn to use "twelve" words which can transform our lives. He believes that if we use these words and sincerely mean what we say from our hearts, we will find that God will use us to be a blessing and encouragement to others. They are; "Please & Thank You." When you use them you are showing people that they are people and not things and that you appreciate them. "I'm Sorry." These two break down walls and build bridges. Shows you are approachable and authentic. "I Love You." When said to someone in a way other than romantic, it holds tremendous power... it shows that you see them as family. And lastly, "I'm praying for you." Not #prayers. I'm talking about a sincere promise to lift them up to our Lord. Nothing should mean more.

The tongue is a small member, yet boasts of great things... by the grace of God, let it boast of His Glory, and his blessings! Because, **the things you say tell us who you really are.**