

The Power of the Tongue

Series: The Power of Words and the Grace of God

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James 3:1-12

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Sermon Summary

Introduction

- Goal of this message: to help you to better understand what's behind the communication problems that we all face in pretty much every sphere of life—in the workplace, in the community, in our families, and in the church.
- We all stumble and fall, in particular with respect to our words (v.2)

ILLUSTRATION

Recently an NFL football player, had a handgun loosely tucked into the waistband of his pants And while he was out in public it accidentally went off shooting him in the thigh. Now although he is being prosecuted because apparently he didn't have a permit to carry a concealed weapon, thankfully, this player wasn't badly injured. But this incident does make you wonder – what was this guy thinking? Did he realize that there are certain rules and procedures that need to be followed in handling a gun so that you can remain safe? Like Rule #1: If you're going to carry a handgun, WARNING: don't put it loosely in the wasteband of your pants?!

- Pastoral concern behind this message: **all too often, we as Christians can be just as careless and foolish with our tongues, as that football player was with his gun.** And consequently we wound both ourselves – and others!
- In order to warn us that the tongue is not safe, James makes four points about the tongue

Point #1: The tongue is powerful (vs.3-4)

-like a bit in a horse's mouth
-like a ship's rudder

Point #2 The tongue also has great destructive potential (vs.5-8)

- ...like the flames of fire.
- ...like the tongue of Satan

Point #3: The tongue is often inconsistent (vs.9-10)

- The tongue is Unstable, duplicitous
- It is unbecoming of Christians to attend religious services and to bless God at those services and then to turn around at some later point and to begin to express sinful anger towards fellow church members. How can we bless God, then curse his image?

Point #4: The tongue is often driven by our own sinful hearts (vs.11-12).

- We sin with the tongue because *sinful hearts produce sinful speech*

CONCLUSION

- How do we respond to all this? Well, I think we need to ask ourselves some questions. Sinclair Ferguson says that the misuse of the tongue is a sin that we evangelicals are dull to. Lets make that personal.
 - How do I tend to sin with my tongue?
 - In what circumstances, and with whom, should I be more careful to control my tongue?
 - In what ways have I become insensitive to the dangerous potential of words?
 - How have my words worked against God's purposes for me and others?
 - What bad attitudes in my heart tend to drive destructive speech?
- Though we do not always control the tongue as we should, there is One person who perfectly controlled His tongue and who is perfect in everything. And that Person is Jesus Christ, whose righteous life has have been imputed to us, and whose blood atones for every time we stumble and every time we fall.

Questions For Reflection/Discussion:

1. Re-read James 3:1-12. What specific examples come to mind of moments in our nation's history that were shaped by words? In what ways have "words destroyed?"
2. When you consider the power of words as revealed in this passage, what affect does it have on you?
3. This passage talks about the inconsistency of the tongue. In what ways do you find that the tongue can be inconsistent?
4. Why is it so important to affirm that the tongue is often driven by our own sinful hearts (vs.11-12) and not factors external to us (our past, difficult people we relate to etc...)? In other words, what do we lose by failing to take responsibility for our failures with respect to our words? And what do we gain by taking responsibility for our failures?
5. When Chris provided us with all of those questions at the end of the message to help us apply this passage, in what ways were you convicted? In order to refresh your memory, I'll re-read the questions:
 - a. How do I tend to sin with my tongue?
 - b. In what circumstances, and with whom, should I be more careful to control my tongue?
 - c. In what ways have I become insensitive to the dangerous potential of words?
 - d. How have my words worked against God's purposes for me and others?
 - e. What bad attitudes in my heart tend to drive destructive speech?