

James 3:1-12

3Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. ²For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. ³If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. ⁴Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. ⁵So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! ⁶And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. ⁷For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, ⁸but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰From the same mouth comes blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. ¹¹Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? ¹²Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

Mark 8:27-38

²⁷Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” ²⁸And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” ³⁰And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

LET LOVE FLOW FROM OUR MOUTHS

To give credit where credit is due, a big chunk of the material I have used for this sermon came from a sermon by the Rev. John Jewell given back in 2000 entitled *The Power of Words*.

So we're in our LOVE series here at Bethel; two weeks ago I spoke about how LOVE flowing from the heart of God, and last week I spoke of God's LOVE being infinite. Today I want to talk to you about LOVE that flows from the spoken word. My prayer is twofold: First that you would certainly experience GOD'S love that comes through his word, and second that you would fully appreciate the impact that your words have upon others, and thus we would SUBJECT OUR TONGUES to our Lord Jesus Christ lest we do harm to those around us.

Words have the power to create or destroy. We learn in Genesis that all of creation was accomplished through words; God said...and it was. We learn in the Gospel of John that "the Word (of God) became flesh (in Jesus Christ)" (John 1:14) and dwelt among us and brought us salvation. The book of Hebrews describes the Word of God as "living and powerful...sharper than any two-edged sword."

It's clear that God's Word has the ability to create rather than destroy, to build up and to tear down, and because we are built in the image of our creator, our words too have this power to build or to tear down, to create or to destroy, and while it's true that God's word is certainly more powerful than ours, the words that come out of our mouths are still potent in positive and negative ways. Consider what happens to us when we hear a word: the sound travels through our ears, activates about 24,000 nerves, sending the message to the brain which processes the word, then sends impulses to our limbic system, the hypothalamus and the pituitary gland which sends hormones through the body depending on how the word is understood. If the word is understood in a positive way, the pituitary gland will release hormones that give us a feeling of joy, peace, and safety. If, on the other hand the word is understood as threatening or condemning, the pituitary responds by making us feel pain, fear, and anxiety. The whole negative reaction takes 72 hours to subside. Seventy-two hours! Talk about the power of words! So imagine what it's like for folks living in unhealthy environments where hurtful words are constantly flying around, where hurtful words thrown at one person generate hurtful words thrown back in anger. People who grow up or live in such an environment must be constantly agitated, angry, and upset.

This is why James tells us in such strong terms about the words we say. At one time we may praise God and curse the one created in God's image (what I mean by *we* is actually, because I have a parrot at home that keeps me honest 😊). This is why Jesus speaks to us so sternly in the Gospel of Matthew, "*I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter...*" (Matt. 12:36). How are we doing on that? Let's take a little test here: answer these questions true or false:

- I have never intentionally hurt another person with my words
- I have never repeated something about another person that I did not know for certain was absolutely true.
- I never participate in idle talk about other people and their lives.

How did you do? Pretty well? I hope so. But if you're like me, you'll probably have some 'splainin' to do to Jesus at some point, and when that happens you'll probably be hoping for some positive words of grace to help ease your anxiety.

No, the only person I know who has the power to tame our tongues is Jesus Christ. The more we place our lives under his authority, under his Lordship, the better chance we'll have at bridling our own tongues. How do we place ourselves under his authority? By staying in close contact with him. How do we stay in close contact with him? There are three ways: First, be hearing his word, or reading his word; study the Bible to learn what God is saying to you. Second, pray; remain in constant dialogue with him (Paul tells us to "pray without ceasing – 1Thessalonians 5:17). Don't just call on Jesus when you think you need him; have a relationship with him like C. Austin Miles describes in the hymn *In the Garden*:

And he walks with me and he talks with me
 And he tells me I am his own.
 And the joy we share, as we tarry there
 None other has ever known.

The third way to stay in contact with Jesus is to stay in contact with the Christian community. God has a habit of working through human channels, and the people around you may have a word for you that can help guide you or comfort you or help you deal with a situation.

God has given us a great gift in language, but words have the power to build or destroy. Let Jesus bridle your tongue so that the words that flow from you are words of love, intended to build up and encourage those around you.