**JAMES 3:1-18 TAMING THE TONGUE! 3rd July 2022**

*Not many of you should become teachers, my sisters and brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what they say, they are perfect, able also to bridle their whole body. If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. 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. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! 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. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing.*

*My brothers and sisters, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water. Who is wise and understanding among you? By their good conduct let them show their works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (Jas 3:1-18)*

PRAYER

This well known passage is so clear that it needs no clarification or even comment!

James’ vivid imagery and effective metaphor make it clear…

However we still have a problem - because it is just so hard to tame the tongue!

James begins this section by thinking about those who are called to teach…

and the dangers and difficulties of this task.

Not because teaching is tough…

But because, it is imperative for our lives to match our words!

As teachers, and Christian teachers in particular – we must be authentic.

And who of us can say that is true!

Certainly not me!

I can preach an eloquent sermon,

listen attentively to someone facing a challenging situation,

support a couple going through difficulty

or offer some wise words of advice when requested…

But then on the way home mutter unkind things about the man who pulls in front of me,

speak harsh words to my children,

or think cruel things about someone who upset me.

It seems that it doesn’t matter how good I can appear, or how hard I try…

my thoughts and words don’t always reflect the child of God I now am!

But it’s not just me, is it…

Think of people like Mark Driscol

The pastor of a large and influential church in America – Mars Hill

And an author and speaker who profoundly influenced thousands, possibly millions…

But behind the scenes his words were abusive, controlling, even threatening…

And when they were exposed – his ministry fell apart and the Church folded.

His words, discredited his actions.

And this is a particular danger for teachers.

We can sound good – when needed.

But in the privacy of our own home, or when provoked, or behind the scenes…

the words that come out, or the thoughts you have…

completely contradict what you have been saying!

So you who are called to teach.

You who are called to be an example to others

You who are called to share your faith – and this is all of us who follow Jesus

Be very very careful about what you say!

Because for James – consistency of speech...

The ability to always speak well, to speak in ways that build up,

to never stumble in what you say…

that is a perfect person!

And it is what we should all be trying to develop. PAUSE

To illustrate the importance and power of the tongue, our speech…

James talks about bridles in horses mouths,

ships rudders and sparks that cause forest fires.

All vivid, powerful metaphors!

Although – if we are honest we don’t need to hear these illustrations.

We know all too well the power of what we say…

and how our tongues get out of control.

How we say things we don’t mean - Or worse - do mean!

And we all know – often through our own experience, the power of the tongue

And how profound the negative impact can be of the words we say.

In our foster care training – part of the program included watching some videos of parents interacting with their children…

When a parent spoke harshly,

when they called the child stupid,

when they shouted, or criticised cruelly…

the way the child recoiled was tangible… palpable.

And I know of many adults trying to get through life, but struggling with feelings of worthlessness, self condemnation or self doubt…

because they were not sufficiently affirmed, or told they were loved, growing up.

And think about the scars you bear because of the way someone you loved spoke to you

Or the damage you have done because of the way you spoke to another!

We know all too well the power of the tongue.

Although such a small member – has such a potent and profound effect!

Our problem is not knowing its power

But keeping reign on it.

Our issue is how to take control of our tongue! PAUSE

How do we ensure that what we say is only what God would have us say?

What is good for encouraging, for blessing, for benefit.

Or in the words of Paul *Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.(Eph 4:29-32)*

How – is what we all want… need… to know!

And fortunately – James gives us some pointers.

Helps us understand what’s going on!

Firstly, it is important to recognise that

1. **Your words reflect what’s in your soul**

v.11 *Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.*

Now I find this a bit scary.

I am keen to reflect Jesus…

I want my actions; How I treat people, what I do for them… to be Christ like.

And generally I do ok. I am basically nice!

But if you include into the examination – my words…

(both spoken and unspoken – my thoughts)

Then my soul is revealed for what it is!

And I don’t like what I discover.

When I raise my voice out of frustration!

When I impose my ideas on another before listening!

When I interrupt my wife because I think I know what she is about to say!

When I am critical, or judgmental, or disparaging…

All of these reveal something deep within. They expose my heart!

This is the reality! As Jesus said: *The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. (Luk 6:45)*

So, if you find your words are harsh

If you say things to others that hurt

If your humour is cutting and tears down, rather than builds up

If you find yourself speaking badly about others, criticising and critiquing them

instead of praising and appreciating them?

All of this reveals what’s deep within. PAUSE

SO… Take a moment to think about your words…

What do they reveal about what’s going on in your soul?

Are they highlighting an area of your life where you need to experience the Lords healing and restoring love?

I know when I am **not** doing well in my relationship with God

Perhaps I am feeling overwhelmed,

or things are not working out the way I want,

or I am just tired…

Or perhaps someone is irritating me…

Instead of dealing with it directly, or letting it go because it is minor…

I find it comes out in my humour….

Or in off handed comments…

they become more critical, less encouraging, more spiteful…

I have learnt to pay attention to these signs.

And in the words of the Psalmist, use it as an opportunity to say: *Search me,* *O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! (Psa 139:23-24)*

So take a moment now to think about your words.

Are there times when your tongue is used in ways that point to something deeper that needs to be dealt with?

Is there some unforgiveness lurking,

bitterness that still harbours,

hurt that has not been dealt with.

Could it reveal some underlying jealousy…

or a pain or grief for which you have never received healing?

If unsure – ask someone you are close to.

How would they answer this question about your words?

Take a moment now to take this to God in confession – and seek his restoring touch.

PAUSE - and pray

1. **Work on what you do, not just what you say**

I find this second one surprising!

For whatever reason – if there is an area of my life that needs improving…

it makes sense to focus on it.

If my golf shots are going right – I need to work on my swing

If my hair is all over the place and can’t be subdued – I need to cut it!

If I keep hitting things when in my car – I need to work on my driving

If my wife keeps complaining about clothes left on the floor…

I need to work on picking up after me!

So surely – if my tongue keeps getting me in trouble, surely I need to work on what I say!

But James says: *Who is wise and understanding among you? By their good conduct let them show their works in the meekness of wisdom. v.13*

If you want people to experience you as wise and understanding…

You need to work on what you do!

So often we want to look good.

We want people to think we are knowledgeable and wise

Here, James suggests, let your actions speak for themselves!

Like the adage: “better to be thought a fool – than to open your mouth and prove it”

This is part of what James is saying here.

But more still…

Our words will reflect our actions, as our actions reflect who we are.

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If you are jealous, if you are selfish – these things will be evident in how you behave.

If you are angry or if you are greedy – these will show themselves in what you do

So start behaving as one who has been transformed by Jesus.

And then your words will follow.

As Jesus said: *“For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For we do not gather figs from thorns, nor do we pick grapes from a briar bush. The good person out of the good treasure of their heart brings forth what is good; and the evil person out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for their mouth speaks from that which fills their heart.” Luke 6:43-45*

Take a moment to think about your actions…

What do you need to do so that your life increasingly reflects God’s transformation?

Do you need to be more generous, more gracious, less selfish and more serving?

At home – can you more willingly do something for your partner…

just because you know they will appreciate it

With your neighbours – what practical things can you begin to do to show you care

At Church – are you willing to forgo conversations with your friends…

so that you can welcome and include a new person or someone you haven’t met?

Should you consider going on the roster for morning tea or cleaning…

as an expression of your love for your family here?

What do you need to **do** to reflect the love of God you have experienced?

As you do it will also impact what you say!

Take a moment now to think about your actions…

What is God calling you to do differently?

PAUSE

Tell someone you are near what you have resolved to do!

1. **Get right with God**

Finally, and unsurprisingly, the way to best control your tongue, what you say…

is to be right with God.

If God is at work within

If we are living lives of submission, devotion and gratitude…

If we are nurturing our relationship with Him…

and looking for opportunities to honour Him

Then increasingly who we are will reflect Him!

As Paul says in Gal.5 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. (Gal 5:22-25)*

Or in the words of James: *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.   And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. v.17-18*

And so the message is clear.

The way to take control of your tongue

To ensure that all that you say is God honouring and encouraging for all…

The best thing to do is to make sure you are right with God.

Because it comes from Him.

Julie was known for her sharp tongue.

It was quick, cutting and expertly used.

And for a number of years left a trail of destruction with all who loved her.

Despite all attempts to encourage her to change the way she spoke

Despite the constant assurance of the love of her family…

The anger within – spilled out in vitriol, verbal abuse and disdain

that destroyed those she targeted.

It was hell for her family and those trying to love her.

But then she met and responded to Jesus.

Never before had I seen such a radical transformation.

Her face was softer, her manner gentler…

but what was most noticeable were her words.

Almost overnight, they became more positive, affirming, grateful, encouraging…

She was different and this was most obvious in what she said.

James tells us that which God gives is first *“pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits…”* And this will be seen in what we say.

And God gives this to those who seek Him. PAUSE

The book of Proverbs, time and time again gives advice on our speech

In many ways filling out what James reminds us of here.

For example:

In Prov.10:11 he tell us to use words of life: *“The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence” (*[*Proverbs 10:11*](https://www.biblestudytools.com/proverbs/10-11.html)*).*

To use fewer words: *“When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent” (*[*Proverbs 10:19*](https://www.biblestudytools.com/proverbs/10-19.html)*).*

To only say what is appropriate, helpful: *“The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked, what is perverse” (*[*Proverbs 10:32*](https://www.biblestudytools.com/proverbs/10-32.html)*).*

To avoid gossip: *A gossip tells everything, but a true friend will keep a secret. (Pro 11:13)*

To speak in ways that demonstrate love and care: *“There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing” (*[*Proverbs 12:18*](https://www.biblestudytools.com/proverbs/12-18.html)*).*

And to always speak the truth: *“Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment” (*[*Proverbs 12:19*](https://www.biblestudytools.com/proverbs/12-19.html)*).*

Just to name a few.

Frequently in his letters, Paul instructs us on the importance of watching what we say:

To the Corinthians he expressed his fear that he would discover how destructive their words were with one another: *I am afraid that when I come, we won't be pleased with each other. I fear that some of you may be arguing or jealous or angry or selfish or gossiping or insulting each other… (2Co 12:20)*

To Titus he instructed *“To speak evil  of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy to all people.” Titus 3:2*

To the Ephesians: *“*[*Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths*](https://biblereasons.com/idle-words/)*, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.” Ephesians 4:19*

And the Colossians *“Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” Colossians 4:6*

As some obvious examples.

And even Jesus often spoke of the need to watch what we say.

*I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” Matthew 15: 37*

The importance of good and uplifting use of our words is found throughout scripture.

The problem we have is knowing its importance but doing it.

Here in this passage James tell us how this can change.

1. Be aware your words reveal what is going on inside
2. Work on what you do, what you say will follow

Finally, and most importantly…

1. Get right with God.

He alone is the one who can change how we speak…

and ensure that what we say honours Him.

TAMING YOUR TONGUE

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Looking at the passages below, where does your tongue need controlling?

What will you do this week to take control of it?

PROVERBS

*“The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence”* [*10:11*](https://www.biblestudytools.com/proverbs/10-11.html)*.*

*“When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent” 10:19*

*The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked, what is perverse 10:32*

*A gossip tells everything, but a true friend will keep a secret. 11:13*

*There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing” 12:18*

*“Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment” 12:19*

PAUL

*I am afraid that when I come, we won't be pleased with each other. I fear that some of you may be arguing or jealous or angry or selfish or gossiping or insulting each other… (2Co 12:20)*

*“To speak evil  of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy to all people.” Titus 3:2*

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JESUS

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**Martin Luther King, Jr.** delivered 28 August 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C.

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. And some of you have come from areas where your quest -- quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive. Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed.

Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends.

And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of "interposition" and "nullification" -- one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; "and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together."**2**

## Winston Churchill’s ‘We Shall Fight on the Beaches’ Speech

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill delivered his soul stirring “We shall fight on the beaches” speech in World War II.

“I have, myself, full confidence that if all do their duty, if nothing is neglected, and if the best arrangements are made, as they are being made, we shall prove ourselves once again able to defend our Island home, to ride out the storm of war, and to outlive the menace of tyranny, if necessary for years, if necessary alone.

At any rate, that is what we are going to try to do. That is the resolve of His Majesty’s Government-every man of them. That is the will of Parliament and the nation.

The [British Empire](https://mocomi.com/british-rule-in-india/) and the French Republic, linked together in their cause and in their need, will defend to the death their native soil, aiding each other like good comrades to the utmost of their strength.  
Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous States have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or fail.

We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France,  
we shall fight on the seas and oceans,  
we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be,  
we shall fight on the beaches,  
we shall fight on the landing grounds,  
we shall fight in the fields and in the streets,  
we shall fight in the hills;

we shall never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this Island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God’s good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.”