

# RTM

reaching/teaching/ministering curriculum



May 17, 2009  
The Power of Your Words  
James 3:1-13

## MINISTERING HELPS

### Group Prayer

When is the last time your group prayed for God to lead and bless your efforts in the areas of effective reaching, teaching and ministering?

Realizing that apart from Him we can do nothing, it is important for us to pray about this. Include it in your class prayer time today (and each week to come.).

### Go After Absentees

Assign the names of each member and prospect that are absent to group members that will call them or e-mail them this week. Find out what's up, pray for them, and invite them back to class next Sunday!

## REACHING HELPS

Who do you know that has kids that could be a part of VBS?

VBS is not just for reaching kids, but their families as well. Start by inviting the kids from your neighborhood. Then invite their families to the Thursday Night Carnival.

Pray that God will use all this to bring kids and their families to Christ and the church.

## TEACHING HELPS

We continue our sermon series called LIVING AT THE SPEED OF LIFE.

In our fast paced, busy life; it is not uncommon for our words to get away from us. Saying things we shouldn't have or saying them in a way that was not productive can cause huge problems at work and at home.

Let's take a look at the power of our words today, and discover how we can make sure that our words build folks up and not destroy them.

# The Power of Your Words

## James 3:1-13

At amusement parks, the bumper-car ride is always popular. People enjoy driving recklessly for a few minutes, bumping deliberately but harmlessly into other people's cars. Some people have a bumper-car mentality in their relationships with others. Using blunt words, they deliberately bump into others' feelings, which is anything but harmless. James spent time explaining to Jewish Christians the deceptive nature of the tongue in Chapter 3 of his Epistle.

Having spent much time on spiritual maturity in Chapters 1-2, James introduces a new matter of spiritual maturity in Chapter 3, the way the tongue is used. The tongue is unique in that it is the tattletale of the heart and revealer of the real person. Misuse of the tongue is perhaps the easiest way to sin and there are no limits to the damage one can do with it.

### 1. The Powerful Tongue - James 3:2-5

*2We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. 3When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. 4Or 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. 5Likewise 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.*

The tongue is a universal problem. James's statement that we all stumble in many ways reinforces the truth that no one is exempt in regard to the dangers of the tongue and other forms of sin against God. Nothing seems to trip a believer more than the tongue.

The tongue has extraordinary power to control, even to the extent that if anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man. The word perfect most likely means complete, or mature not perfection. The idea is that a person who is never at fault in what he says gives evidence of a purified and mature heart, which is the source of his righteous speech. We could never be perfect in the sense that Jesus is perfect, in speech or in any other way, but we can, in the Holy Spirit's power, have a spiritually mature and sanctified heart. The result of

### Teaching Plan

#### Introduction...

Use one or more of the following questions to get your class talking...

- ▶ How do you react when you hear someone cursing and using abusive language?
- ▶ How can a person be hurt by the words of others?
- ▶ What can you learn about a person by listening to him or her speak?

—Adult Questions for LESSONmaker

Today's lesson helps us to remember that our tongues are powerful to either build up or tear down. Let the Lord speak to us today about what our tongues should and should not be used to do and how to get your tongue wagging in the right direction.

#### 1. The powerful tongue... (2-5)

- ▶ Why do you think the passage starts out with, "We all stumble in different ways?" What is the first step in correcting any problem? (admitting you have a problem)
- ▶ Is it possible to be perfect? Consider the following verse...  
*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*  
**1 John 1:8 (NIV)**
- ▶ Why would James infer that the tongue (words we speak) is harder to control than any other part of the body?
- ▶ How are the words we use...
  - like a horse's bit?
  - like a ship's rudder?
  - like a spark that starts a forest fire?

maturity is the ability to control the tongue. If one can control their tongue, which responds so readily and limitlessly to sin, then controlling everything else will follow. If the Holy Spirit has control of this most volatile and intractable part of our being, how much more susceptible to His control will the rest of our lives be? That is why spiritual maturity requires a tamed tongue.

The tongue has great power and is very influential. Three illustrations make this point clear: the bit and the horse, the rudder and the ship and the spark and the forest. The Greek used in the passage is both ancient and eloquent. James was both steeped in Jewish tradition and well versed in Greek classics.

**Bit and Horse** - The bit lies on top of a horse's tongue, and when attached to the bridle and reins, it is possible for the rider using that bit to easily make the horse obey. Controlling horses' mouths controls their heads, which, in turn, direct their entire body as well. Even gentle horses, which have been ridden for many years, are not controllable without bits in their mouths. As long as they are expected to perform service, whether for riding or for pulling a wagon or plow, they require that control. So it is with believers. To be useful to God, we will need our tongues controlled, with everything else following in submission.

**Rudder and Ship** -The largest ships of that day were small compared to the gigantic ocean liners and warships of modern times. But the ship in which Paul traveled on his voyage to Rome had a total of 276 persons on board, including the crew, soldiers and prisoners; indicating it was a fairly large vessel. In any case, James's point is that, compared to its overall size, a ship's rudder is very small, yet can easily steer the vessel wherever the inclination of the pilot desires.

**Spark and Forest Fire** -James obviously had in mind man's natural inclination to boast, to be self-centered and to have a high self-image. Whenever and however the tongue boasts; it leaves a wake of destruction. It tears down others; it destroys churches, families, marriages and personal relationships. It can even lead to murder and to war. James likens it to a spark in the forest. The smallest match or spark can grow exponentially that destroys thousands of acres of forest, killing countless animals and often destroying human life and property. Fire has the amazing and virtually unique capacity to reproduce itself in an almost unlimited way as long as it has fuel to burn. Fire feeds on itself. If there is sufficient flammable material and enough oxygen to sustain combustion; it will burn on indefinitely. So to does the tongue as it praises self through boasting.

James' point is readily clear. The tongue is powerful. In order for the tongue to control our lives in the right way, we must resist the ever-present inclination and temptation to boast and brag. We should speak only gracious words, kind words, words that build up rather than tear down, that edify, comfort, bless and encourage. They should be words of humility, gratitude, peace, holiness and wisdom. Such words, of course, can only come from a heart that not only is indwelt by the Holy Spirit but is also wholly submitted to His control.

## 2. The Perverted Tongue – James 3:6-7

*6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. 7All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, 8but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.*

James moves to his second point in verse 6. The tongue is perverse. James continues with his use of the fire, but the meaning is different as he says it is a world of evil among the parts of the body. 'World of evil' means a system of iniquity, evil, rebellion, lawlessness and every other form of sin. It is the source of unrighteous, ungodly behavior within sinful man. It breeds and gives vent to every sort of sinful passion and desire. No other bodily part has such far-reaching potential for disaster and destruction as the tongue.

The tongue corrupts the whole person. It is as though the tongue is at the center or hub of the wheel of nature, and like a fireworks display; the wheel is set on fire at the center. The more it burns; the faster it revolves until the whole wheel spins in a blaze, spitting fire in all directions. But the tongue is only the fuse; the source of the deadly fire is hell. The word James uses is *Gehenna*. It was a never ending fire pit where garbage was burned and human sacrifice occurred outside of Jerusalem. This is an illustration of the Lake of Fire.

Not only is the tongue like an uncontrollable fire it is also like an untamed animal. The wildest, smartest, fastest, most powerful and most elusive of creatures are subject to man's taming. Even after the Fall; Noah was able to bring every kind of animal into the ark in pairs without serious incident. For centuries, the major attraction of circuses has been the wild animal acts; in which lions, tigers and other powerful and dangerous animals do tricks at the command of a human trainer. In that regard they are less primitive and more civilized and controllable than the tongues of their masters. But no one, that is; no human being in his own power, can tame the tongue. Even in believers, the tongue can easily slip out of its cage and do great harm. Its work can be so subtle that it sometimes escapes notice until the damage is done.

The tongue is restless. In this context, the meaning goes well beyond that of restless. He is suggesting the idea of a wild animal fighting fiercely against the restraints of captivity. This evil always seeks a way to escape and to spread its deadly poison. Its "venom" is more deadly than a snake's because it can destroy morally, socially, economically and spiritually.

## 2. The perverted tongue... (6-8)

- ▶ In today's passage, the Bible speaks of the tongue as a very potentially dangerous part of our body. There are three reasons given for this...
  - 1) It CORRUPTS the whole person- What does the word corrupt mean? Does it mean everything is bad, or that the bad part is having a destructive influence on the whole? How can our tongue undermine all the good that is coming out of our lives?
  - 2) It also can negatively impact the COURSE of your life- What is the course of your life? (plans, dreams, and where you want to go) How could our tongue change the course of our life in a negative way?
  - 3) The source of a perverted tongue is HELL- The Bible says that the perverted tongue gets its orders from Hell. We know the devil is destined for Hell because they are both connected to that which is against God, so what does the Bible say that the goal of Hell is for us who are believers in Jesus in this verse...

*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*  
**1 Peter 5:8 (NIV)**

So according to this verse, what is the important thing we must do to not be devoured or corrupted? (Alert and Self-controlled)

- 4) It almost seems like a hopeless effort the way James expresses it here. Is it a hopeless effort? Where does the power for overcoming come from?

<sup>3</sup> *By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence.* <sup>4</sup> *And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.*

**2 Peter 1:3-4 (NLT)**

### 3. The Forked Tongue – James 3:9-12

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

In the old Cowboy and Indian movies, the Cowboys were often accused of speaking with a forked tongue. Basically what the Cowboys were being accused of is saying one thing to the Indians, but another thing to non-Indians. This is a similar thing to what James is saying in this section of the passage.

The tongue is not just wild and raging like an animal, but clever, plotting, and subtly deceptive. It is hypocritical and duplicitous, eagerly willing to deceive in order to achieve its own advantage. Every believer should use his tongue to bless our Lord and Father, just as God desires and expects of those who belong to Him. But with the same tongue with which we bless God, James continues; we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God. Men continue to be like God in many ways—in intelligence, self-consciousness, reasoning, moral nature, emotions and will. How tragically inconsistent and hypocritical; therefore, that from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. Yet every believer has been guilty of that hypocrisy to some extent. It was not only the wicked scribes and Pharisees who claimed to bless God and yet demanded the crucifixion of His Son, accusing Him of blasphemy.

My brethren, James implores, these things ought not to be this way. *This should not be* is a strong negative, used only here in the New Testament. The idea is that there should be no place in a Christian's life for duplicitous speech. It is an unacceptable and intolerable compromise of righteous, holy living. When God transformed us, He gave us the capacity for new, redeemed, holy speech and He expects us, as His children; to speak only that which is holy and right. Our "yes" and "no" should be honest. James explains this truth using three illustrations. First, he asks rhetorically, "Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?" The obvious answer is no. The same spring, or fountain, does not issue two vastly different kinds of water.

"Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?" (Matt. 7:11)—James asks, "Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs?" Again, the obvious and expected answer is no. Such a thing is utterly contrary to nature and cannot happen. He then states emphatically, nor can salt water produce fresh. This also is clearly impossible, and no rational person would think twice about believing anything to the contrary.

### 3. The forked tongue... (9-12)

- ▶ Describe what a "forked tongue" is. Help your group to understand it relates to saying one thing in one moment, and then saying something contrary to it the next.
- ▶ What were the two contrary things that God says we tend to do with our tongues?
- ▶ What are ways we can praise God with our tongues? Make a list of as many as your group can think of.
- ▶ What are ways we can curse others with our tongues. Next to the first list, make a list of as many of these as you can think of.
- ▶ Now draw ONE circle around both lists and ask, "If this circle represents you and what comes out of your mouth, what does it make you think about what God thinks and what others think about you?"

#### 4. Getting to the Source of the Problem and Fixing it...

This leads to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 12:33-37 where he is talking about the Pharisee's and their hypocrisies. Either Jesus and God were good or bad.

*33"Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. 35The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. 36But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. 37For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned." Matthew 12:33-37*

*How can you who are evil say anything good?*

Being evil expresses the depravity of the natural human heart, which can *produce* only evil because it *is* only evil. That is the legacy of fallen man because of Adam's sin. As Paul explained to the Roman church, "Both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, 'There is none righteous, not even one; ... there is none who does good, there is not even one,' ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3). The tongue is simply medium through which the heart speaks. The mouth simply reproduces verbally what is in the heart. Whether good or bad the tongue reveals the heart.

Words are important to Jesus. Because men's words are an accurate gauge of their hearts, men will render account for their words in the day of judgment. It is by his words that a person is either justified or condemned. Salvation and condemnation are not produced by words or deeds, but they are manifested by them. Words and deeds are objective; observable evidence of a person's spiritual condition. In the day of judgment, that future general time when the Lord evaluates who belongs in and out of His eternal kingdom, the criteria will include the speech of every person.

Hypocrisy is not tolerated by Christ. Whether it is through actions or words; Christ expects believers through the power of the Holy Spirit to control their tongue because the tongue is the microscope to the heart.

**References:** *Bible Knowledge Commentary;*  
*John MacArthur's New Testament Commentary;*  
*Our Daily Bread; Lesson Maker Questions for New Testament*

#### 4. Fixing the problem...

- ▶ How does the following verse relate to verse 11-12?

*<sup>34</sup> You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? **For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.** <sup>35</sup> The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. <sup>36</sup> But I tell you that men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken.  
**Matthew 12:34-36 (NIV)***

- ▶ Once we realize that our mouth does what it does because of our heart, we will realize that our heart needs "fixing." Only God can do that. Use the following verse to encourage group members who need a heart fix...

*<sup>10</sup> Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
**Psalms 51:10 (NIV)***

You may want to encourage them to read all of Psalm 51 for a more thorough look at fixing a heart problem...

#### Application Points...

- ▶ The tongue has power to both bless and curse. Who is someone you need to apologize to that you have recently "torn down" with your words, or maybe even someone that you have now gotten in the habit of "tearing down?" Who is someone that you could bless with your words today. Speak that blessing from the heart and let them know your love, appreciation and encouragement. Watch their reaction and let it be a catalyst for getting in the habit of blessing others with your mouth.
- ▶ If your mouth has become contaminated, it really means you have a heart problem. Don't try to fix the mouth before you fix the heart. Confess your polluted and conflicted mouth and heart to God. Meditate over Psalm 51 and ask God to fix your heart. Then do what He says and watch your mouth fall in line.