

MASTERING YOUR TONGUE

JAMES 3: 1 -11

AUTHOR: The book of James is written by James the brother of Jesus Christ. James was the leader Christian church in Jerusalem.

TO WHOM: First century Christian Jews living outside of the land of Palestine.

BACKGROUND: The Christians were facing many temptations and internal problems such as;

- Impatience at difficult times (1:1-4)
- Talking but not living the truth (3:1)
- Fighting and coveting (4:1)
- Materialistic life style (5:1)

James identified these problems as resulting from lack of Christian maturity. He encouraged the churches by giving them practical advice on how to grow in the Christian maturity. His advice was centred on five major areas in five chapters of the book and they are:

- i. How to be patient in times of testing and temptation – chapter 1
- ii. How to practice the truth – chapter 2
- iii. How to develop power over their tongue – chapter 3
- iv. How to be a peace maker not a trouble maker– chapter 4
- v. How to be prayerful in trouble – chapter 5

As we look at these problems we ask ourselves are they different from the problems in our local churches today? If we are honest the answer is – No!

So James was dealing with something that is on-going and up to date today. His advice is also for all Christians today.

Mastering your Tongue (James 3:1-11)

Mastering your tongue is the 3rd of the five signs of Christian maturity according to James.

In order to emphasise the importance of controlling their tongues in the process of Christian maturity and the inevitable consequences of their speech James uses six images to illustrate the power of the tongue. He likens the tongue to a bit in the mouth of a horse (3:3); a small rudder that steers a large ship against a strong wind (3:4); a small spark that sets a great forest ablaze (3:5); Restless animal with deadly poison(3:8); water flowing from the spring (3:11); a fig tree(3:12).

Warren W. Wiersbe in his book “Be Matured” puts these six images into three meaningful classifications that vividly showed the power of the tongue in 3 “Ds”.

THE POWER TO DIRECT: Bit and Rudder (3:1-4):

In the Jewish culture teaching and being spiritual leaders were highly sought after professions, perhaps because of the respect they commanded but Jesus warned against such motive (Matt. 23:1-12; Mark 12: 38-40; Luke 20:45-47).

Teaching and leadership involve the use of tongue to guides and direct peoples' lives. In choosing the bit and rudder James illustrates two items that are small, yet exercise great power over other items that are hugely greater in size than them (see photos).

The bit in the horse's mouth controls the big horse and makes it do what the rider wants.

The rudder controls the large ship to make it go where the pilot wants against the forces of wind and waves.

An uncontrolled horse or ship endangers the lives of the rider on the horse or the passengers in the ship.

In the same way the words we speak have the power to affect the lives of other people. For example:

- Jesus spoke to the woman of Samaria at the well and her life and the lives of her neighbours changed for better (John 4)
- Peter spoke on the day of Pentecost and 3000 souls were saved from the punishment of sin
- When a Judge says "Guilty!" or "Not Guilty!" those words affects the lives of the accused, his or her family, friends and the society for better or foe worse.
- When a head of state, president or prime minister of any country says few words and signs some papers and nation would be at war. It was the 45 minutes from attack claim by the Prime minister of Great Britain and his advisers in 2002 that sealed the nation's approval for war with Iraq. That war according to CNN reporter BALTIMORE cost 655,000 Iraqi's death. And according to icasualties.org there were 4669 Coalition Military fatalities. Dr David Kelly committed suicide in 2003.
- A "Yes" or "No" from a parent can greatly affect the direction of a child's life.

Never underestimate the guidance you give by the words you speak of not speak.

"A gentle answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov. 15:1).

The tongue is like the bit and rudder. It has the power to influence others. I pray that our tongues will direct people in the right way that glorifies God.

THE POWER TO DESTROY: The fire and wild animal (3:5-8)

James likens the destructive nature of tongue to that of fire. How?

Start & Spread: Fire starts as a spark and spreads quickly. But the spark has a potential to set a large forest on fire. James says "Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark" (3:5b)

Rate of Destruction: Fire seeks to destroy everything in its path. A forest that took many years to grow is destroyed in minutes as it spreads. The words we speak have the power to destroy. A person's whole life can be injured or destroyed by words. We dare not be careless with what we say, thinking we can apologise later, because even if we do the scars remain. A few words spoken in anger can destroy a relationship that took many years and effort to build. Before you speak, remember that words are like fire-you can neither control nor reverse the damage they can do.

Control: Once the fire is started it is difficult and almost impossible to control. James tells us, "All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue" (3:7 & 8). When we tame an animal we get a worker. When we control the fire we get energy. But tongue cannot be tamed by man. Only God can tame the tongue.

THE POWER TO DELIGHT: The fountain and tree (3:9-12)

James also likens the tongue to the delight of fountain and tree.

In any community the presence of fresh water fountain is a great blessing. It provides water for drinking, washing, cooking, irrigation (farming), transportation etc.

A tree can provide edible fruits, shelter for mankind, animal and birds, building materials etc. Some are used for healing.

In the same manner, well spoken words can refresh, and heal a wounded soul. "Reckless words pierce like a sword but the tongue of the wise brings healing" (Prov 12:18)

However if water is not controlled it can be destructive and bring death. We can all remember the Tsunami that struck South East Asia in 2004 which destroyed the entire village near the coast of Sumatra and killed over 300,000 people with many bodies either being lost to the sea or unidentified.

In the case of the tree it needs to be deeply rooted in order to provide its delightful qualities.

THE INCONSISTENCY OF THE TONGUE (3:9 -12):

⁹ “With 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”.

At times our words are right and pleasing to God, but at other times they are violent and destructive. The tongue gives us a picture of our basic human nature. We were made in God's image, but we have also fallen into sin. God works to change us from the inside out. The tongue reveals the stage of change in our hearts.

How can we master the Tongue?

- ❖ We need to give our tongues to God to tame it and it does not need to be “set on fire of hell” (3:6). The first step is to accept that Jesus paid for all your sin by dying on the cross and by asking him to be the Lord of your life.
- ❖ Recognise that the tongue can only speak what is the heart (Matt 12:34). If the heart is filled with hatred Satan will set the tongue on fire of hell. But if the heart is filled with love and all the rest of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), God will set your tongue on fire to build others up and not destroy them.
- ❖ We can learn from the Lord Jesus example and spend time with God. “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed” (Mark 1:35). Isaiah said “Morning by morning he awakens me and opens my understanding to his will” (Isaiah 50:4b –The Living Bible). We need to be deep rooted in the words of the Lord for our tongues to be delightful in what we say. Paul in encouraging the Colossians said “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in words or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:15-17).

Let me pass on to you these relationship building words that would certainly make a huge impact in mastering your tongue:

- “Please”

- “Thank you”
- “I’m sorry”
- “I love you”
- “I’m praying for you”