

## **We Are What We Say: Faith Shows in Our Words Too**

James 2:1-12

Good morning! As you may know by now, we've been studying about the need for spiritual transformation in these past weeks. Last week we talked about James' principle on how to have a living faith. James says that a living faith is impartial, it shows mercy and it acts to help the poor.

Well in our text this morning, James continues to address the question of what makes faith a living faith. He's saying, that if we claim to have faith, then it will show in our words too, or how our tongues behave. The question James is asking here is how can I carry my faith from the bottom of my heart to the tip of my tongue? James has some striking things to say about how our tongues can impact our lives. And the first principle is this...

### **1. Words Can Control**

*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.*

What you say can affect the mood of your day or the direction of your life. It's like this guy who planned for that perfect dinner date—things were going well, but then he said something wrong, and suddenly, it's a disaster! The candles, the roses, the music, the ambience, the food—all of it became worthless. Why? Because, the tongue has a power for direction. According to James, the tongue is like a horse's bit or bridle. You know what a bit or a bridle is? It's that strap placed in the mouth of a horse to control its direction.

James also says that the tongue is like a rudder—well I'm we're all familiar with the rudder. Well, the ship is going on its normal course, but then the rudder malfunctions—then suddenly things go haywire! Just the same way, what we say determines our relationships, it decides our commitments. And James says don't let size fool you. It's a small bridle in the horse's mouth but it enables a person to control this powerful horse. It's a small rudder in a huge ship and yet it holds the power of direction. Our tongue is very small compared to the rest of the body, but it could control our lives. We need to realize that our tongue directs what we do. So that means we always need to be watchful of what comes out of our mouths. If we steer the tongue in the right direction, it can open great opportunities for us. It can surely change our lives, even our relationships with our love ones and other people for good.

But now James moves to the second principle, which I think is a negative assessment of the tongue. Yes it has a power for control, but James points to a second principle.

### **2. Words Can Destroy**

Yes while the tongue can be like a rudder, it's also like fire. In verse 6, James says *6The 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.*

James says that the tongue is "a world of evil." It means that all the evil in the world can be contained in our words. One negative word standing on its own can't do much—but you combine that word with other words—and the possibilities for destruction are countless. And James says, that the tongue is even more destructive than the other parts of the body. Even if you consider yourself physically strong, your hands, your arms, your legs are no match to the tongue.

There's this old rhyme that says "stick and stones can break my bones but words can never hurt me." I think you would agree that this is just not true. Well, just look at Hitler. In 1925, Hitler wrote this book *Mein Kampf* or *My Struggle* which basically outlined his Nazi ideology. Somebody once said that for every word Hitler wrote in that book—125 lives were lost. Those hate-filled diatribes of Hitler caused the lives of more than 6 million Jews!

Proverbs 18:21 also says *21 The tongue has the power of life and death. they have the power to destroy.*

Yes, it's true that while James is saying that words have the power to destroy, he is also in effect suggesting that if words are used properly they possess the power to build. Words are like bricks. I can use a brick to smash a window, but I can also use it to build a building too. I pray that God will reorient our tongues. Let us practice to speak blessing instead of curses. Let us learn to complement people more. Yes the tongue has the power for direction and destruction, but James also gives a third principle and it is this...

### **3. Words Can't Be Tamed**

In v. 7, James says, *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.*

Well, wild animals can be tamed, but no person can contain the tongue. Once your tongue starts moving and generating those words—those words will begin to take a life of their own. We see politicians or people in the spotlight get in trouble for the things they say. I think you know what happened to that congressman who heckled the President. Once we say something, there's no turning back. You cannot ask those words to return back into your mouth. Once words leave the tip of tongues—that's it. You can no longer undo them. If you released hurtful words to a person, those words have the ability to devastate that person for days, or worse, even for years.

So how can our words be tamed? Well, no person can contain them.. There's even no secret pill that will enable us to say good words automatically. Well, here's the bottom line: Yes you can't tame the tongue and its effects, but God can. Why? Because God can empower us to ask for forgiveness. Yes, we can never undo what we say, but we can ask for forgiveness. Yes, we cannot control the devastating effects of our words, but God is gracious—God can bring healing. Yes we can never tame the after effects of our words, but God can. That's the good news here. We can never tame the tongue but God can!

So the tongue has power for direction, power for destruction and cannot be tamed, but there's a fourth principle. James says:

#### 4. Words Show What's On the Inside

*10Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. 11Can both fresh water and salt[a] water flow from the same spring? 12My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.*

Our tongue expresses our character. James talks about praise and curse coming out of the same mouth. I think we've all experienced this. One moment—We're singing a praise hymn, talking about the goodness of God, and then we get in the car and then something's not right with the children or our spouse and then all of the sudden the words that are coming out of our mouths have nothing to do with what we did just a while back. "How can that be?", James asked. he's saying don't settle for this. Don't think that that's okay.

James is actually saying that our mouths are like a spring of water—they have to be consistent. Yesterday on a trip with our superintendent, Mike showed us that artesian well at the end of HBR. If I go to that well and I know that 90% of the time it gives fresh water and that 10% of the time it's contaminated, well I'm not going to take the chance. Or if I do, I will have to test it first. I'm not going to easily trust it. You want people to trust our words? Then we need to be consistent with our words. We need to be consistently positive and encouraging.

James is not saying here that we need to balance our bad words with good words to make it even. We all tend to do that, but that's not the way of Christ! Unless our words are consistent they lose their eternal impact in people's lives. One taste of poisonous water could ruin your life. One word can ruin another person's life. So what do we do when we say something hurtful? We say the truth, we acknowledge it and ask for forgiveness. You don't pretend it never happened.

So here's the principle behind the spring. The spring comes from one source only. Similarly, our words also come from one source—and that source is the heart. In our text two Sundays ago from Mark 7: 23, Jesus says, "*All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'*"

Clearly, It's all in the heart. If my words are inconsistent that means that something is wrong with my heart. So if the real issue is the heart—then we need to ask God to deal with our hearts. I've been saying almost every week now, but let me repeat it again—We need the infilling of the Holy Spirit on a daily basis to change our hearts and when that happens what we say will change to. We may not have access to our hearts but we can ask God to do some cleaning, some form of spiritual surgery there. We need to start addressing the issues of our hearts, and then ask God to control our words—even before we begin to say them.

Let's ask God to do just that. Let us pray....