

A Two-Ounce Slab of Trouble

James 3:3-12

Introduction:

1. When a doctor examines a patient, he often asks the patient to stick out his tongue – it must be helpful in diagnosing illness
2. Spiritually, the tongue test is also valid
 - a. What we say reveals much about us
 - b. When Peter was standing around the enemy's fire he denied that he knew Jesus. People said "thy speech betrays you? – Matt 26:73b
3. Words are extremely powerful
 - a. Maybe you have been hurt by words
 - b. Maybe you have been encouraged /strengthened by words
4. As with anything powerful, words can be used or abused
5. We should use our words to edify others – to build them up
6. Contrary to popular opinion...the most powerful weapon in the world is not some secret weapon developed by the military. Indeed it is not even a weapon made by man.
7. There is incredibly awesome power in the tongue.
8. In a small town in North Dakota there was a young family. They were happy, even though the mother had not been entirely well since the birth of their second baby. People in the town knew that there was warmth there because of the way they treated each other. One day the town gossip started a rumor that the husband was being unfaithful. Though it wasn't true, the story spread around town and it eventually reached the ears of the young mother. It was more than she could bear. That night when the husband came home, he knew that something was wrong. No one ran to the door to greet him. In fact, the whole house was silent. Down in the basement he found the three of them hanging from a beam. In despair, the sick young mother had taken the lives of her two children and then her own. This was the result of gossip.
9. This morning we look at a two ounce slab of trouble

I. The Tongue is Small, but it is Powerful

3 Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. 4 Behold also the ships, which though [they be] so great, and [are] driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

A. Illustration of a Bit in the Horse's Mouth

1. The horse is a strong-willed animal and it prefers freedom to go where it pleases
 - a) *But a mighty horse can be controlled by a small bit*
 - b) *The bit is very small in relation to the size of the horse*
2. A large, wild stallion could injure or even kill someone.
3. But a horse under control can pull a carriage, or be ridden or work on a farm.
4. The tongue, though small, has great power
5. Controlling the tongue requires control of our inner impulses

B. Illustration of the Rudder of a Ship

1. A large ocean liner or air craft carrier can be controlled by a small rudder
 - a) *The rudder is small compared to the size of the ship*
 - b) *Even in a storm with fierce winds, the rudder still controls the ship*
2. A ship out of control could float down a river and hit a bridge pylon and cause much damage.
3. A ship under the control of a skilled captain can carry food or oil to benefit many people.
4. The rudder must overcome the currents and winds that would push the ship off its course
5. Words affect our lives
 - a) *The doctor says, "Cancer."*
 - b) *The judge says, "Guilty."*
6. The secret of self-control is tongue control

II. The Tongue is Small, but It is Dangerous

A. The Tongue Can Destroy

5 Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

1. Tongue is a torch - like a spark in a forest of dead wood
2. On October 8, 1871 in a barn in Chicago, a cow owned by Mrs. O'Leary accidentally kicked over a lantern. That lantern fell into some hay, the hay caught on fire and from that the fire spread...and when the fire was over, over 100,000 people were left homeless...17,500 buildings were destroyed...300 people died...and it cost the city over 400 million dollars...Just because of one spark.
3. Fire, out of control is dangerous and deadly but fire in a fire place provides warmth and light and enjoyment
4. One inappropriate word can cause a lot of damage
 - a) *How many friendships have been ruined...*
 - b) *How many churches have been split... by gossip*
 - c) *How many reputations - ruined by careless words?*
 - d) *How much hurt has been caused by false accusations?*
 - e) *How many lives adversely affected by a "slip of the tongue"*
5. We must realize that one careless word can create lasting damage. The tongue destroys.
6. Many people would never set fire to a man chained to a stake. They would never clap their hands in approval at the shrieks of those who were being torn apart by lions in the coliseum. But these same people would assassinate friends, neighbors, and fellow church members by untruths, gossip, tale bearing, vicious and evil words. Sometimes it is a half-truth which is worse than a whole falsehood. Most all of us have felt the sting of unkind words.

B. The Tongue Can Defile – vs 6 ←

1. Mt 15:11 Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.
2. What you say cannot only destroy others. It can defile you.
3. You see our words can ruin our appearance and personality.
4. Imagine meeting someone for the first time. That person is attractive until you hear them say a profane word or utter some curse word and in just that instance their beauty was gone.
5. The tongue can do the same thing to us.
 - a) *It can strip radiance / beauty of Christ from our lives*
 - b) *It can ruin our testimonies*

C. The Tongue Can't Be Tamed by Man – vs 2, 7-8 ←

1. Here, James compares the tongue to a wild untamed beast in the jungle that attacks and feeds off other animals.
2. If we do not tame the tongue, it will devour us + others
 - a) *Many dangerous animals can eventually be tamed*
 - b) *Lions can be trained to jump through flaming hoops*
 - c) *Huge elephants can be trained to stand on their heads*
 - d) *Killer whales can be trained to do tricks*
 - e) *We can't tame our tongues*
3. We have a term for devouring one another - "backbiting."
 - a) *That's a good term...for that is exactly what it is.*
 - b) *It is when you take your teeth and bite into the back of another person.*
 - c) *That's exactly the way one wild animal often attacks another wild animal by biting the animal in the back.*
4. The tongue is like a piranha...which can eat you alive.
5. If we turn our tongues loose, they will devour...devour our friends, and our family.
6. The tongue can be a very dangerous weapon. We must control it.

III. The Tongue is Small, but It is Revealing

9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. 10 Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. 11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet [water] and bitter? 12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so [can] no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

- No fountain to sends out both fresh and bitter water.
- No fig tree to produces figs and olives
- No grape vine produces grapes and figs
- No fountain has both fresh and salt water
- Yet the tongue often does just that.
- It is used to bless God and to curse men.
- It is used for glory and it is used for gossip.

A. *Tongue Reveals What Kind of Person You Are*

1. Matt 12:34-35 ←
2. Jesus says that our words expose our hearts...they tell what kind of persons we are.
3. Our words expose one of three things about us.
 - a) *We either have the heart of a viper - vs 34*
 - b) *A heart of an evil man - vs 35*
 - c) *A heart of a good man - vs 35.*
4. You see, our words expose our true nature...what lies beneath the surface...what is deep down within our hearts...our motives, desires, and ambitions. Our words expose our true character: whether good or bad, kind or cruel.
5. It doesn't matter if you are a Sunday school teacher, a deacon, or a preacher. If you do not have control over your tongue...James says that your religion is worthless.
6. If we want to be considered good people, Christian role models, spiritually mature follower's of Christ, then we must have control over our tongues.

B. Christians Should be Consistent in Speech

- “For good or ill, your conversation is your advertisement.
- Every time you open your mouth you let others look into your mind.
 1. A heart that is filled with the love of God will not send out blessing and cursing at the same time
 2. To change the fruit, the inner nature of the plant would have to be changed
 - a) *You cannot teach a fig tree to bear olives by showing it olives*
 - b) *You cannot change a saltwater fountain by pouring some sweet water into it*
 3. External attempts to produce internal change only result in confusion
 4. The internal change from salvation can change speech

IV. Conclusion:

A. Rethink Your Freedom of Speech

1. We live in a country where we have freedom of speech
 - a) *“You can’t tell me what to say!”*
 - b) *“I have a right to speak my mind!”*
2. If anyone had rights, it was Jesus
 - a) *He had done no wrong but said nothing in his trial*
 - b) *He could have called 10,000 angels, but kept silent*
3. Before you speak your mind
 - a) *Make sure that it has been transformed by Jesus*
 - b) *If it has, then what comes out will be different*

B. Lead with Your Ears and Follow with Your Tongue

Jas 1:19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

1. I usually have a problem with this
2. I react too quickly
3. Spend more time listening and less time speaking

C. Bridle Your Tongue More Often – Ja 1:26

26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion [is] vain.

1. Radio stations have a delay and a dump button on the board
2. Someone who says something that should not go out over the air can be blocked
3. We don't have a dump button
 - a) *Once we say something – it cannot be taken back*
 - b) *Sometimes it is better to bite your tongue*

D. Refuse to Tear Others Down

1. We are accountable for the words that we speak
Mt 12:36 But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.
2. Don't let the devil use your mouth to cause problems
3. Someone said, "Sticks and stone may break my bones, but words will never hurt me."
 - a) *They couldn't have been more wrong.*
 - b) *Broken bones heal much quicker than wounds left by an uncontrolled tongue*

E. Surrender Your Tongue

1. No one can tame his tongue
2. Why not just surrender your tongue?
 - a) *Turn over control of your tongue to the Lord*
 - b) *Say only what He would have you say*
3. Before you talk T-H-I-N-K
 - a) *Is it True?*
 - b) *Is it Helpful?*
 - c) *Is it Inspiring?*
 - d) *Is it Necessary?*
 - e) *Is it Kind?*

In 1980, Lee Atwater, a political campaign manager, inflicted terrible pain with his words. His staff learned that an opposing congressional candidate from South Carolina had once experienced severe depression and undergone electric shock therapy. When Atwater released the information to the press, it humiliated the candidate and cast doubt on his ability. In anguish, the man questioned Atwater's campaign ethics. Atwater responded by saying that he had no intention of responding to a man "hooked up to a jumper cable." Ten years later, Atwater was afflicted with an incurable brain tumor. He was confined to bed, attached to machines and tubes and wires. Before he died, he wrote the candidate a letter and asked to be forgiven

It strikes me that so many [too many] people wait until they are about to die to seek forgiveness for wrongs they have carried around their entire life and which have "gnawed" away at their conscience and their very soul. Dear reader I must ask you - Is there someone from whom you need to seek forgiveness? Or is there someone to whom you need to grant forgiveness, "canceling their debt" against you and thereby releasing yourself from the unyielding prison of resentment and bitterness, feelings that you have willfully chosen to keep "bottled" up inside your heart and mind for days, months or perhaps even years? If the Spirit prompts you, I pray you do not delay, for your sake and the sake of His Name. Amen). He saw how cruel and heartless his words had been.

Our words can be just as devastating. And it seems that it's our children or family or fellow believers whom we hurt the most. As believers in Christ, we have an obligation before God to evaluate the impact of our words. Idle, angry, hateful words can inflict great harm, for which we will be held accountable (Mt 12:36, 37).

On a windswept hill in an English country churchyard stands a drab, gray slate tombstone. The faint etchings read:
Beneath this stone a lump of clay, lies Arabella Young,
Who, on the 24th of May, began to hold her tongue.
Let's learn what this woman never did, to tame her tongue.

HBC# 142 - May 2011