The Power of the Tongue

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Date: 24 August 2025

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[0:00] So get your Bibles out this morning and turn to the book of James. We have been in the book of James the last couple of weeks and we are going to continue in the!

Practical day-to-day advice, challenges that it gives us that we face on a daily basis. James 1, we are going to start in verse 26 and if you found that I am going to ask if you would stand, if you are able, as we read God's word this morning.
James 1, verse 26 is where we are going to start and this is what it shares. If any among you seem to be religious and controls not his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is in vain.
And then turn to James 3 and we are going to read the verses that Joe mentioned. James 3, the first 12 verses says this, My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.
For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man and able to control the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths that they may obey us and we turn about their whole body.
[1:37] 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, wherever the governor lists.

Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindles. And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity.
So is the tongue among our members that it defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of nature and is set on fire of hell.
For every kind of beasts and of birds and of serpents and of things in the sea is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But the tongue can no man tame. It is an unruly evil full of deadly poison.
Therewith bless we God, even the Father, and therewith curse we men which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceeds blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.
[2:35] Does a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries, either a vine, figs? So can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

Let's bow our heads as we pray. Lord God, we thank you once again that we can come together in your house. We can come together as family and that we have the freedom to read your word.
But Lord, we also make a choice and that's whether to listen to your word. Whether to have hearts and minds that are open to your word. Whether to accept the challenges that you give us or whether to ignore them.
And Lord, this morning I pray that each one of us would make a conscious decision. To open our ears, our minds, our hearts to you this morning, Lord.
To open up ourselves to your word and just to have a desire. To live our lives according to what you tell us in your word. To thank you again for your presence in this place, Lord.
[3:31] Help us to have ears that are ready to listen. And in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask these things. Amen. You can be seated this morning.

So again, as we look at the book of James, it gives some very practical advice and talks about some very practical things. And as Joe shared, you know, the tongue is one of those things that this sermon is for who?
Everybody. Everybody. All of us. If you talk, this sermon is for you. How many of you have spoke so far today?
That involves most of you. And the words we speak, the things that we say, it's important, isn't it?
And you know, as we look in James, the first chapter, verse 26 that we read, you know, it's really a pretty powerful verse. If any man among you seems to be religious.

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[4:33] That word seems is an important part of that verse, isn't it? You know, we can put on an act. We can act like we're religious. We can come to church, we can wear a shirt and tie or do whatever.

We can come to Bible study. We can appear to be religious. We can appear to be sincere. But what does it say is an actual indicator of whether we really are sincere or not?
It says we can seem to be religious, but if we don't control, or your King James may say bridal, if we don't control our tongue, what are we doing?
It says we're deceiving who? Ourselves. We're deceiving ourselves. And our religion is, and this is a pretty powerful part, our religion is what?
Vain. That is how important controlling our speech, controlling what we say, that's how important it is. Now, is that an easy thing to do?
[5:34] You know, Scott was sharing with me yesterday and shared this morning a situation where he was driving. Was it easy to control your tongue? He says no.

How many of you can relate to that? Tammy, you're with me when I drive a lot. What would be my answer to that question?
I don't curse, but I don't always say the nicest things about people when I'm driving.
Someone cuts me off, someone does something that I think is stupid in my own mind. I don't say, oh, I hope they have a blessed day. God bless that person. I don't.
And these verses are reminding us just how important it is, what we do speak and what we do say with our tongues. But it also tells us the challenge of that. And that's what chapter 3 is really all about.
[6:35] In verse 2, it says, for in many things we offend all, but if any man offends not in word, the same is a perfect man. It says we're perfect if we don't offend anybody.

If we're able to control our tongue, it says we can control our whole body. You know why that is? Because the tongue is the most difficult part of our body to control, isn't it?
How many of you get upset and next thing you know you say something you regret? You say something and you think, boy, I wish I wouldn't have said that. How many of you have had that happen? Why is that?
It's because the tongue is hard to control, isn't it? It's sometimes very hard, and I'm going to put it bluntly, sometimes it's very hard for us to keep our mouths shut, isn't it? We have an opinion and we want to make sure somebody hears about it.
Controlling the tongue. And God's word here gives so many examples of that. It compares our tongues actually to three different things in this chapter that tell us and show us how powerful the tongue is.
[7:40] In verse 3, behold, we put a bit in the mouths of a horse that they may obey us. You know, I used to, Flat Rock Creek Festival in Paulding isn't a thing anymore, I think, but we used to once in a while go to the horse poles that they had there.

And I was just fascinated by these. And you know, you'd walk down along the fence and you'd stand next to one of those horses. And I'll be honest, for me, it was pretty intimidating because you know what size those horses were?
They were huge. I mean, they were this big around and just bulging with muscles. Their backs were this high. I mean, they made me feel very, very small. And you look at how powerful those horses were.
And yet, you know what? Those horses could be controlled. With what? A bit or a bridle in their mouth. And you could steer those horses.
Or when you're riding a horse, you didn't ride those, but you could steer them just with that little bit in their mouths. And it's talking about that's how strong the tongue is. You know, that little bit controls that whole horse.
[8:48] Really, compared to the size of your body, how big is your tongue? You should be able to answer this. Joe just told you. Four inches, roughly. That's not really that big compared to the rest of your body, is it?

But what's the most powerful part, really, of your body that can do the most damage or do the most good? Your tongue. So it compares it with a bit in a horse.
It goes on and it doesn't end the comparison there. In verse 4, behold also ships, which though they be so great, are driven of fierce winds, yet they are turned about with a very small helm.

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You know, on the big ships that used to sail with the big sails and all that, they had a little rudder in the back. I think it's called a rudder, right? That would steer the whole ship. You turn the wheel up on top and it would just...
And that little rudder would determine where that whole ship would go. That's how it works, right? Again, God's Word is comparing that little rudder to our tongue.
[9:53] A very small part of our body, and yet often it's what's in control. And then it gives a final comparison that is even more powerful.

Look in verse 6. The end of verse 5, actually. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindles. And the tongue is a fire.
It says the tongue's a fire. What do you know about fire? Think about fire. Why does it say the tongue's like a fire? It can be uncontrollable.
Zane? Okay, it brings both warmth or it can burn. It can be destructive or beneficial. What else? Yeah, talk about a tongue of flame. You know, some of us may have experienced... We were up in Michigan a couple... I don't know, a month ago or whatever, on vacation. And so we were a little further north than we are here.
[10:57] And up there on those days... And we've experienced some of it here. You know some of those smoky days that we've had this summer? And up in Michigan, it was even thicker. Why is the smoke in the air? To me, that's amazing.

That we have smoke in our air that we can actually see. And once in a while, we can smell it in Michigan. That was coming from so far away from a fire that was burning in a forest somewhere in Canada.
So that has to be a pretty massive fire, doesn't it? That's destroying thousands upon thousands of acres. How did that fire start? Now, they may not know for sure, but how does a fire start?
All it takes is a tiny little spark. It could be lightning. But it could also be somebody lit it or somebody didn't pay attention to a fire. But it starts in one little spot, doesn't it?
And from there, it just grows. And it consumes more and more to the point where... Why don't they just put the fires out in Canada?
[11:57] Why don't they just put it out? Why? Because they don't want to? Why? It's too big.

They don't put it out because they can't put it out. It is too strong and too powerful once it gets to that point. Folks, that's what the Bible is comparing our tongues to.
Look at what it says in verse 6. The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. So the tongue is among our members, that it defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of nature.
And it is set on fire of hell. That sounds pretty bad, doesn't it? But you think about it, the reality of that. That's how strong our tongue is.
And it's not just in James. We're going to look at a few other verses. It's not just in James that the Bible talks about our tongue. Because as Zane said, the thing with fire is it can be a good thing, can't it?
[13:01] Can it? What are some beneficial things of fire? Warmth. You can cook with it. You can cook food, absolutely. How many of you would want to eat that raw cow tongue?

Now, I wouldn't want to eat it cooked either. Don't get me wrong. But if I had to eat it, I would want it cooked, right? Beneficial things.
Fire can destroy, but it can also be beneficial. And the Bible talks a great deal about this. I want you to turn for a little bit. We're going to be back in James. But look in the book of Proverbs. Because in Proverbs, it talks about this.
Proverbs chapter 15. Proverbs 1. And I want you to think as we read these verses that this is what your tongue has the ability to do.
This is true for every one of us. Proverbs 15.1. A soft answer turns away wrath. What does that mean? What's a soft answer?
[14:05] A nice answer. A kind answer. A kind response. And what does it say that does? What's the result? Turns away wrath. Turns away anger.

It can take an angry situation. And it makes it better. Isn't that what it means? Does your tongue have the ability to do that? Everybody say yes, it does.
Your tongue has the ability to do that. But there is a flip side to that. Just like fire can be bad or good. It can be good. We can turn away wrath. We can make that situation better.
Or... But grievous words... What are grievous words? Harsh words. What do they do?

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Stir up anger. Stir up anger. So the tongue has the ability to stir things up, doesn't it? Does your tongue ever do that? Does your tongue ever stir things up?
[15:07] You ever get in an argument and you say something and it makes things worse? Nobody wants to admit that, do you? We've all been there though, haven't we? That is the power of the tongue.

And here we're just talking about, it can be an everyday conversation. Maybe it's an argument or a disagreement you're having with your spouse. You have a spouse. Do you ever have disagreements? Nobody wants to admit to any of these things.
I'll admit it. We have disagreements sometimes, don't we? She sometimes doesn't see things in the right way. I agree. I love you, dear.
See, what did my tongue just do? It stirred things up, didn't it? Again, and we can laugh about that, but that's the truth.
I mean, things we say can make things better or they can stir things up. And it's, you know, in situations like this, it's funny and whatever. But when we're in a disagreement, there's a reality to that. That I make a conscious decision that what I say, I can either make it better or I can say something that's going to stir things up.
[16:20] What choice am I making? It's a choice I make. What am I going to choose? Am I in control of my tongue or is it in control of me? Grievous words stir things up.

And it's not just in conversations one-on-one. You think about things anytime there's a group of people, even a church, a church body. Can you say things within a church that stir things up? Absolutely.
Can you say things within a family that stir things up? Nobody wants to answer any of these things, do we? Are the words that we use, do they calm things and make it better or do they stir things up?
But this isn't the end of it. Stay in Proverbs, but look in chapter 12. You only have to turn probably one page. Proverbs 12, verse 18. Proverbs 12, 18.
There is that speaks like the piercing of a sword, but the tongue of the wise is health.
[17:30] So now it's again talking about the tongue, but it's saying the tongue can either be like a sword that pierces or it can be something that heals, something that provides health.

How does your tongue pierce? Cuts like a knife? Has anybody ever said anything to you in your life that really feels like it just cut you, just hurts?
It's hurtful? It's a tongue. That's what it's talking about. Our tongues have the ability to hurt others, don't they? The things that we choose to say. We can hurt others if we so choose.
We have that power. And again, it's just that little tongue that's doing it. Or instead of hurting others, what can our tongue do? Heal. That's a pretty amazing thing that a tongue that we have can do either one of those.
It can either cut or it can heal. But again, the question comes down to what are we using it for? Which are we using it for? But it gets more extreme than that.
[18:38] Look in Proverbs 18. Again, just turn a couple pages probably. Proverbs 18 verse 21. Proverbs 18 verse 21.

Death and life are in the power of what? Tongue. And they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof. We've talked about it can stir up anger or it can make it better. It can cut or it can heal. But here we're talking about death and life itself, aren't we? It says death and life are in the power of the tongue.
How is that? What does that mean? Death and life are in the power of the tongue. You can build someone up or tear them down. That's absolutely true.
But I think it goes even deeper than that. Death and life are in the power of the tongue. Can you do something to encourage someone in their faith? Can you share Jesus Christ with someone?
[19:41] When you do that, what are you helping them to find? Life. Eternal life. In heaven. That's the power you have with your tongue.

You can share something with someone that can help them find eternal life. Isn't that a pretty amazing thing? Yeah. But are you also capable of being a discouragement to them in their spiritual life?
That is just how powerful our tongue is. That it can be the difference between life and death. Now look back in James again.

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I know we're jumping around. We're going to stay back in James for a minute. James chapter 3 verses 7 and 8. For every kind of beast and bird and serpent of things in the sea and things in the sea are tamed and have been tamed.
But the tongue can no man tame. It is an unruly evil full of deadly poison. Isn't that a cheery verse? And think about what that verse is really saying.
[20:48] Can you tame your tongue? What does it say? We're going by what the Bible says, not by what Pastor Chris says.

But the tongue can no man tame. What does that mean? Colton, say that again out loud. It's impossible.
Isn't that what it says? You cannot tame it. No man can tame it. You think you're better than any of the people that they're talking about here? It means all of us. None of us can tame our tongues.
Well, that's discouraging, isn't it? Isn't that discouraging? So where do we go from there? If we can't tame our tongues, should we just give up?
Well, I might as well holler at that driver beside me. I'm not going to tame my tongue, so I just might as well give up. Tammy, remember that. I can't tame it, so I'm just going to give up. You know, you can read that and kind of be left without hope there, can't you?
[21:53] Well, I can't tame my tongue. There's no point in even trying. You know, as hard as I try, sooner or later, I'm going to say something I regret. Isn't that the way it sometimes goes? I can say, oh, I'm not going to have any more disagreements with my wife, and when I do, I'm going to say something that makes it all better, and I'm not going to stir it up.

And that lasts how long? Until the next argument. Then you say something, I'm like, I shouldn't have said that. Folks, the Bible always gives us answers.
Do we understand that? The Bible will never leave us without hope, period. There is one more place I want you to look in the Bible.
This is the last place I'm going to have you turn, and it is the book of Psalms, chapter 141. Psalms 141. First three verses of Psalms 141.
And this is the answer. If you've thought, I can't control my tongue, I've tried to. I just keep saying things that just make things worse. Here's the answer. And David wrote here.
[23:02] Was David a perfect man? No, he was a long way from it. But it does say he was a man after God's own heart. That there were some things David knew that had a lot of wisdom, and this is one of them.

Psalms 141, beginning in the first verse, David says this, Lord, I cry to you. Make haste to me. Give ear to my voice when I cry to you.
So what is David doing? He's crying out to God. He's talking to God. Let my prayer be set forth before you as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as evening sacrifice.
He's praying, isn't he? That's what he's doing. He's talking to God. And in verse 3 is what it's really all about, what we're talking about this morning. What in his prayer does he ask God for?
Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth. Keep the door of my lips. What does that mean? What is he asking God to do?
[24:05] Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth. A watch is like a guard, right? So he's saying, put a guard before my mouth. Is that to keep things out?

So what's it for? To keep things from the inside coming out, not from the outside coming in. Lord, set a guard before my mouth. Help me control what I say.
What comes out of this mouth of mine? Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth. Keep the door of my lips. So who is he putting in charge of his mouth?
God. There are some things, folks, that for man is impossible. Do you believe that?
Completely controlling our tongue, according to the Bible, is one of those things, because it says no man can tame it. It is one of those things that is impossible for us on our own to do.
[25:08] So no matter how much you may say, well, I'm going to control my tongue from now on. I'm not going to say things that stir things up. I'm going to talk nicer to my wife or my husband. Whatever the situation, no matter how much resolve you have that you're going to do better, if you're just relying on yourself to do it, what's going to happen?

You are going to fail. It is one of those things that is impossible for us to completely control our tongue. However, the Bible says with God, all things are possible.

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And that includes controlling our tongue. But we have to do what David did here. We have to be willing to say, Lord, I want you in control of my mouth, of what comes out of it.
Lord, help me. Give me strength. At times, to keep my mouth shut. Give me strength to know what to say and when to say it, and when not to say it.
That is something, folks, that needs to be a part of our prayer life, doesn't it? And we can be praying, Lord, help me to share things that build people up. Help me to share things like sharing Jesus with other people.
[26:18] Help me when I'm driving my car and someone cuts me off, not to call them an idiot. Any of the rest of you ever do that? I do always feel bad about that because if I do it, then I think, I hope I don't know that person.

I just called him an idiot. But what we need to be doing is going to God and asking Him for help.
It is one of the things, folks, we can't do on our own. We need to acknowledge that. And we need to say, Lord, help me control my tongue. I want you to be the one in charge of it, not me, because if I'm in charge of it, I'm going to mess it up.
So, Lord, I want you in charge of what I say. Give me that kind of wisdom. Lord, when I'm going to say something I'll regret, help me not to. But David was wise enough to ask God for help.
And, folks, I hope we follow that example. Because when we do, God will help us. Do you believe that? Amen. Amen. I believe it with all my heart.
[27:28] And God will set a guard before our mouth. And He will keep the door of our lips. So that the words that we share build people up. The words that we share share life with people and not death.

That they don't cut like a sword, but they heal. And, folks, I believe that's what God wants to see in each one of us. So this morning is not a complicated sermon. It's just about the words that you use. And I encourage you to just take it, give it to God. And ask Him to be in control of your mouth, not you. Let's pray. Lord God, I thank You for this morning.
And, Lord, You know the reality that as we go through this life, there are some things that are just very, very difficult for us to control. And one of those is our tongue. And I pray, Lord, that we would have the wisdom of David.
Lord, that we would just give it over to You. That we would understand that You need to be in control because for us it's not possible.
[28:26] That we will lose control of it. It's too strong. But, Lord, with You all things are possible. And, Lord, You can control it. So, Lord, we just pray that You would give us that desire.

Help us to make it a topic of our prayer to ask You to control our tongue. And let the things that come out of our mouth give life and build up. And we ask and pray these things in the name of Jesus.
Amen.

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