James 3:1-12

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 February 2020

Preacher: Bob Akroyd

[0:00] James' letter. Remember that James, the half-brother of Jesus, there are several James in the New Testament. There's James, son of Alphaeus, which we don't know much about. There's James, the brother of John, and he's early martyred in the book of Acts. You'll see that. The James here is obviously James, the half-brother of Jesus, who was a pillar of the early church. And James is a no-nonsense preacher. He just says it. In fact, much of James' letter requires very little preaching. It just requires obedience and response. James chapter 3 begins on this note. Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or 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. Likewise, 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 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. 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. It is a restless evil full of deadly poison.
With the tongue, we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives or a great vine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. Amen. And may God add his own blessing to this reading of his word. 1968, 1,375 sanitation and sewage workers failed to show up for work in Memphis, Tennessee. The vast majority of the workforce were African American. There were long-simmering disputes regarding pay and conditions, and enough was enough. So these workers didn't show up for work.
Garbage wasn't collected. A large city like Memphis, you can imagine after a few weeks, tons of garbage on the street. The city does its best to get its workers back to work, but doesn't address their concerns. On the 3rd of April, a speaker, a guest speaker, came into Memphis to speak to an audience of many of the strikers and their families. His name was Martin Luther King.
[3:06] His most famous speech, of course, we remember, was, I have a dream. That occurred over five years earlier. This speech was entitled, I have been to the mountaintop, and you often can remember those words.

At the end of the speech, I have been to the mountaintop. I have looked over and I've seen the promised land. This was April the 3rd, 1968. The reason why that date is significant is April the 4th, 1968.
In 1868, Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. But what struck me, listening to that sermon, it's not really a sermon, it's more of a speech, but it was a sermon, because as a preacher, generally whenever you speak as a preacher, it tends to be a sermon no matter what you call it. But he said this, he said, all we say to America is be true to what you said on paper. He said, somewhere I've read of freedom of assembly, and somewhere I've read of freedom of speech, and somewhere I've read of freedom of press, and somewhere I've read of the greatness of America is the greatness to protest for right. Be true to what you said on paper.
So you see, the United States has a constitution, and that constitution safeguards certain rights. Now, the city of Memphis was trying to circumvent those rights, and King is saying, look, it's on paper. Do what you say. Be true to what's on the paper.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-08 19:38:25

[4:28] Now, as a good preacher, he has good material. And as a good preacher, James has good material. He's saying to us tonight, be true to what you've said on paper.

Be true to what God has said about you, for you, to you. You see, James is saying, this is what it is, and this is what it looks like. This is what God has said, and this is what you are to do.
So as you're reading James, very little is required by way of preaching. But I think quite a lot is needed by way of exhortation, encouragement, challenge, and straightforward speaking, because that's exactly what James is doing.
Because as we look at the Bible, whether we're looking at James, or letters to the Romans, or Gospel of John, or Psalms of David, or books of Moses, we're told that all Scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
So if you're a Christian here tonight, James is saying, be true to what God has said on paper. Be true to what God has written, because everything that God has written is true, and everything that God has written is good.
[5:52] It's beneficial. And as we come to this subject, actually, James has two lessons that he wants to teach us. As we turn to James chapter 3, he has something to say to teachers, specifically.

And then he also has something to say to all believers, all Christians, generally. So if you're not yet a Christian tonight, in a sense, you're kind of coming in almost on a family discussion.
You know, sometimes you might have that awkward feeling where you're kind of in the middle of a discussion that you realize, I'm not part of this family, but something's taking place in my presence. And it can sometimes feel a little bit awkward, or even more likely more confusing, because you're not really sure what's going on.
And if you come into the Word of God at this particular point, you know, you might understand what James is saying, but it might seem to be a bit hard to grasp, or maybe a difficult entry point.
But just suffice it to say, that God's Word tends to do two things. God's Word tends to convict us that something is wrong. And then God's Word tends to show us that which is right.
[7:05] So if you're not yet a Christian, maybe James chapter 3 might say to you, something actually isn't right in my life, not to mention the lives of other people, but in my own life.

Because he's going to talk about speaking. And I think we can all be honest that our speech is not always the best. What we say and how we say it.
The words that we use, the tone of voice, the content of what we say, the implications of what we say, the motivation for what we say, and the outcome of what we say can be far from good, far from right, and far from helpful.
So if you're not a Christian, maybe a chapter like James chapter 3 is a bit disconcerting. And even though James doesn't say it, I would say that the message for any who are not yet following Jesus is to come to that point that James himself did at the very beginning.
Because at the very beginning of James' letter, just he says, James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Because that's the key. The key to understanding this book, James, the key to understanding this Bible is Jesus Christ.
[8:18] He is the one to whom this book points. And for those of us now who profess his name, we ask the question, how does Jesus want us to live? James answers that question very simply, very straightforwardly.

He says, first of all, I've got something to say to teachers. He says this, not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.
We 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.
So in those first two verses, we go from the specific, and then we're beginning to branch out into the general. But specific, and you know, for, I'm a teacher. I teach ETS, I teach theology, and there are other people here who teach.
There are other people here who have responsibilities, maybe parents to children or responsibilities Sunday school teachers to their class. And what Paul is saying, not Paul, James even, what James is saying is that the role of teacher is very important.
[9:27] You see, each of us has a responsibility to know what's right, to do what's right, to be consistent, to have a consistency of life, a consistency of faith. But you see, if the teacher gets it

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-08 19:38:25

wrong, that doesn't just affect that individual.

It affects everyone that that person is teaching. A great commentator on almost everything was Charles Spurgeon. Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher of the 19th century.
I read from Isaiah 45 as our call to worship. Now, on a snowy winter's day, Charles Spurgeon was a teenager. He stumbled into this church.
It wasn't his own church, but he heard that voice of God speaking powerfully, turn unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is none else. And from that point, his life was changed.
He heard the gospel and he responded to the gospel. But Spurgeon once said, if a pastor possesses a burden for evangelism, the people will get that burden. So, again, what you will find is that what a pastor or teacher is interested in, that will translate to the audience.
[10:36] But he went on to say, but if there is a mist in the pulpit, there will be a fog in the pew. Meaning if there's a lack of clarity or a confusion here, then most likely the message that comes from here to you will be even more perplexing, more confusing, less clear.

So, James is saying, if you teach, recognize that there's a higher standard for teachers. Because it's not just you. You have the ability to influence for good or for ill, depending on whether you are faithful to what's written in the book.
Spurgeon then went on to say, he said, in such a situation, the Holy Spirit will move them first by moving you. So, God is never limited by our own human folly, but he has a way of moving on those who are not faithful.
So, if you're a Christian teacher, take that responsibility seriously. If you're a Christian parent, if you teach Sunday school, if you're called to preach from the pulpit, take that seriously and say what God has said.
You don't need to be novel. You don't need to be creative. Just tell people what God has said and let God do the work. Because when God's word is proclaimed, God takes his word by his spirit and does his work.
[11:55] That's just the way it is. The opposite, of course, is true. That when it's your word and your truth and your perspective, it carries with it your power.

Now, if you think of it, the power of God, the word of God, the purpose and plan of God, or your plan, your purpose, your power, your wisdom, your word. So, teachers, take these words seriously if you're called to teach.
Because what you say matters. And that's true for all of us. What we say matters. Now, James has said already that if you're guilty of breaking even one part of God's law, you're kind of guilty of breaking all of it.
If you think of a big plate glass window, if a rock goes through that window, even a small rock, it's going to shatter the whole window. And that's kind of what the law is like.
If you can keep it, great. But you need to keep all of it at all times, in all ways, in what you say, in what you do, even in what you think.
[13:02] And in that regard, as we come to this speech, let's just remind ourselves of what James' half-brother had to say. Because James' half-brother had a lot to say about speech.

He had a lot to say about life. And he had a lot to say about what God's standard is. In Matthew chapter 5, the words of Jesus, you have heard that it was said to people long ago, do not murder. And anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. Okay, so far, so good. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.
Now, anger. Okay, now, murder is one thing. But anger seems to be a different matter altogether. Because anger is now speaking of a mindset.
Not just actually the work of a hand. And then he goes on to say, again, anyone who says to his brother, Raka, is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, you fool, will be in the danger of the fire of hell.
[14:08] Jesus said, I haven't come to abolish the law. He says, I've actually come to fulfill them. And he says that nothing will be taken away from the law. He says, I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished.

So if we want to understand what James is getting at, Jesus, the great preacher, says to us that the law of God is action, is word, and thought.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-08 19:38:25

That's the standard. It's not just what you do, but it's what you think. And it's not just what you think, it's what you say. And if you don't keep a standard perfectly, as James says back in James chapter 3, he says, we 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. So as a preacher, he's basically saying, if such a perfect person exists well and good, but we all stumble.
And we all stumble in this particular way. We say things that we shouldn't say. Now for this second part of this opening portion of James chapter 3, again, it's, there's not much comment is needed, because he's illustrating his point as he goes along.
[15:34] First of all, he says, let's look at the animals. Now I'm not involved in animal husbandry, but I get the point, what he's saying here, is that there's a horse, which is a big animal, and generally speaking, a horse is stronger than we are.

It can pull us or, you know, move us if it wanted to. But he said, what do we do? We can put small bits, small pieces of metal, into the mouths of horses to make them obey us.
And we can turn the whole animal. Now, verse 4 is an illustration I'm more familiar with, or 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.
My uncle was a sailor, and he would have large sailboats, maybe 25, 28 feet boats, you know, large sails. But it had just a small rudder that you move with your hand, this huge boat that you could never move yourself.
Just a small tiller. You push it this way, it moves that way, push it this way, it moves, you know, the other way. You have to realize that you have to do the opposite. If you want to go one way, you push it the other way. But the idea is this small rudder can move the direction of this boat, big boat.
[16:47] This small bit can move the horse in one direction or another. And the tongue, what we say and how we say it, is so powerful and can have such an impact for good or for ill.

So James is saying there's a standard that God requires, and it's a standard that we don't keep, which reminds us why we so greatly need James's half brother.
We need Jesus. We need Jesus to forgive us. And I'm sure if we're honest tonight, there are so many things that come to our mind when we can think to ourselves, if I could only have got those words back, if I could only unsay what I said, or if I could say them in the right tone of voice, because it's quite possible to say something correct and true and honest, and to say it in a tone of voice that completely destroys the effect.
So you think of the horse and the bit in its mouth. You think of the small rudder that can change the direction of a large boat. Likewise, 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. So what can we do with our tongue? We can boast. And boasts tend to begin with a personal pronoun.
[18:10] The first person, singular pronoun, I. I did, I can, I like, I want, I am. And we draw attention to ourselves.

Now, when we understand what God has done, we realize that there is absolutely no room left for boasting. When Paul was writing to the Corinthian church, Paul had some tough things to tell them, but he wanted to remind them first of the gospel.
He said in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 23, but we preach Christ crucified. That's the message. He said this has an effect of stumbling block for Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.
So you think of it, what an unusual message. It seems to alienate everybody. Half of the audience finds this a stumbling block. The other half finds it ridiculous. But what I want you to notice is the words that Paul says at the end of 1 Corinthians 1.
He says, What is our intention?
[19:36] What is our tendency? We boast. We brag. We draw attention to ourselves. Paul says, When you really understand what God has done, there's now no room for boasting.

Because God has chosen you and me, not because we're strong. And that would be something we would brag about. Not because we're wise. And that would be something we would boast about. Not because we are substantial or significant.
Because we could then say, Look at me. He says, No, quite the opposite. He chose you because you're weak. He chose you because you're foolish. He chose you because you were insignificant. Why?

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-08 19:38:25

So he could demonstrate his power. So he could demonstrate his wisdom. So he could demonstrate his ability to take the insignificant and make them substantial. So therefore, when it comes to credit, all the credit goes to him.
There's no boasting. So that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God. That is our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.
[20:37] Therefore, as it is written, let him who boasts, boast in the Lord. So the temptation we have, the inclination is to boast about ourselves.

James says, That's the problem of the tongue. We boast. We brag. We make big things of ourselves. When Paul says, Actually, it's God who's done the big thing.
Therefore, if you're going to boast, boast about him. Tell people about how great he is, not how great you are. Let people see what God has done in your life and how God has changed you from the inside out.
So this tongue has the ability, like a spark, to set on fire and to have a great impact for ill, not for good.
So first of all, we are to tame our tongue and not boast. Maybe as a test this week, think of how many times you highlight your strengths to other people.
[21:38] Think of how many times you begin a sentence with the word I so as to let others know what you've done, what you've achieved, what's special about you, and then ask yourself, Am I doing what Paul is telling me to do, boasting in the Lord, or am I doing what James is telling me not to do, boast about myself?

I think that's an unnerving test because I think you'll find, I think I'll find, that a lot of times we are talking about ourselves.
We are telling people how great we are when in fact the gospel should be our telling people how great Jesus is, how great he is in my life, not how great I am in his service.
So James goes on. He then again is using the common illustrations, all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, creatures of the sea, are being tamed and have been tamed by man.
If you have a pet, people have pet fish, you know, turtles, cats, dogs, birds, I mean, pigs, even seeing, you know, pet pigs.
[22:55] There's a lot of animals that people keep in their homes for one reason or another. So we just have that ability. We can domesticate certain animals and we can have them as pets. But Paul says, no man can tame the tongue, restless evil, full of deadly poison.

And then he says, here's the, here's the real problem. A few moments ago, we were singing. We were singing praise. And who were we singing praise to? We were singing praise to God.
Whether it's the Psalms of David or the hymns or the, you know, the choruses, whatever it is, we are not gathered to say, God, how great am I? We are saying, no, how great thou art.
So we sing it in our hymns. We pray. We don't pray to ourselves. And I hope that we don't pray like the, the Pharisee who said, God, let me tell you how good I am.
And let me tell you how bad he is. And God, let me just remind you that I'm much better than he is.
If you hadn't noticed that already, that's not how we pray. And that's not how we sing. But Paul says, or James says, I'm sorry.
[23:59] James says, what we tend to do is we tend to praise God. That's good. But then we tend to curse men. And he says, but men, we, men and women have been made in God's likeness.

We're image bearers. Now, this is a game changer. If you treat people, the people you meet, the difficult people you meet, the awkward people you meet, imagine that.
Imagine, imagine there's awkward, difficult people in church. And imagine you're engaging with them. Now, if you treat people as you think they deserve, this person's difficult, this person's demanding, this person is, you know, I mean, again, it's other people, of course, not us.
But if we do that, we're doing exactly what James is commanding us not to do. Because we're treating people not as they ought to be treated, certainly not as we would like to be treated, but we are making assessments and we are making wrong assessments.
Because what James is saying to us is every one of us here is an image bearer. We are representing God. We are bearing his image. Now, if you think that and believe that, and the Bible teaches it, that changes how you treat people.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-08 19:38:25

[25:17] It has to change how you treat people. Because I can't praise God in one moment in a hymn. I can't add my amen in a prayer the next moment, and then somehow be demeaning or degrading or, or awkward or difficult or hostile or critical to you, who bears the image of the God I just praised.

So people are image bearers. We've been made in God's likeness, fallen people. Remember, James is not talking about Adam and Eve. He's not talking about the garden.
He's not saying, oh, that's what we used to be like. No, no. He's saying, that's what we are. We are image bearers now. So if we praise God, great. But if we curse people, James says, that's like a, a fountain that brings forth salt water and fresh water.
It just doesn't happen. And if it did happen, it'd be no good for anything. Because the water would be mixed. You couldn't drink it. You couldn't make use of it. It'd be, it'd be useless. I came across a, a, as an excerpt from DL Moody.
DL Moody is one of my favorite characters in the history of the church. DL Moody was a physically big man. I mean, I'm quite tall. I think he was taller than I am, and he was much broader than I am.
[26:36] He had a big heart, but he found that he was often the subject of criticism. As a rule, if you do something, you'll always be criticized.

The best way never to be criticized is never to do anything. You'll never get criticism that way. But what, oftentimes Moody would get criticized for his evangelism. He often had mass rallies. He spoke to a hundred million people during his lifetime.
Didn't do too badly for somebody with a fourth grade education. Mr. Moody, I don't care for the way you do evangelism. I don't particularly care for the way I do evangelism myself.
But sir, do you do evangelism? No, I don't. Well, sir, it's clear that you don't like my way of doing evangelism. You raise some good points. Frankly, I sometimes do not like my way of doing evangelism either, but I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it at all.
And that critical spirit. And in one of his speeches, he put it this way. He said, there are many professed Christians who are all the time finding fault and criticizing. What James is saying here, praising God, cursing man.
[27:42] They criticize the preaching or the singing. The prayers will be either too long or too short, too loud or not loud enough. They will find fault with the reading of the word of God, or they will say it was not the right portion.

They'll criticize the preacher. I do not like his style. Too American, maybe. They will say, if you doubt what I say, listen to the people as they go out to the revival meeting or any other religious gathering. What do you think about the preacher, says one.
Well, I must confess I was disappointed. I did not like his manner. He was not graceful in his actions. Another will say he was not logical. I like logic. Or another, he did not preach enough about repentance.
There was too much repentance and no gospel, or it was all gospel and no repentance. He spoke a great deal about abortion, about justification, but he said nothing about sanctification.
If a man does not go right through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation in one sermon, they at once proceed to criticize and find fault. The fact is, say one of this class of people, the man did not touch my heart at all.
[28:42] Someone else will say he was all heart and no head. I like a man to preach to my intellect. Or he appeals too much to the will. He does not give enough prominence to the doctrine of election. Or again, there is no backbone in his preaching.

He does not lay sufficient stress on doctrine. Or he's not eloquent, and so on, and so on, and so on.
And Moody concluded, he said this, you may find hundreds of such fault finding among professed Christians, but all their criticism will not lead one solitary soul to Christ.
I've never preached a sermon yet that I could not pick to pieces and find fault with. I feel that Jesus Christ ought to have a far better representative than I am. But I've lived long enough to discover that there is nothing perfect in this world.
If you are to wait until you can find a perfect preacher, or a perfect meeting, I'm afraid you will have to wait till the millennium arrives. What we want is to be looking right up to him.
Let us be done with fault finding. When I hear people talk in the way I have described, I say to him, come and do better yourself. Step up here and try what you can do. My friends, it's so easy to find fault.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-08 19:38:25

[29:50] It takes neither brains nor heart. So if James is asking us to consider how often we say I, and draw attention to what we've done, I've done, you've done, he's now asking us to consider this question.

How often do we put others down? How often do we criticize? How often do we identify the fault? How often do we act as judge?
And again, ask yourself this week, how many times am I saying things that are critical? That, that push down rather than lift up.
There are many gifts of the spirit. This is one of those subjects that divide Christians. Because some Christians will talk about the miraculous gifts of the spirit. Do we still have gifts like prophecy and speaking in tongues?
But there's one gift of the spirit that is generally unused by most Christians. It's uncontroverted. There's no difficulty in explaining what is being said.
[30:56] But time and time again, this is one gift that the spirit gives that is largely unused, largely unopened. When Paul is saying in the Roman letter in chapter 12, he says, for the grace of God given me, I say to every one of you, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought.

That's the boasting theme. Isn't it interesting how James and Paul so often say the same things? They use different words, but they say the same truths. But rather think of yourself as sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.
Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not have all the same function. So in Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve.
If it is teaching, let him teach. If it is encouraging, let him encourage. If it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously. If it is leadership, let him govern diligently.
[32:04] If it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. There it is. The spiritual gift of encouragement. It's a gift that every single Christian can exercise, but I would suggest that very few do.

In that list, which is quite extensive, the list of criticism, or the gift of criticism, or the gift of fault finding is left out, because it's not a spiritual gift.
Quite the opposite. It's condemned as being inappropriate for the people of God. So whether it's the Apostle Paul in Romans, or whether it's James in James chapter 3, James says the tongue is powerful.
It's a powerful engine for good or for ill. You can boast and brag, or you can brag about God and the gospel. Who do you want attention to be given to?
Who do you want credit to be given to? You can praise God, and you can curse people. And James says that just doesn't fit. My brothers, this should not be. And when you think about it, of course it makes perfect sense.
[33:10] That the tongue is meant to praise God. But the tongue is also meant to encourage and build up the people of God. Why? We're made in God's image. Now that's true of every individual.

Not just Christians. Every individual is made in the image of God. And if you start tomorrow, and you say, God, God, I want to treat every single person I meet as someone who bears your likeness, as someone who bears your image, I guarantee you, if that's your prayer in the morning, that will shape what you say, that will shape how you say it, that will shape the words that you use, that will shape the tone of voice that you engage with, because you will now not be thinking, what does this person look like?
How does this person treat me? What are my feelings right now? No, because you're now governed by a different standard. This person is made in the image of God. And I would suggest that if we have that attitude within this fellowship, if we look upon each other as image bearers, but if we're fellow Christians, it's even greater.
Because not only do we have a shared image of God that each one of us bears, we are each indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We are each united to Jesus. So how much more should our words capture those truths?
Instead of cursing, blessing. Instead of tearing down, building up. Instead of criticizing, encouraging. Psychologists will say that it takes, for every negative comment that you hear, it takes five positive comments to overcome it.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-08 19:38:25

[34:53] Now you might dismiss modern psychology. But I've heard this statistic repeated by Christian counselors, but they say that the ratio is even higher. Christian counselors will say that for every negative thing you hear about yourself, it takes seven positives to overcome that.

Now this doesn't mean saying things that aren't true. Saying, Bob, you're sleek and slim and you look 25. Don't tell me that because it's not true.
You know, so using the tongue in this way is not about lying. But if you think of it, there are countless things that we could say to people identifying what God has done in their life, what God is doing in their life.
The qualities and characteristics that are worthy of praise rather than condemnation. The characteristics and qualities that are worthy of encouragement and thanksgiving. And you ask yourself, how often am I thankful?
How often am I encouraging? How often am I positive? Or how often am I thinking or saying negative, critical, condemning words? James says if you're a teacher, you've got an extra responsibility to use your tongue well and wisely.
[36:07] And no matter whether you teach or whether you're being taught, no matter whether you have a position of responsibility or not, if you are a follower of Jesus, people listen to what you say.

People listen to how you say it. People see Jesus in you. They either see a good representation of Jesus in you and hear a good representation of Jesus in you or not.
And you see, what we do here in an evening hour, what we do here in the morning, generally, let's be honest, it's quite easy. We're gathered together. We have a common faith.
We have a common outlook. You know, we have shared values. So having an hour's worship service is quite simple. We can praise God. We can add our amen. And we can, you know, read the words together and listen to the sermon.
But what you do out there, it's the vast majority of your week, the vast majority of your interactions. And most of the people that you encounter out there don't come here. So you now represent Jesus, for better or for worse.
[37:12] Go back to 1 Corinthians. God hasn't chosen you because you're eloquent, wise, and powerful. Quite the opposite. But what he wants you to demonstrate in how you say things, in what you say, in how you live, the quality and the character of the Christian is so essentially important.

We can list our faith on a, we can write down what we believe. We can add our amens to the Westminster Confession of Faith. We can say that we agree with every word of the Bible.
We can have a very strong, clear view of the gospel. But that is either confirmed or absolutely contradicted by what you say today as you leave this place.
By the conversations that you have tomorrow at work. By the way in which you speak to the people that you love. Are you commending the gospel or are you bringing the gospel into disrepute? James says, consider carefully how you speak, what you say, how you say it.
It's his teaching of a scriptural truth that goes, that runs right through scripture. Our words can build up, our words can encourage, our words can hearten or our words can destroy, our words can curse and our words can tear down.
[38:30] If we share a common savior, if you're a Christian here today, we share a common savior. We share the Holy Spirit who is at work within us. We look to the word of God and we acknowledge it as the word of God.

The quality of our testimony and the test of our Christian discipleship is often seen not in the faith that we ascribe to, as important as that is, but will be seen in the life that we live.
Do we commend our faith by how we live? And James is asking us tonight, do we commend our faith, do we commend the gospel in how we speak, in how we speak to others, how we treat others, and how we use this very powerful instrument called the tongue?
We can use it well and wisely. We can use it foolishly and dangerously. And the outcome of both are quite obvious. So may God give us wisdom to hear and to heed his word and to put these truths into practice.
Let's pray.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-10-08 19:38:25