

James 3:1-12

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[0:00] So, last week, none of the kids are in here, but we talked about in Luke 2, we heard that when John the Baptist was finally named and his father's tongue was suddenly loosed, it said that all who saw it, all who heard them laid them up in their hearts.

So, fear of them came upon their neighbors, and all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea. And all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, what then shall this child be? For the hand of the Lord is on him.

So, I want you to have that in your minds, laying things up in your heart. This morning, we heard about Mary, and after these shepherds came and told them about the angelic visit, so it's happened to other people, it's not just her and Joseph.

There's a whole heavenly host singing, and all these shepherds come running, sprinting, out of breath, and they're wanting to see the baby king. And it says, and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them, but Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her hearts.

Okay? So, there's a pondering, there's a treasuring up in the heart that I want to look at, and we'll get to this in James. Okay? But I got a passage from Luke 6, 43, that I also want to touch on before we get to that.

[1:30] So, James is going to be talking about the power of the tongue, both to build up and to tear down. So, there's tremendous power. And I want to hear what Jesus, how Jesus framed that as well.

So, Luke 6, 43, Jesus teaches, For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit.

For each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. And here's the thing I want to emphasize.

The good person, out of the good treasure of his heart, produces good. And the evil person, out of his evil treasure, produces evil.

For, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. So, there's a vital connection between what we've treasured up in our hearts and what comes out of our mouths.

[2:36] I don't want to talk about that this morning. There's a parallel passage in Matthew 12, verses 36 and 37. It kind of has that same passage, but he's talking to the scribes specifically in that passage.

And Pharisees. And he says, I tell you, on the day of judgment, people will give account for every careless word they speak. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

Okay? So, God really cares about words and how we speak to each other and what comes out of our mouths. He's not just concerned about the fruit. He's not just a fruit inspector, making sure that everybody's behaving.

He cares about what's inside, what's producing that fruit. What's the root on the inside? What's the treasure laid up? Out of that good, treasure comes forth good.

Out of that evil treasure that we've stored up, can come forth evil. So, I want to talk about that this morning. And that's what we have under view in James 3. So, last week, or maybe it was two weeks ago, that Seth preached.

[3:39] And he was talking about faith and works. And he was making the point that faith, it's invisible. James was making that point. You say you have faith?

Great. I'll show you my faith by my works. You show me your faith without your works. What does it even look like? Does it look like anything? Are we talking about a dead faith?

Or are we talking about a faith that actually works? Like a working faith? Or a dead faith? Or a demon faith? You've got all these different categories of faith that weren't faith at all. It didn't do anything.

It didn't work. And I think a lot of these guys might have even been wanting to preach. You know, they might have been wanting to take the reins, you know, of this new Jeebus movement that was happening.

And James has some cautions for them. And so in the same way that faith shows itself by its works, what is invisible makes itself visible, shows itself, works its way out from the inside, works its way out from the invisible to the visible.

[4:44] So what's that secret treasure of our heart, what we've laid up, the good treasure that we've stored up, that we've pondered on and laid up for ourselves, that also comes out the mouth, whether it be good or evil.

And James will have stuff to say about if there's a mixture there, too, and what happens when it's bitter water and sweet water coming from the same opening.

Like, what happens then? So, and I got one more proverb that I want to share just as a framing device as we look into this passage.

So Proverbs 18.1 says, Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits. So that's pretty important.

Let's read this passage through once. Let's read this passage through once, and then we'll go through it bit by bit. James 3.1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

[5:57] For we all stumble in many ways, and if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well.

Look at the ships. Look at the ships. Though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder, wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

[7:14] Does a spring pour forth from the same opening, both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs?

Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water. Okay. So, verse 1, we're talking about, Not many of you should presume or should become teachers, my brothers.

For you know that we who teach, he's putting himself in this category, we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. So, God's jealous that his people, and that those who represent him to his people, would have an inner consistency, and not have this divided heart that we see later in this chapter.

And there's something about the law of Genesis. Remember when we were going through Genesis 1, kept saying, and things produced after their kind.

Like, that's kind of a law of creation of nature. Like, God's created order. That things produce after their kind. And this works on the biogenesis scale.

[8:27] Like, we don't get clams from kittens, or, you know, it doesn't work that way. You know, the macroevolution that came from single-celled organisms, and that that somehow happened out of nowhere, doesn't hold a lot of water.

There's a lot of missing links. Things produce after their kind. Because God made it that way. And it's a law of his created order.

And it's not only a natural law in the physical world, but it happens in the family, too. It happens in hearts. It happens in relationships. It happens in leadership. So, louder.

Okay. Take a drink. So, the law of Genesis says that things produce after their kind.

That's why he's so invested in those who would presume to teach or to lead in the church, that they would have a single-hearted devotion, single-minded devotion. We talked about this in James 1.

[9:32] And the dangers of the double-minded man who's unstable in all his way. Literally, it meant two-souled. You know, like this totally divided self. And how dangerous and wicked and unnatural that is.

And he's wanting us to be one. He's wanting us to be singular. Single-hearted devotion. Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers. For you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man. Able also to bridle his whole body.

So, who is the perfect man? Which of us would raise our hand if I called for a show of perfect men who are able to bridle their tongue perfectly? Yeah, we need another's perfection.

We need the supply of God himself to work anything in us that's going to approach perfection. And it won't be until the other side that we reach it when we're fully known.

[10:40] We see him as he is. And know him even as we are fully known. Then we'll get that perfection. But until then, we wait on him who is perfect.

And we look to him to be that perfect speech. That perfect way of relating to our spouses or our roommates or our friends or our coworkers.

We need that help. And he does work in us to unify our hearts. To bring us into one person whom he created us to be.

So, if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man.

So, we've seen this word translated as perfect in James already three times. So, we saw it in verse 4 of chapter 1.

[11:40] And let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. So, there's a category of you being perfect. And the word that we brought out that time when I preached was telos or teleos.

And it was the seeing the end goal. Seeing at a distance what's way off. And seeing it as up real close. Like the telescope, you know. Seeing planets that are so far away.

That are so much bigger than you can even imagine. But seeing them as though they're very close.

So, it's making them seem closer to as big as they are.

And I think there's an element of that here as well. Let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Letting us see the end from where we are right now.

And then, where's the other one? Oh, verse 25 of chapter 1. But the one who looks into the perfect law of liberty and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets, but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

[12:52] And then it also shows up in chapter 2, verse 22. You see that faith was active along with his works. And faith was completed, or some translations say perfected, by his works.

So, it's this summing up, this maturing and arriving at the end for which one was created. So, it's something that's resonating with the nature that we were created for.

So, that's the idea of perfection in this context. I don't think he's talking about moral perfection as much. And so, anyone does not stumble in what he says.

He is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. So, bridling your whole body, what would that take?

Like, what, how much self-control would that take? Where would that self-control come from? So, self-control is a fruit of the Spirit.

[13:53] It's a fruit of the Holy Spirit. We don't have that without the Spirit. So, you can look at some Buddhist monk who maybe looks

tremendously disciplined, you know. But he doesn't have the Holy Spirit. So, that's going to come up, come out somewhere else.

And he's going to find himself worshipping demons. So, I feel like there's trade-offs, you know. Like, if you grow real strong in one discipline or seeming fruit, you know.

Like, it's going to, the sin's going to pop up somewhere else stronger. And you can't make real, lasting, sad, holistic fruit growing without the Holy Spirit.

It just doesn't work. You're going to miscarry somewhere along the way. Okay. So, this able to bridle our whole body requires the Holy Spirit to do it in us.

And that's one of the fruit that he does provide when he comes into a man to live in him. And it'll show itself in the way that we speak. So, the invisible will show itself visibly and audibly.

[15:00] The silent heart will make itself known through the mouth. And so, that's why it's a really helpful barometer to have the way that we speak. All right.

James 1.26. The man without the bridled tongue. Yeah. James 1.26 said, If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. So, we're seeing the discontinuity, the mismatch between somebody thinking that they're religious and not bridling their tongue, having no control over how they speak, and saying, this man's religion is useless.

He's deceiving himself, deceiving his own heart. And now we look at horses. So, we've talked about bridles for humans, for their tongues.

It says, If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. So, James has a few different pictures of what it looks like for small things to govern great things and add up to great things.

[16:18] Like, what is a minute made of? Seconds. Like, what is a second made of? Moments. And they all add up. Hours are made of minutes, you know.

Days are made of hours. Weeks are made of days, you know. Months. Decades. Lifetimes. And they're all made of moments. And these small things that we tend to think aren't that important. There's a little, the moments where we could be on our phone, or we could be listening to our kid, you know. Like, or could be paying attention to our wives. Or could be digging into the word, you know.

Like, there's moments make up a whole lifetime. And we tend to, when we think about it as only a moment, and not as the building block of who we are, it's easy to waste them.

It's easy not to, not to think about it and hold it as weighty. What I do right now. I'll get to it, you know. But, we have right now.

[17:20] And our whole life is made of right nows. And we only have control over right now. In a similar way, words make up your whole thought life.

Your whole world. Your whole world view. The way that you relate to everything. They're made up of small ideas. Small words. Small things. That we think are pretty insignificant.

And when you think of people's impressions. You know, like sometimes it's, it's little things. That make, give you the impression about what's really happening under the surface with somebody.

And lives are made up of what we say. And that's how we communicate what's on the inside. Out of the good, the good person out of the good treasure brings forth good.

And the evil person out of the evil treasure brings forth evil. So, yeah. We communicate what's on the inside when we, when we speak.

[18:21] And words have tremendous power. And they all add up. And even small things have inordinately outsized effects. So, if you think of things that have really landed on you and impacted you.

So, like, I remember John Piper, he talked about how it's not books that change your mind. It's often sentences, you know, or paragraphs. It's like little things, you know, can have just these totally outsized impacts.

And just in the same way, like, if we're a small word, like, you could, you could damage your whole testimony. You could, you know, disqualify yourself from ambassadorship for, for eternity, you know, with a wrongly placed word, you know, undisciplined way of relating to somebody in public.

You can, you can do tremendous damage with just small things. Small things make up big things. Namely, your whole life. Your whole character.

All right. So, we put bits in the mouths of horses so that they obey us. And we guide their whole bodies as well. And that whole bodies can possibly have a reference to the teaching and being judged with greater strictness.

[19:40] Because that's a way of steering whole body, body of Christ. So, like, that kind of raises the stakes on that, too. But horses back in the day would have been a technological advance over walking.

You know, they didn't have bicycles. They didn't have automobiles. They didn't have railroads. They didn't have anything. They had horses. And they had ships, which we'll get to. But to turn a horse, to rein it in and to take control over it and subject it to the will of the steersman, the one who's steering, the reinsman, was a feat.

Like, a lot of people didn't have that. There were a lot of cultures that didn't master the horse. And then the ones that did could just decimate in battle. Cavalry.

When that was a new invention, just made it a powerhouse. It was a force multiplier. Because of these small little pieces of metal that they put into the bits that they put into the mouths of horses. And they could steer them wherever the will of the pilot desired. And then look also at ships. Look at the ships also. Though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.

[21:04] So, yeah, this helmsman, the steersman, the captain, the governor of the ship, can turn the whole vessel and everybody aboard.

Like, that was a technological advance. Unparalleled. To unlock the seas. And they had big, I think, even like grain ships that they had back then.

Huge triremes, which couldn't have even been imagined, you know, centuries before. Look at the ships. Though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.

So also the tongue. So he's making the connection here now. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire.

And do you think it's for forests that God's really concerned? Or is he using that as a picture to show us something else? There's a quote that I like by Jack Handy.

[22:15] He said, it's sad that whole families can be torn apart by something as simple as a wild pack of dogs. It's a joke. But the idea of the, that we, we get to the end of that joke and we laugh.

Okay. You expect it to be something else. But a wild pack of dogs is even less scary than the way that a tongue can destroy whole families.

You know, like it has the power to destroy. And later we'll hear it called full of deadly poison set on fire by hell. You know, force of nature. And so also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things and have outsized impact.

Okay. Matthew 15, 11 talks about what comes out of a man's mouth. Okay. It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person.

This is Jesus speaking. But what comes out of the mouth that defiles a person. And then the disciples came to him and talked about how the Pharisees were offended at that saying.

[23:32] And then later he, because they saw his disciples eating grain without washing their hands, being ceremonially cleansed. And they were giving Jesus a hard time about it. And Jesus again doubles down.

He said, but what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart. And this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone. So Jesus is caring about the heart and what proceeds from the heart.

And that's why he cares about what comes out of a man's mouth. Because it's telegraphing what's inside. And there's a natural connection that just comes out.

And you might be able to keep it in polite company. You know, but if you got somebody that you're around all the time, it's going to come out, you know, with your roommate. It's going to come out with your wife or your husband.

[24:37] Like, if it's in there, it's going to come out. And it's a grace that it comes out so that we can see, oh, there's something poison inside. I need the Lord to deliver me from this body of death.

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire. And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.

So, that's a lot. That sounds kind of hopeless. What are we going to do? So, yeah.

How do we say it? No man can tame the tongue? Okay, how am I going to tame the tongue? Like, what are we going to do? It's a world of unrighteousness.

The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell itself. Wow.

[25:45] Who's going to deliver me from this body of death? But, thanks be to God. So, Romans 7, you know, Paul paints this just terrible picture of him wanting to do what he can't do, and he can't do what he wants to do.

And there's two things happening in himself, and he's at war against his own body that he lives in.

He says, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?

Then he says, ah, but thanks be to God through Christ Jesus. The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus sets us free from the law of sin and death. And so we look to him.

And it is hopeless without him. Like, there is no way of getting victory over your tongue without the Holy Spirit, without God's life himself.

And so that casts us on him. It's a good place to be cast. It's not hopeless when he's given his own son, when Christmas has happened.

[26:46] He sent himself into the world to redeem the world, to save his people from their sins, from their sins, which produce sinful tongues, which produce the arrows that we shoot and the poison that just pours.

He didn't leave us there. He came to rescue us. He came to save us. And so we look to him, and we are thankful this Christmas season. Okay. For every kind.

So you've got a couple more pictures here. He says, for every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no human being can tame the tongue.

It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. Okay. So he's talking about the nature of animals and the dominion that mankind was given over the animals means that we can tame them.

We can tame, what's Shamu? It's like a killer whale. We can tame killer whales to do tricks, to do, I mean, that's incredible.

[27:56] We can tame seals and walruses and all sorts of things, you know, but we can't tame the tongue. Like, we can subdue nature to our own will.

We can't even subdue our own nature to our own will. Like, we need help. We need the Lord to come and do this. And it's a huge problem, but we have a great solution.

We've got a great supply for our great need. No human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

With it, we bless our Lord and Father, and with it, we curse people who have been made in the likeness of God. Okay. This is unthinkable to James here.

He's got this picture of people blessing God. Oh, bless you, Lord. We love you, Lord. So good. And then turning around to his body that we can see.

[28:56] We're so good with this God who we can't see. We're sweet. Just me and Jesus. He's my homeboy. And then we look to who we actually can see, who we actually have to deal with.

We look at his body, and we got grumble. We got verses, you know. We slander them. We speak against them. We're sharp with them. We're not generous.

We're dismissive. We're not giving them the benefit of the doubt. There's just all these ways that we can sin against people with thoughts and words, you know.

And he's saying, man, this is not fitting. This is, these things ought not to be so. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.

From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?

[29:58] Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives or a grapevine produce figs? These are things that you see all the time. Like, it's never going to happen. Like, things produce after their kind. You got this evil poison pouring out of your mouth.

Like, check your spring. Check the spring. Check the treasure that you've stored up there. Yeah, these are just things that don't happen in nature, but they happen in us. Because we exist with divided natures. We exist with divided souls. You know, two souls. One, the good that I want to do.

And the good that I, evil that I don't want to do. You know, like, there's two things happening. And God came to make us one person. To unify us.

To bring us into his son. And there's no room for two people to be in Christ. He only takes, he makes you into his image. He conforms you and transforms you by the renewing of your mind.

[31:03] And that will have its effect on the way that you speak. And on the words that come out of your mouth. And it's a tremendous promise. So, these unthinkable.

I mean, like, think about a spring that has bitter water and sweet water. Like, does the amount of sweet water really matter? You know, in a poison well.

Like, oh, no, but I poured 40 gallons of fresh water in there. You know, it's clear. It appears to me. No, it doesn't matter. There's a dead raccoon in there. Like, it doesn't matter how much good you put in there.

Like, it's defiled. And so, like, this too-souled, too-divided will just doesn't work.

And it's, you don't get credit for the good that you put on, you know, in front of other people. When there's rot, you know, happening on the inside. And it's lashing out in secret.

[31:59] Even if it's just in your own head, you know. Like, some of us are really good. We can keep it rained away. And we're just, you know, seething, you know. And letting things, conversations happen in our own minds, you know.

And letting people have it in our own imagination. Like, that's just as poisonous. And it's going to poison you. So, does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?

It doesn't. And even if there were two sources, you know, like the bitter water would contaminate the sweet. And neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

That very last verse. Okay. So, that's a lot of bad news. But there's good news in the bad news. He doesn't leave us there.

He didn't leave us to our own supply. And he actually doesn't even expect us. Though he does require us to be perfect. He doesn't expect us to be perfect. He's not sitting up there, like, offended that Michael didn't live up to perfection today.

[33:03] Like, it's not. He knows our frame. But he does require us to be perfect. So, we have a problem. But he's provided the solution to that problem in his son that he sent to earth to live the perfect life that Adam could never live.

That Carrie could never live. That none of us could ever live. But that we are required to live. And so, what do we do? We look to him. We cast ourselves on him.

We say, Lord Jesus, you live your perfect life in me. I need you. I don't want to. I can't stand on my own two feet. I can't even do it.

But I need you. I need you. I need to be in you. Would you give me your righteousness? Would you let your perfect record be accounted to my account as I look to you in faith?

Would you help me? I believe. Help my unbelief. Would you save me? And so, I mean, the tongue is a hard thing. It's an unruly evil full of deadly poison.

[34:09] But he's given us requirements. And this should cast us on him. Say, Lord, I need you. Whatever I've been saved from, if you haven't been saved from this, you need to get saved from this.

Ask him to save you. He's willing. He paid for it. He paid for your speech. He paid for the way that you speak. And he paid for that treasure to not be evil.

So, ask him to give me a heart transplant. I want a good treasure out of which I can draw forth good. I don't want this divided, double-minded, two-souled division reality in my heart.

I want to be single-hearted. I want to be singly devoted to you, Lord. I need your help. He is ready and willing to provide that, to give that to you. And he paid for it. Paid for it with his own precious blood that all who look to him could have it for their own.