

The Smallest But Largest Troublemaker

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[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. Make sure if you'd like to learn more about the church, you go to our website, FCCGreensburg.com.

You can also see our messages on our FCC Greensburg Facebook page. But we're so thankful that you've tuned in to hear this radio message today. And we just pray that as we get into the word, that most importantly, this word of God will get into us.

And it will change our hearts and transform every single thing about us and how we live. Well, hey, welcome here to the first week of a series called Not a Series.

And while we're having some fun with this, what we're going to do for the rest of July is we're just going to have a random series of messages from our pastors that the Lord has laid some things on our hearts that we feel we need to preach.

And while the original plan was for me to preach this whole month, like the whole month, I'm not going to physically be able to do that the last couple Sundays of the month. Because apparently when the dentist tells you that when you're 20 that you need to have your wisdom teeth cut out, you probably shouldn't wait until you're almost 40.

[1 : 21] And they're impacted pretty bad apparently. And so they're anticipating my recovery time being a little more lengthy than normal wisdom teeth. And they recommended I just don't preach for a couple Sundays.

So you'll get to hear later this month from Pastor Steve and Mitch and maybe even about some mission trips that some of the ladies here in the church have gone on here recently.

But I want to start off this message by taking you back to 1961 to an R&B singer named Brooke Benton. He redid this old Southern folk song that climbed all the way up to number two on the charts.

And it went something like this. And I promise I'm just going to read it and not sing it. He said, let me tell you a story about a boll weevil. Now some of you may not know, but a boll weevil is an insect and he's found mostly where the cotton grows.

Now where he comes from, hmm, nobody really knows. But this is the way the story goes. The farmer said to the boll weevil, I see you're on the square. Boll weevil said to the farmer, say, yep, my whole family's here.

[2 : 25] The farmer said to the boll weevil, say, why'd you pick my farm? The weevil just laughed at the farmer and said, we ain't going to do you much harm. The boll weevil spotted a lightning bug.

He said, hey, I'd like to make a trade with you. But you see, if I was a lightning bug, I'd search the whole night through. And the boll weevil called the farmer and he said, you better sell all your old machines.

Because when I'm through with your cotton, you can't even buy gasoline. Now I'm going to stop right there because what the farmer says back isn't very nice. But go ahead and just think about this question.

Have you ever heard of this tiny little bug called a boll weevil? Well, this little thing will get no longer than a half of an inch. It's that small.

But this bug, when it comes with its family members, has the potential to wipe out an entire cotton field. In fact, in the early 1900s, this bug came up from Mexico. By 1920 had infested so many fields, cotton fields in the south that cost farmers millions and millions of dollars.

[3 : 32] Some even lost their farms and their livelihood. Everything they had because of this half inch bug. And so there wasn't too many words that struck fear in the heart of, say, a Mississippi farmer like the words boll weevil.

And over time, it kind of became like a curse word. So back in the 1930s, there wasn't anything worse that you could call a person in the south than to call them a boll weevil.

In fact, if you called someone those words, you better be ready to fight because those were what we call fighting words. This tiny little bug caused that much devastation.

Now, I tell you all that about the boll weevil to say that its devastation doesn't even begin to compare to what James talks about here in James chapter 3.

See, he's talking about spiritual maturity. Those things that are destructive to a healthy and God-honoring follower of Jesus and even to the church. He's talking about what's been called the world's smallest but largest troublemaker.

[4 : 36] He's talking about the tongue. The tongue. This little instrument right here in your mouth that on average is four and a quarter inches long. And yet this little instrument has started wars, caused divorces, scarred children for life, murdered characters, even damaged, stifled, and destroyed growing godly churches.

Now, I have to tell you from what I've learned about James from reading this book, I think I would have really liked this guy. I like how down to earth he is, just how blunt and to the point he is.

See, although it's clear that James, who was one of the main leaders in the church, that guys like Peter and Paul would have probably answered to actually. He loves people and he believes in the grace of God with all of his heart.

But James cares so much about the big C church that he's willing to deal with things, to keep things, to keep Satan from getting a foot in the door. He's going to not let these kind of things run rampant in the church.

See, sometimes we just want to talk about those big two or three taboo sins in our culture, those hot button sins that we love to say, oh, well, we don't do that, so we must be fine while we do all these other things, right?

[5 : 52] And there's no question that God's word has plenty to say on those hot button topics. And we believe and we follow what God's word teaches, whether it's popular or not. But James says that there's a problem that the church just doesn't talk about enough that can cause just as much destruction, if not more.

And it's the words that come out of your and my mouth. Now, I'm just going to be 100% real with you here and say that this is one area that I've struggled with my whole life.

I still do. I too have had foot in mouth syndrome way too many times. I have a size 12 mouth sometimes. And I have a feeling that you've struggled with this too, whether it's gossip or slander or cussing or lying or boasting or skewing or manipulating the facts to bring someone over to your side.

And so the goal of today is to humbly bow our hearts before the word of God. The word of God is our mirror that we look into and to let it have its perfect work so that our lives can be molded more and more into the image of our Savior.

We want to glorify Jesus in everything we do, everything we say, everything we even think. Now, one unique thing about the Hebrew and Greek languages is that their words paint pictures that are powerful, so much better than the English language does.

[7 : 19] And if you want to turn with me here to James chapter 3, kind of towards the back of your Bible, James chapter 3, just a few books before the last book, Revelation.

Turn to James chapter 3 with me. And this passage has six different pictures, powerful word pictures that describe the consequences when ugly things come out of our mouth.

And today I want to group them into three different take-homes, take-home points for us to chew on that will help us to understand just how important the words truly are that we speak.

So, first, I want you to see that our tongues have the power to direct. The power to direct. Now, if you would ever like to see our outline that we have for our messages, you can go to the YouVersion, Y-O-U-Version Bible app, and you can click on the menu, go to the events, go to First Christian Church of Greensburg, and then you can see our outline.

But the first thing I want you to see today is the power to direct. I once heard of a pastor tell a member of his church who was a notorious gossip. She would hang on the phone most of the day, sharing just tidbits with any and all who would dare to listen.

[8 : 39] Well, one day she came up to the pastor and she said, Pastor, you know, I'm so sorry. The Lord has been working on my heart, and he's convicted me of my sin of gossip. My tongue is getting me into trouble.

It's getting other people into trouble. Now, you got to listen here. The pastor didn't seem to think that she was all that sincere because they had been through this song and dance many times before. So, he said to her, Well, we've had this conversation more than once, so tell me, what do you plan to do this time to change the problem?

And that's when the lady said, Well, I want to put my tongue on the altar. And the pastor very calmly said, Sister, there isn't an altar big enough for your tongue. See, the Bible makes it very clear that our words truly do have the power to direct.

Now, they can direct and lead in the right direction, or they can take us down the wrong. So, turn with me here. You should have your Bibles open to James 3. James 3.

And let's start in the first verse here. Verse 1. James says, Okay, so first thing, we see that James kind of starts off here by talking to leaders, especially teachers within the body of Christ.

[10 : 18] And probably the reason why is because, and this is a little scary to those of us who teach, but God holds leadership, and especially teachers, to a higher standard. That old saying really is true.

As the leadership goes, so does the church. And his quick little reminder to those God has called into leadership is simple. He says, I know you're not perfect. I know you're never going to be perfect.

I don't expect you to be perfect, but I do expect you to seek after my heart with everything you are. And as a leader, your words that come out of your mouth have the potential to lead either in the right direction, or even in the wrong.

See, Proverbs 18.21 Proverbs 18.21 echoes the same thought. The tongue can bring death or life. Those who love to talk will reap the consequences.

You know, as leaders, we can't talk one way in church and then walk out the doors and talk a completely different way. That's called being a hypocrite. And that's why so many people won't step foot in our churches.

[11 : 19] We can't have one set of ethics at a leadership meeting and a whole nother set with our buddies or in the business world or with our family. And James gives us, not only to leaders, but to all of us, two word pictures here to show that even though our tongues are small instruments, if they aren't properly controlled, they can cause a world of damage.

The first picture is a bit that is used to control a horse. The bit, as you probably know, is just a small metal piece that's controlled by the rider. And depending on how she pulls it, the horse will go different directions, even stop, even go.

So we have this massive animal that could throw any of us around like a rag doll and yet she's controlled by this tiny little bit. And then second, he compares the tongue to another instrument that these first century Jews understood very well, a rudder on a ship.

And as you guys know, the rudder is so small in comparison to the rest of the ship, but at the guidance of the person steering it, it turns and directs where the whole ship is going to go.

And the message that James is trying to get across in a very practical way is, hey church, you have the potential to direct and lead a lot of lives towards Jesus Christ by the words that come out of your mouth.

[12 : 40] But in order to do that, you must keep a tight grip on the reins. You must keep hold of the steering wheel of that boat because if you don't, you have the potential to cause a lot of destruction.

And many churches have been torn to pieces by leaders and church members who either didn't care or who just didn't realize the power behind their words. So the tongue has the power to direct for good and for bad.

And then second, our tongue has the power to destroy. An anonymous quote says it like this, the tongue is but four inches long, yet it can kill a man six feet high.

Now watch how James actually puts this, starting here in James 3 verse 5. He says, 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 body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

[13 : 48] All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

Now, did you know that a small spark started a fire in the O'Leary barn at 830 in the evening on October the 8th of 1871? And because of that small spark, and because it spread, over 100,000 people were left homeless.

17,500 buildings were destroyed. 300 people died. This fire, known as the Great Chicago Fire, cost the city. And you got to realize, this is 1870s money, not today.

It'd be billions of dollars today, but it cost the city over \$400 million in 1870. And James uses this word picture of a fire to describe the damage that a word spoken in ungodly anger or in slander can cause.

Because by the time the blaze gets going, man, it consumes everything in its path and causes a massive amount of damage, not only to individuals, but also to God's precious bride, his church.

[15 : 01] See, Warren Wearsby put it this way. He said, fiery words can defile a home, a Sunday school class, a church. The only thing that can wash away that defilement is the blood of Jesus Christ.

So, I got to thinking about this, and I thought, you know, whoever made up the song, sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. You know, that's a fun song to sing, but I'll tell you what, that song is dead, dead wrong.

Because all of us have been hurt by words that have been said, maybe falsely about us, or just something said harsh about us, and there's no question, words can deeply, deeply, deeply wound you and me.

But you know, if you are truly standing up for the word of God, and you are striving to fulfill God's purpose he has over your life and for the church, doing all of this in love, there are always going to be words spoken against you, right?

There always are. And the reason I know that is because Jesus even had people say things that weren't true about him. In Matthew 11, his enemies called him a glutton and a drunkard all because he was willing to eat with the outcast.

[16 : 12] When he performed miracles, they said he was teaming up with Satan. Even on the cross, as he was shedding his blood, even for those people mocking him, they couldn't help but to taunt and criticize him to his face one last time.

James says, Church, if we are going to truly be the body of Christ that God has called us to be as we seek spiritual maturity, then we must allow what comes out of our mouths to truly honor God.

And many times, it's even the words that don't come out of our mouths. Let me say it again because I need to hear it, okay? The words that I keep in my mouth that don't come out and cause me to slander or gossip or whatever.

See, Calvin Coolidge, our 30th president, said these simple but yet very true words. He said, I have never been hurt by anything I didn't say. Did you know that Adolf Hitler really became popular and worked his way into power after he released his book called Mein Kampf, which means my struggle or my battle?

And in this book, he shared his hatred for different groups and he convinced a whole lot of people to join him in destroying them. He painted such a picture that people who would have probably not done otherwise were convinced to follow him.

[17 : 33] And for every single word he wrote in that book, 125 lives were lost in World War II. So sad. Our tongues really can be like a spark that turns into a mass of fire that leaves behind it a wake of destruction.

James also uses the picture of wild animals that can be tamed but says the tongue cannot be tamed by man. It can only be tamed by God. But here's the great news.

When our tongues are sanctified, when they are surrendered to the lordship of Christ, pursuing holiness in him, they become even more powerful in spreading the truth and winning the lost and encouraging others.

So let's talk about our last take home today. Our tongues also have the power to delight. To delight. Now, look back at James chapter 3 with me.

And let's start in verse 9. Excuse me. James 3 verse 9. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father and with it we also curse human beings who have been made in God's likeness.

[18 : 39] Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. And then James says, My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both the fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives or grapevine bear figs?

Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. Aesop, the ancient storyteller, told this fable. He said, One time a donkey found a lion's skin. He tried it on, he strutted around, and he frightened many animals.

Soon a fox came along and the donkey tried to scare him too. But the fox, hearing the donkey's voice, said, Well, if you want to scare me, you'll have to disguise your bray. And the moral of this fable is that the clothes or the mask may disguise a fool, but his words will eventually give him away.

And here James closes out this passage with two more pictures that these Jewish believers would have completely understood. The second one he mentions is all about a fig tree and how a fig tree can't produce olives just like a grapevine can't produce figs.

And his intention is for the Christians he's writing to say, Well, duh. That's just common sense, man. Of course, that can't produce figs. That grapevine can't produce figs and figs can't produce a grapevine, right?

[19 : 53] But then the first word picture here he paints is about natural springs. Some produce fresh water. Some produce salt water. But it's impossible for one of these springs to produce both fresh and salt water.

And once again, his audience would have been like, Okay, that's common sense too. What are you getting at? And James' point is clear. You claim to know Jesus as your Savior. You say you've undergone a metamorphosis of change because of his amazing grace over your life.

You want to love his church and do nothing but the best for her. You have no problem coming on Sunday and singing worship songs. But the problem comes when you and I walk out the doors of a church and we curse those made in the very likeness of God.

Maybe we even do it in the doors. I don't know. But he says, Listen, that can't be true. That's not what a follower of Jesus who is seeking spiritual maturity does. And you know what?

If we're 100% honest, we've all done this and most of us probably still struggle with this in one way or another today. And as I was preparing this message, like I said earlier, God really convicted my heart that this is an area that I need to surrender to him, where I need to grow more.

[21 : 10] And to each of us, God is saying, I want you to be spiritually mature and not lacking anything. So clean up your words because you have the potential using this water analogy, you have the potential to be refreshing to those people that you come in contact with.

See Proverbs 10, 11, the first part of that verse says, The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life. And as believers, we have this amazing opportunity, both in the church and outside of the church, to be refreshing, to be encouraging with our words.

We can store up the word of God in our hearts and then we can let it flow out from us to impact those around us. We have the privilege of going out in this world and finding people who've been chewed up and spit out with ungodly words.

And we can share with them the love of Jesus Christ, that he came to this earth, that he gave his life so that we could be forgiven, so that we could be washed as white as snow, so that we could be made whole.

So let me close with this passage from Ephesians 4, 29. The Apostle Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says, Don't use foul or abusive language.

[22 : 20] Let everything you say be good and helpful so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. Now I want to tell you a story about a man named Johnny. He grew up in a big family where all the children were equally abused, both physically and verbally.

At 16, he had enough, and so he left. He went out on his own, but you know what? That lifestyle was all he knew, and it wasn't long before it crept back in. He was a ball of anger just trying to dull the pain of life, and alcohol was his drug of choice.

And then one day at school, a Christian teacher noticed this young man once again in the middle of a fight. He took him aside, and he said, You know what they tell me?

They tell me that you're going to end up in prison someday. But do you know what I think? I think you're misunderstood. I think you have a great big heart that's going to do some amazing things. I believe that you can and you will be successful in life.

And guess what? Those words spoke life into that hurting young man because he had never heard anything like that before. No one had ever believed in him like that before.

[23 : 31] And that teacher became a prophet. That boy changed. He grew into a man, and he went on to be a great husband, great father, and great follower of Jesus. All because one teacher spoke life into him.

Now think back over your days and the people God has put in your path to help you, to love you, to encourage you to be everything he's called you to be.

They could have probably pointed out a whole lot of faults in you. Maybe they did have to bring up some things to your attention because that could be real love when someone maybe sometimes has to step on your toes to get you to see something.

But mostly, they encouraged you. They taught you how much the Lord loves you. Just the amazing plans he has for your life. They probably even saw things in you that you didn't see in yourself.

And it really is true. The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life. So let me give you and me both this quick challenge. Let's use our tongues to bring life to others.

[24 : 37] Pray with me. Heavenly Father, we just praise you because you are so worthy of our praise. You are so good.

And I know this struggle with our tongue with the words that come out of our mouths is something that every one of us struggle with because it's hard. It's so easy to just let your mouth go.

It's so easy to gossip and slander and talk bad about someone who we just don't think have it all together or whatever. And yet, your word calls us to holiness in our speech as well.

Your word calls us to let everything that comes out of our mouth to glorify you and to build others up. And so, Father, I just pray that you will help us with this. That if there is a major issue in our hearts because our words flow from our hearts, so please first deal with our hearts and show us that we are saved by grace, why would we not want to show that to others?

And so, Father, show us how to get our words to be something that truly honor you. Holy Spirit, we just give you permission to have your way to speak your truth into our hearts so that our tongues will bless people instead of cursing them.

[25 : 54] And so, Father, thank you once again for speaking your words of life into our hearts and may we take them to heart and truly follow you with everything we are.

Take our hearts, Lord, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen and amen. Hey, let me give you this quick invitation. I don't know who's listening to this radio message today but I know that God is faithful.

I know that His word never comes back void and that God can take a broken vessel like me, like you, and He can use us to encourage and bring other people to a life-changing relationship with Christ that we can be that vehicle, that vessel that God uses, that broken vessel that He uses so that others can hear about the amazing love of Jesus.

So let me tell you what Jesus did for you. Jesus came into this earth in the most unexpected of ways as a fragile little baby. He grew and He lived a sinless, perfect life.

Do you realize how hard that is? Because you and I have failed many, many, many, many times over and yet Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life.

[27 : 07] He dealt with all the temptation, all the struggles you do and more and yet He lived a perfect, sinless life and God loved you so much that He looked down upon you and me in our sin and He sent Jesus to the cross for us because our sin causes us to be separated from God and that sin has to be paid for.

That's what justice looks like, right? Think about our culture. That's what justice looks like so our sin has to be paid for and so Jesus went to the cross with our sins on His shoulders and He gave His life to pay the price for our sins that if we would dare by faith follow Him then He could redeem us, wash us clean by His blood and give us life on this earth and life eternal.

He will not force you to follow Him. He gives you that choice. He gives you that free will and so if you're ready to say Jesus, I need you in my life, I'm ready to follow you then I want you to know He invites you.

His arms are open wide and He says, Child, I love you and I have a great purpose for your life and so if you would like to have a conversation about, hey, what does it look like for me to follow Jesus?

We would love to come alongside you. Once again, this is First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana. My name is Ray Sweet. I'm the lead pastor here and I would love to come alongside you just like some have done for me and so won't you give us a call in the office Monday through Thursday 8 to 430.

[28 : 41] You can call us at 812-663-8488 812-663-8488 or you can email me at ray at FCCGreensburg.com Hey, God bless you and I hope you have an amazing week.