

# Untameable Speech

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] in many ways no one does not stumble in what he says he is a perfect man able also to bribe on 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 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 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 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 well let me begin by presenting some imaginary scenarios to us this morning so first we meet sally sally is exhausted her oldest child has had a meltdown over his homeschool reading book again the baby won't stop crying the dinner's overcooked it looks and will probably taste like cardboard then sally's phone goes genuinely written down it's her husband texting her texting her texting her to say he'll be late back from work and that's the final straw sally loses her rag with her children gets them to bed with much arguing and false threats and then gives her husband the cold shoulder when he finally comes in pamela there's pamela pamela is meeting up with friends over a cuppa it's great to finally get a chance to catch up and hear how everyone's doing one friend has heard some gossip about someone they all know and it's so tempting to join in after all thinks pamela it's not doing any harm it's just fun chat pamela later the conversation turns to talk about the latest tv drama and how gorgeous that male actor was with his shirt off oh yes pamela agrees as they enjoy harmless talk he's very hot and then there's lynn lynn works her socks off in the office day in day out she gives it her all but her boss doesn't seem to notice her boss isn't really a people person and the team they all find him unpredictable unreasonable one day lynn competes a highly pressured deadline she can't wait to get out the office to celebrate but an email comes through from her boss telling her she's got to do a massive chunk of it before she leaves and lynn feels her inside just boiling over with anger she turns to her colleague on the neighbouring desk telling him how unfair her boss is her colleague agrees with her and lynn feels so much better for venting her frustrations these are imaginary scenarios made up but they all have something in common that i know resonates with me and perhaps with you also they are all christians who struggle to honour god in their daily speech

and i think their struggles are not uncommon i see my use of speech reflected in sally pamel and lynn i am reminded how speech is something that i do all the time and influences all my relationships and yet because of that my speech is something i often have little self-awareness of like a fish in a goldfish bowl that can't see the water it swims in i don't see or reflect upon the words and i'm speaking every day and that is something that james wants to wake us up to for as we saw last night in james 1 26 if anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but decease his heart this person's religion is worthless if anyone thinks they are living for god but do not control their speech they are deceiving themselves and they are showing their faith to be a sham not genuine you see james is writing to christians his brothers and sisters in christ he is writing to those who have heard the gospel and have been given new spiritual life by that very same gospel word and yet james needs to warn these christians to beware being double-minded and falling away from following jesus he warns them and us to beware being those who are in two minds to be those who say they want to live for god but in reality are living more like the world around them and so james particularly wants us to see today how vital our speech is to consistently living out our faith in christ and yet also how often our speech is the main area that reveals our double-mindedness we will see this dangerous double-mindedness this morning in two ways first by realizing that speech has positive power that's the first point on the handout verses one to five and second by being humbled by the evil of our speech that's verses five to twelve so firstly we are to realize that speech has positive power realize that speech has positive power have a look with me at verse one 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 james begins by giving us a warning about teaching not many christians should become teachers of god's word we should be slow to teach so james has in mind here the teaching of god's word within the church community this would be those who preach in responsibility but it would extend outward to others in other teaching roles so to small group bible study leaders and to sunday club teachers why should christians be slow to take on such responsibility because verse one teachers of god's word will be held to greater account when we stand before the lord on the last day christ has dealt with all our sins at the cross he alone is our savior but the bible also teaches that christians will give an account for their lives when christ returns and so being a teacher is a serious business because verse two all christians stumble in many ways we all struggle to live out our faith consistently we all of us stumble into sin and this includes in what we say to teach others teachers must speak so those who teach god's word are taking on a responsibility where they will struggle in the key area this is sobering isn't it

for those of us in teaching roles perhaps with quite a bit of experience and training i wonder do we forget this have we tendencies to self-reliance confidence in our own ability i know that i do these verses surely drive us don't they to our knees in prayerful dependence on god in all our teaching and for those of us perhaps considering teaching roles in the future james's words here should cause us to be humble and to be slow to take on teaching responsibility but james's main purpose for beginning with teachers is actually to show how important speech is for all of us how we must all realize the positive power of speech have a look at verse two 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 it's true here that james is showing that we stumble in what we say but he does so to actually show that our speech has potentially great positive power if a person never sinned in their words they would be perfect they would be mature godly and ultimately sinless why because they would be able to bridle their whole body that is they would be able to control their very selves their thoughts attitudes and behavior speech has positive power because speech can control the whole life and james gives us two illustrations to make his point so first bits in horses verse three if we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us we guide their whole bodies as well horses are large strong and powerful creatures i have a limited experience of horse riding but i do remember when i was on summer camp when i was 13 i was on a horse but it decided to rear up on its hind legs and i just held on for dear life it was terrifying it would only last a few seconds but i was pretty shaken up and yet humans have been able to control horses other humans than me just watch the equestrian events at any olympics and you can see riders direct their horses to do the most amazing things and how do they do that?

well they've got a small bit in the mouth of the horse that has great control and influence over the whole horse similarly james goes on small rudders control large ships so verse four 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 perhaps you've journeyed on a large ship before across the channel to france or belgium maybe all the cars are stored on the lower deck and well you go up and enjoy the top deck enjoy the view or perhaps if you're like me i do i need to sit down try and control the queasiness ships are large they're affected by strong weather and yet what directs the ship to its destination?

what keeps it on track? why the very small rudder that has the power to control the direction of the whole ship and so too the tongue though small has massive influence over our lives verse five so also the tongue is a small member yet it boasts of great things the tongue is physically a small part of our bodies yet the speech that comes from it can do great good both for ourselves and for those around us speech can control the whole life so when we persist in holding our tongue back from making sharp critical comments our thoughts and attitudes towards others become less critical too when we restrain from gossip don't we find that we become more focused on the things God has called us to be concerned for and when we speak encouraging and patient words to our children we see them flourish and grow slow and painful though that growth may be when we say sorry to someone we've hurt those words can bring healing to the relationship speech has positive power because godly speech is a key to the godly life so i hope this is an encouragement for those of us who are teachers of God's word to keep on teaching to keep praying for the children that we teach in Sunday Club and to keep longing to speak encouraging words to our growth group and for those of us who are children doesn't this encourage us to teach to keep teaching our children about Jesus to keep modelling those words of patience and forgiveness to our children it really is worth it and for all of us as Christians godly speech really has great positive power and influence and no doubt as James writes he is recalling the one man who alone has truly lived that consistent life his brother Jesus

[ 13 : 19 ] Jesus never stumbled in what he said Jesus was the perfect man who bridled his whole body his whole self and in the gospels we see the great power of godly speech in action for we see that Jesus spoke words of compassion and mercy Jesus spoke with patience and forbearance Jesus always spoke truth no matter what it cost him Jesus graciously spoke God's word of salvation to a rebellious lost world and so as we look at Jesus we truly can see the positive power of the tongue of speech as we look to Jesus we can give thanks that he is the one who has lived that perfect life for us we can give thanks too that Jesus is the one who has borne all our sinful speech upon himself on the cross for though there is great positive power in speech James goes on to humble us by showing us that our speech is double-minded and evil we are to be humbled by the evil of our speech have a look with me at verse 5 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 the reality is our tongue our speech is a world of unrighteousness unrighteous means sinful it means ugly dirty wicked horrible and ungodly it means anti-God against him opposed to him hating him and the tongue is a world of unrighteousness that is its evil is absolutely overflowing overwhelming constantly inventive in its evil and constantly opposed to God there is no part of our speech that is unaffected by our sin and so our tongue our speech is destructive it is a fire that causes great havoc from time to time in the news there will be tragic stories of uncontrollable fire

Australia often experiences bushfires in its dry winter seasons these fires start so very small perhaps caused by a drop cigarette or a campfire yet from such a small fire comes great destruction as a whole area of bush is set ablaze so too the tongue though small is a fire that stains the whole body and sets on fire the entire course of a person's life the way we speak can cause great destruction in our lives and it can set a destructive direction for the whole of our life that is ahead of us and what's more it is a destruction that reeks of hell that is it is hellish satanic and can ultimately lead a person to hell itself this is utterly shocking isn't it okay we think we put our hands up we recognise we slip up in what we say we lose our patience we say a sharp word we indulge in a little gossip we slightly adapt the truth in a situation we vent our frustrations and complain a little but surely it's not that bad surely we say more kind things than unkind surely we do pretty well at being polite to others and avoiding conflict surely we're just being a bit eorish no says James the tongue is a fire a world of unrighteousness left to ourselves our speech is naturally evil and anti-God and if we're not yet convinced

James goes on in his hard-hitting direct style to give us further evidence to prove that our speech is naturally destructive so firstly the tongue is an untamable poison verse 7 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 humans humans have been able to tame and control many animals over the years I wonder have you ever been to see birds of prey demonstrations it can be quite stunning these amazing eagles have such sharp claws majestic wings immense eyesight and they fly at such speed with such beauty and yet at these demonstrations these fearsome birds listen to and obey the instructions of their human keeper they have been tamed eagles can be tamed but no human being can tame and control their tongue we need to see that the tongue is far more dangerous and powerful than any wild creature you might come across on David Atom's blue planet the tongue is a restless evil that is it is unstable an unstable and uncontrollable force that will lash out at any moment and it is verse 8 full of deadly poison like a snake poised to strike to deceive and destroy our speech is a death-bearing poison that kills relationships we know this to be true don't we even from a young age as females we know the power and influence of speech even in the playground as girls we knew instinctively what cutting words we could say to each other and what power and satisfaction that could bring us as teenagers making our way through the trials of school life we know too well how comments could cut and bite us inside of us for far longer than any actual argument and as adults we know too well how words can put up barriers between spouses siblings parents and children colleagues friends and amongst church family the tongue is an untamable poison secondly the tongue is also evil because it is full of inconsistency it is double-minded verse 9 with it our tongue we bless our Lord and Father and with it we curse people who are made in the light of God from the same mouth come blessing and cursing my brothers these things ought not to be so even as Christians even as those who have the spirit our words are often inconsistent we speak words about how amazing

God is how precious Jesus is how great his word is and yet with the same mouth we curse people who are made in God's image this is utterly inconsistent and double-minded and it happens all the time so we might have a quiet time in the morning thanking God for Jesus then on the way into work someone cuts us up in the car or pushes past us on the bus as we're British we don't speak our curse out loud but our hearts burn in anger against the person that person who's made in God's image or at church on a Sunday we praise God together in song but then over coffee afterwards we avoid certain people because in our hearts we've made certain judgments about them this is utterly inconsistent with who we are in Christ and so James gives us a loving rebuke verse 10 my brothers and sisters these things ought not to be so and why is it that Christians should not indulge inconsistent and double-minded speech because finally

James also tells us that evil speech is an unnatural fruit for the Christian have a look with me at verse 11 does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water the obvious answer is no a spring of water cannot give out both fresh and salt water it would never happen in nature it's impossible because the salt water would contaminate the fresh water so too as a Christian we should not be inconsistent in our speech it's unnatural for those who have the Holy Spirit in them and so too if we prove to be inconsistent ultimately it's the ungodly words that will influence us the most and such persistent ongoing ungodliness in our speech would even cast doubt over the genuineness of our faith 4 verse 12 can a fig tree my brothers bear olives or a grapevine produce figs neither can a salt pond yield fresh water in the world of nature there is utter consistency fig trees can't bear olives grapevines cannot produce figs apple trees can't produce pears blackberry bushes can't produce strawberries and neither can a salt pond produce delicious life-giving water a salt pond will produce salty disgusting undrinkable life-denying water and so in the same way the fruit of our speech will reveal the godliness or ungodliness of our hearts within the way we speak day after day week after week year after year is a powerful pointer to whether we actually know

[ 23 : 18 ] Christ at all for bitter words reveal a bitter heart critical words reveal a critical spirit unloving words reveal a heart that does not love God or neighbour as Jesus himself said in Matthew 12 for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks the words we speak reflects our heart within so what does this all mean for us firstly this is surely massively humbling though speech can have great positive power the reality is our speech is naturally evil our speech is destructive it is an untamable poison and even as Christians our speech is so often double-minded and full of an inconsistency that dishonours our father who has saved us in our more honest moments we know this to be true don't we we know how easy and natural it is to use speech as a weapon we know how hard it is to hold back from that oh so satisfying comment and we look back at words we've spoken in the past and wish we could take them back well let us be humbled here let us admit that by ourselves we cannot change our speech we cannot produce the godly speech that is the mark of the

Christian life we cannot do it just as much as we cannot change our hearts within us and in omitting our sin let us take it to God let us confess to God that James is describing us describing our double-minded speech no excuses no circumstances pressures or other people that cause us to lash out instead let us say sorry to God for how we sinned against him in our speech and as we are humbled and come to God with us in we will find forgiveness and we will find hope because we'll be coming to the one who truly can tame the tongue we will become to the one who by the spirit will give us the power and wisdom we need to be godly in our hearts and in our speech God always humbles us for our good

God humbles us to reveal a loving truth we can't change ourselves but God can but that's for the next talk for now let us take a moment in the quiet to be humble before the Lord to acknowledge our sinful double minded speech and to thank God for Christ our Saviour who was the perfect man who always spoke words of God and peace Jesus who spoke gospel words that offer forgiveness for our sins through Christ alone Bo■■ because we feel ■■■■ to God to