

Sowing in Peace for a Harvest of Righteousness

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] Let's begin our worship then singing in Psalm 106. That's in the Scottish Psalter, page 378, to the tune Warwick. We're singing verses 1 to 5.

Give praise and thanks unto the Lord, for bountiful is he. His tender mercy doth endure unto eternity. God's mighty works who can express or show forth all his praise?

Blessed are they that judgment keep and justly do always. Psalm 106, verses 1 to 5. If you're able to stand, please stand to sing.

His tender mercy doth endure come to eternity.

God's mighty works who can express or show forth all his praise?

[1 : 27] Blessed are they that judgment keep and justly do always.

We thank God thee, Lord, with the love which thou to thine dost bear.

With thy salvation, O my God, to this safety from here.

God's mighty works who can express or show forth all his praise? For thy thy chosen goodness see, and in their joy rejoice, and may with thine inheritance cry a prayer with cheerful voice.

Let's call on the Lord now in prayer. Let's all join together and give our minds to prayer. Almighty and ever-gracious God, we do owe thanks to you once again for this privilege of being gathered in your holy presence.

[3 : 04] We pray that you would make us conscious that it is into your presence that we come whenever we gather together like we do now, or even individually when we come, to have our prayers addressed to you and our praise given to you.

We thank you, Lord, for every privilege attached to this time of worship. And we give thanks for every promise that is attached to it also, that you will not allow your word to return to you empty, but you will bless it and you will use it for the good of your people and for the glory of your great name.

We thank you, Lord, today that we come as a people who are not unfamiliar with the gospel. And we thank you, Lord, for the way that that familiarity with the gospel brings us more and more into a knowledge of those holy things that pertain to you and to your salvation.

And we give thanks, O Lord, for every occasion we have, that when we're able to gather up our thoughts and our voices and sing your praise and come to join together in minds that are united in prayer.

We thank you, Lord, tonight that you promise to meet with your people as they gather in your name. And we pray that as we are conscious, Lord, that the teaching of your word reminds us of how you dwell in your people.

[4 : 24] They dwell in their hearts. And in that sense, Lord, we know that they carry you even as they come together in this way, that each of your people carries your presence with them.

But we pray that we may know that presence in our experience, and that we may know it more than a mere theological truth, though it is so precious to us, that we may know, Lord, your blessing through your Holy Spirit being with us and blessing your word to us once again.

Lord, we thank you for every gift that you have given us and for all the variety of gifts represented here before us in this congregation. And for all the congregations of your people in the world today, we give thanks, Lord, for the variety and the sheer number of gifts that you have endowed them with.

And we pray that you would remind us that all the gifts you give us, whatever nature they be of, that they are for the furtherance of your cause, for your glory, that we are not to keep them selfishly to ourselves or simply enjoy them for ourselves personally alone.

Help us, Lord, to see that we need to use all the gifts that you have given us so that we may reach out into our community and show people around us the wonder of Christ, the worth of him in his grace, and the beauty of his holiness, the perfection of his being, the wonder of his salvation.

[5 : 49] We pray, Lord, tonight that your salvation will be further imparted to us in the work of your Spirit. Grant us, Lord, that we may know a further understanding of these things, that we may give ourselves and our minds once more to seek to understand and to read through and to come to dwell our minds upon those things that are of such importance.

We give thanks tonight for all the ways in which you have blessed us already as a congregation. Even today we have known your blessing in the gatherings of your people. We pray, O Lord, that your blessing will continue with us in all that we have set before us by way of our concerns and plans for this week.

Lord, while we know not what a day might bring forth, yet we give thanks for the ability you give us to look ahead and to seek to make provision for ourselves and for your cause. We pray for all the meetings that are already listed for us on this week.

We pray for the worship services. We pray that you would bless all, Lord, who come to attend on the midweek services. We pray that your blessing will accompany them as well as the Saturday meeting and all other meetings associated with your cause here in the congregation.

Bless the work amongst our young people. We thank you for them. We thank you for every household and every family that has a concern to have their children educated in the gospel and brought to know you and brought to follow you and brought to be for themselves a living witness to your grace and to your salvation.

[7 : 28] Lord, we ask, too, that you'd bless the meetings of Precept Scotland that are anticipated in the weeks to come. We thank you for Jonathan's organizing of it. We pray that you'd bless these meetings to young and to adults alike.

And we ask that your own blessing will follow them. We pray that you'd bless the camps as they prepare, Lord, in the near future to come once again to gather as camps throughout the country.

We thank you for the work of the church, the work of the church and those who give up their time so willingly, Lord, to give leadership at those camps. And we pray that once again, as these camps come to day by day, be prayed for and set before you, that they might once again be blessed, O Lord, and blessed to the young people especially who will come.

We ask that many will come and fill up the spaces and that the teaching received will remain with the young people and will be a means by your blessing of truly buttressing their life with your truth and coming to give to them that biblical wisdom which you are pleased to impart to all who come to trust in you.

Remember them and their families. Remember them, Lord, as we pray for each and every family with children in our midst. And we ask that you would bless them as they go about their family lives.

[8 : 57] We pray for them and pray for your protective care of them. We ask that you'd bless our community at this time. Bless us, Lord, in days when we know so much is done against the gospel, so many attempts are made to thwart the advance of the gospel.

Once again, Lord, we pray over these proposals against so-called conversion therapy. We pray that you'd bless your people so that we will come not only with prayer but also with the practice of responding to these proposals as we have opportunity.

We give thanks for that opportunity. And whatever doubts we may have in our minds about it, help us to use it. Help us to appeal, Lord, to those who are in authority over us that they may take note of what your people have to say in regard to the moral standing that your word sets out for us.

And help us especially to prize our freedom, not only the freedom that we have to promote the gospel, to preach the gospel, to witness to the gospel, to speak about the Lord, but the many other freedoms that have over many years, Lord, been obtained for us, sometimes at great cost.

freedom to speak, freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, all the things that ought to mark us, Lord, as a free society. But we thank you especially for the freedom with which Christ makes us free.

[10 : 23] And we pray that that will more and more be the experience of our people and of our nation, and that you would deliver us, Lord, from all alternatives that will suggest to people that this is a better way than that of the gospel and that which the Lord has provided for us.

Remember now, Lord, those of our number who are confined tonight to their homes, those especially who are ill, remember them, we pray. Remember all who are participating in the service online, not only locally, but in places throughout the world.

We thank you that that facility is being used and blessed. We thank you for the messages we receive from time to time from different parts that give us, Lord, to rejoice that the gospel as it goes forth in that way is of benefit to others in different parts of the world.

And so we pray that as we commend these to you, we ask that you'd bless those, Lord, tonight who have heavy hearts. Remember again those who mourn over the passing of loved ones. Remember those who are anxious over loved ones, seriously ill or terminally ill, we pray that you'd bless them.

We pray for those receiving treatment, those anticipating such, those who have gone through surgery, those who are anticipating such as well. We pray that you'd bless us, Lord, by providing us further with resources that are required for our well-being mentally and physically.

[11 : 52] And we give thanks, Lord, for all who have given of their lives to dedicate themselves to looking after the sick, looking after those who are in need of special care.

And we pray tonight for those who do need that special care, who through whatever incapacity have a life different from many others. And we pray for them and we pray for parents and loved ones who look after them.

And we pray that you'd bless the facilities that are available to us in order that these things, Lord, may come to give us further encouragement and strengthening.

Bless us then now, we pray and lead us into your word and help us in the singing of your praise. We ask it all, seeking the pardon and cleansing of all our sins away for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Now we're going to sing further to God's praise. Our next psalm is Psalm 119. This time it's in Sing Psalms on page 159.

[12 : 52] We'll sing the verses 33 to 40. The tune this time is rocking him. Teach me to follow your decrees and I will keep them to the end.

Give insight and I'll keep your law with all my heart to it attend. Lead me in your commandments path for there, O Lord, delight I find. Incline my heart towards your laws from selfish gain.

Preserve my mind. Verses 33 to 40 on page 159. Teach me to follow your decrees. Teach me to follow your decrees that I will give back to the end.

give insight and I'll be cured all with all my heart to it attend.

take me to find as you know. Lead me in them near your Themedogs for give ■ be light and hine and guide my heart To war still lost From selfish days Preserve thy might O turn my eyes On worthless things With life according To your word To be your servant

[15 : 06] In your flesh So that you may Be feared, O Lord Bring worth from me The ship I bear Your cross except In the uprightness O God, my Lord For your deeds Preserve me in your righteousness Let's now turn to read God's word And our reading tonight Is from the letter of James The letter of James

In chapter 3 And we can read through The whole chapter From the beginning That's on page 1216 Or thereabouts If you're using the Pew Bibles So James chapter 3 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 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

Who is wise and understanding among you By his good conduct let him show his works In the meekness of wisdom But if you have bitter jealousy And selfish ambition in your hearts Do not boast and be false to the truth This is not the wisdom that comes down from above But is earthly Unspiritual Demonic For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist There will be disorder And every vile practice But the wisdom from above Is first pure Then peaceable Gentle Open to reason Full of mercy and good fruits Impartial and sincere And a harvest of righteousness Is sown in peace By those who make peace Amen May again God be pleased to bless That portion of his word to us Once again we'll sing to God's praise And then turn back to this passage in James Singing this time in Psalm 71 Psalm 71 again in the Scottish Psalter

Page 312 We'll sing to the tune Colesville From verse 20 To 24 Thou Lord who great adversities And sore to me didst show Shalt quicken and bring me again From depths of earth below My greatness and my power Thou wilt increase and far extend On every side against all grief Thou wilt me comfort send A passage that wonderfully sets out God's ability To overcome those things In his providence Which cause us pain And anxiety and distress And even though these great adversities At times come to us The psalmist is here teaching us To place our trust in God But also to continue to praise him As the psalm finishes My tongue with just thy justice Shall proclaim continuing all day long For they confounded are and shamed That seek to do me wrong These verses then Thou Lord who great adversities

[20 : 14] O Lord who great adversities And sore to me didst show Shout with me wrong Shout with me wrong Shout with me wrong And bring me again From depths of earth below My greatness and my power Thou wilt increase and far extend On every side against all grief Thou wilt be come for send Thou wilt be come for send In my truth I also praise In my truth I also praise In my God with sottery Thou holy one Thou holy one All this triumph With hearts I sing to thee My soul which thou redeemest In my heart My soul which thou redeemest Unt witnesses In my heart Enj■■■■ Sob

Let us pray.

I'll turn with me now, please, to James chapter 3.

James chapter 3, and looking at the last verse of the chapter, a harvest of righteousness, is sown in peace by those who make peace.

[23 : 26] And I want to look at this verse in the context of the chapter as a whole, so we will be taking material from the whole chapter as it relates to this particular verse. Let me begin by reading to you a comment in one of the commentators on this book of James, Robert Johnston. This is what he says. James would have us take home this thought, that in proportion as a Christian advances towards complete government of the tongue, so he grows in spiritual maturity. We all know that nothing is generally esteemed to be a better evidence of the state of a man's heart than the habitual tone of his conversation. Very important words reminding us that our conversation betrays us as to what's in our heart. And tonight, as we're looking at this verse in the context of this chapter, we'll be conscious, I hope, by the end of the chapter that this is actually something that's very commonly referred to throughout the whole of Scripture. It's not simply an item dealt with by the likes of James, as we've seen before, a very practical letter, a very telling and cutting letter at times, in the way that it gives us to address issues that need to be attended to in our lives practically. But this actually is something that all the way through the Scripture you find given a different emphasis, but always set before us as an important topic. Our use of the tongue, by which it means our conversation, our use of words, the language we use, the words that we use.

What is in our heart is exposed by the words we use and how we use them, the kind of conversation we have and how we actually engage in that conversation. You remember Jesus himself saying in the Gospels, Acts of Mark chapter 7, where in his teaching there he spoke very clearly about how the things that defile the person are not the things that go into the person or into the body. They are actually the things that come out of the person that show what he's like inwardly or internally. Mark chapter 7, very well-known words, I'm sure, where you find at verse 20, the Lord saying, this is actually what actually defiles a man. Well, we can read from verse 18, now you still without understanding, do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him since it enters his heart, not his heart, but his stomach and is expelled? And he said, what comes out of a person is what defiles him.

For from within and out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. What a list! And that's not a complete list.

But the Lord who knew and knows our heart gave us this passage so that we would know that these are the evil things, he says, that come from within, and they are what defiles a person. And in a similar way, James is setting out for it in this passage, particularly to do with the use of language or words, these things that are indicative of what's in our hearts. Of course, as I said, going back over the Scripture takes you back right to the very beginning of things in Genesis, indeed in the Garden of Eden.

Because when the Lord came to question Adam as to what he had done in eating the fruit that God had forbidden him, his immediate reaction was when he said, who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the fruit that I have told you not to eat of it? And he immediately said, my wife gave me, the woman you gave me. Now, effectively, he was really blaming God. He didn't just say, my wife or this woman gave me, the woman you gave me. Look at how quickly the language of human beings was corrupted by the entrance of sin and our fallenness. And of course, the woman then, she placed the blame on the serpent, on Satan.

[27 : 57] You see, the blame game comes with the wrong use of words, with the misuse of language, with conversation that's not honoring to God, with lies, with cover-up, with a blame game that's just part of this whole package of where we actually fall short in our conversation as sinners. And isn't it interesting that in Isaiah chapter 6, when Isaiah had that wonderful, amazing, stunning vision and experience of God high and lifted up in the temple as he saw it in his vision there, his reaction was this, I am a man of unclean lips. Woe is me, for I have seen the Lord of hosts. I dwell among a people of unclean lips. Isn't it interesting that that was what he focused upon? That's what he came to confess, his language, his lips, the uncleanness of his mouth, and the uncleanness of the mouths of all who lived with him in that society. That's what the Lord actually brought to him by seeing this great vision. That was his first reaction, Lord, I'm unclean, and I'm unclean especially in the words of my mouth, in my language. And that's a telling statement, isn't it? And then when you go to, again, the New Testament, as I said, we're ranging all the way from the beginning of the Bible right through into the New Testament. You remember Romans chapter 3, where Paul is demonstrating there that there isn't a single person as a sinner who is righteous and can therefore claim the favor of God.

And he says, none is righteous. No, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside together. And so he goes on, and then he says, their throat is an open grave.

They use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Who's he talking about? He's talking about you and me. He's talking about the whole world.

He's talking about human beings, human society, human individuals, human together, humans together. You see, the quality of our conversation, isn't it, again, is something right throughout Scripture in line with the emphasis it gives to the wrong use of words. But the quality of your conversation distinguishes you as a Christian from the world. If there's one thing that really distinguishes you from that world that is so full of hatred and antipathy to God and the wrong use of conversation and language and bad language and denigrating insults and so on, it's that your language is in keeping with your heart as a Christian. It's one of the great distinguishing marks of a Christian that they can tell you're a Christian by the quality of your conversation, the quality of your words and how you use them. And that was really a mark of what set Jesus apart, wasn't it?

Remember in John chapter 7 that some officers were sent out by the Pharisees to try and bring him into captivity, to take him in for questioning, and they came back without him. And the Pharisees asked these officers, why have you not brought him? You remember their answer, no one spoke, no one ever spoke like this man. They were more or less saying, such is the quality and power and authority of his conversation, of his language, of his words. It just prohibited us from taking him into captivity.

[31 : 41] We couldn't take him. He was so different in his use of language. It's quite a thought, isn't it, that Jesus never thought a bad thought, never used a bad word, never in all his life on earth sinned in the use of words or in anything else, of course.

But when you think how easy it is for you and for me to let the sin that's in our hearts out by the language we use, by the thoughts we have that then are put into words, it's such an amazing but wonderful thing to realize that Jesus was always perfect in his speech and in his whole way of life.

So we see verse 18 here. Let me turn to the context here. That was by way of introduction. Let me just turn to the verse at the end of the chapter. And I'm taking the verse as something that really is a climax led into by the chapter as it unfolds.

The chapter is to do largely with the use of the tongue or the misuse of the tongue, really, the misuse of our words and of language, and the damage that's done by the wrong use of language, by injurious use of words. And it leads into this final verse. If we're going to sow a harvest of righteousness, then we have to take care that we're dealing with our conversation, that we're holding our tongues when we need to hold them, that we have purity of language as far as possible.

A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace, by those whose words are committed to peacemaking, as Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. So first of all, as we go through the chapter, you can see first of all the tongue, our use of language, is always influential. Verses 3 to 5.

[33 : 43] Our language, our tongue, is always influential. Not always influential in a good way, although it is, of course, possible, thankfully, to be influential in a good way with the use of your tongue, the use of your words that you use, your quality of conversation. But James is really focusing on the other side of things, because there must have been a problem amongst those that he was writing to, or at least he was setting out a standard for them that they needed to keep to. What he knew about this, we don't know. He doesn't say for sure, but he is saying, this is really how it should be with you.

And the tongue is always influential, and he uses three metaphors here that are really powerful illustrations. You find there in verse 2, a man also able to bridle his whole body, and that leads him into the illustrations. We put bits in the mouths of horses. Look at the ships, though they are large, yet they're guided by a very small rudder. And he moves thirdly to a little fire that begins and leads to the whole forest being set ablaze. Look at what he's saying there. Small and yet potential for really evil influence. Small and yet proportionally, it can do so much damage.

The wrong use of words, the wrong use of the tongue. Look at what he's saying there. He's saying if we put bits in the mouths of horses. Well, you know what a bit is, what's put in the mouth of a horse, that the rider then, through the reins, can actually pull and control the horse and get the horse to stop. Hopefully. I've never tried it, but that's how they control the horses, as you know, and change their direction. And if you look at the bit, the size of the bit, in proportion to the whole size of the horse, the bit is much, much smaller than the horse. And the horse itself, in many ways, you could say, is a far more powerful creature than that bit on its own. But when that bit in its mouth uses the influence that it has by the rider's use of it, it controls that whole horse, that whole powerful animal. And he's saying the same about the ships. The ships, although they're so large and driven by strong winds, yet they're guided by a very small rudder, wherever the will of the pilot directs. You see a massive big tanker, or some container ship, massive in size, and yet you think of small rudder in comparison actually steering that ship. And whoever is actually controlling the rudder, wherever it's controlled from these days, probably electronically, but it moves about in such a way that the whole ship can be steered according to the will of the person that's in charge of the direction of the ship. Small in size compared to the whole, but just look at the influence, look at the effect, look at what it does to that whole ship, even when it's driven by strong winds.

Yes, the same with a small campfire. We know how easy it is for a small campfire. You look at it, and it's nice. You have a nice evening out, perhaps, with a campfire. But if you're not very careful, that campfire can set the whole forest ablaze. That's why people need to be very careful when they're out actually lighting fires or having barbecues out in public places where there are trees or shrubs or bushes nearby. You need to make sure that it's kept from spreading and that it's out before you leave it. Because he's saying here, so also a great forest is set ablaze by such a small fire. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. And it goes on to speak about the tongue is small among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. Come to that in a minute, but just look at the point that we're making just now the smallness of it, the apparent innocuousness of it, the apparent innocuousness of our words. They don't seem to be really in any great danger of causing very much damage, but you know very well that it doesn't take many words to cause a great deal of damage. And you can't get them back. And when you put a forest on fire, it takes a lot of effort and a lot of resources to put it out.

And that's the same James is saying about our use of the tongue, our use of conversation, how we use our words, what words we choose, and how we present them, and how we go about setting out our thoughts and words. It has a capacity to be immensely destructive. And sadly, we all know that to our cost to some extent. I doubt if there's anyone here, myself included, that haven't at some point or other regretted saying things or saying things in a certain way. And you realize then, I really shouldn't have said that. Or I shouldn't have said it in that spirit. I shouldn't have said it in that way. And you can't take that back. The damage is done. You can repair it to some extent, but then it's sometimes too late. Well, he says, this is what it's like. This with the tongue as well.

[38 : 59] Now, you know that the sixth commandment is a commandment not to take human life. You shall not kill. You shall not murder, as it's put in some translations. You shall not kill. You shall not commit murder. We mustn't confine that, though it is certainly primarily about committing murder, taking a person's life. Nevertheless, as you go through the whole of Scripture, you can see the capacity of words to wound and even to kill reputations. All of that is part of what's envisaged by that commandment, you shall not kill. Slander, innuendo, using a rumor to actually just carry out further damage against somebody or against a family or against people in our society.

That's the same thing in that commandment as it is with these words of James. This little member, this little in proportion, these words, this conversation, this tongue we use to speak literally, it's very small compared to the damage that it can do, the capacity it has for creating havoc and real damage. And that happens, of course, in the church as well.

And you notice in verse 9 here that James is actually saying, with this tongue, 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, and so on. And he's saying, here is what we find ourselves as sinners confronted with, our own capacity to cause great damage by our misuse of the tongue.

You know what he's saying? He's saying, with it we bless our Lord and Father, with it we curse people. It's quite possible to go from a worship service, where we sing praise to God, where we preach the gospel, to go from that context to another context all too soon, where we're engaged in something destructive of a person's reputation, or personality, or relationships.

[41 : 25] We're really, it's telling how James is putting here, we curse people with the same tongue as we sing with, people who are made in the likeness of God.

That's not just Christians. Everybody's made in the likeness of God, created in the likeness of God. And you know, the telling thing about it is, it's not just something that's aimed at people themselves.

Why does he say, made in the likeness of God? Well, because our misuse of words is actually indirectly an assault on God himself. You remember Jesus saying to Paul, to Saul of Tarsus, on the way to create further havoc, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

Who was Paul persecuting? He was persecuting the church. He was destructive of the church of God, of the gospel, as far as he could. But Jesus said, why are you persecuting me?

You see, indirectly, his words and his actions were an assault upon Jesus himself. And that's the telling thing here. We actually assault the image of God. We assault God himself indirectly when we actually misuse our words and our language to wrong people.

[42 : 42] And character assassination and all of that stuff that you have so readily nowadays. He puts it here, the whole course of life in verse 6.

The tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness, set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the whole course of life. What does he mean by that, the whole course of life?

Well, it means certainly from our infancy through to the time that we leave this world, our tongue has to be controlled. Our tongue has the capacity to cause huge damage. Our words have to be carefully chosen and carefully used and carefully presented.

He's saying here really from the beginning to the end of life, the whole course of life. But I think it's more than that. It's the words that are indicative of something more than just a personal matter.

It's not just the whole extent of a person's life individually. The whole course of life means really pretty much all of human society is susceptible to being damaged by the wrong use of tongues, by the wrong use of language, by misuse of language.

[43 : 50] I mean, all you've got to look at and think about, just to take a primary example nowadays, is the use of social media. And if you're at all involved with social media, with the likes of X or Twitter, as it used to be called, it's a toxic environment.

It doesn't mean that Christians shouldn't be involved with it at all, because you can make points through it, briefly at least, in answering some of the stuff that comes up there. But it is so, so toxic, especially when you actually write something or put something up that's supportive of the gospel, supportive of gospel principles, gospel practices, the truth of God.

And when you counter the evil of the world, whether it's the evil of abortion, the evil of other things related to the ways of the world, you will soon find that you're in a toxic environment where words are used simply to try and destroy you and destroy your reputation, to annihilate you, to wound you, to deliberately just take it out on you.

That's the world we live in. That's the world as it's always been. But all of these present-day means and media are actually usable by those who want to use them in the wrong way to that end.

And sadly, as you well know, people, many young people sadly, have ended up really drastically taking their lives, committing suicide, because of the unending attack on social media by others who are bombarding them, not just with criticism, but with the nastiest of stuff.

[45 : 35] That's killing with words. That's annihilating people's reputation. That's attacking people for the sake sometimes of just attacking them.

And the Lord is saying to us here, The tongue with which we bless our Lord should never be used to curse people with, to bring destructive forces down on people's heads.

It has the capacity to cause great damage. It is always influential, even the whole force of life. And you see, not only that, but does it say that the whole course of life, it also says the tongue is a fire in itself, a world of unrighteousness, sustaining the whole body, setting on fire the whole course of life, and set on fire by hell.

It's the word Gehenna he used, which is hell, the literal sense of the word hell in the teaching of the New Testament. Because, you see, Satan has access to our tongues.

Satan has access to our use of the tongue. Satan has access to our use of words, our choice of words, our thoughts, and how we're going to present things in the words that we choose.

[46 : 59] And that's always been the case since the fall, since Satan had access to our first parents, Adam and Eve. And, of course, his first question was, with regard to the words of God, Has God indeed said?

Isn't that telling us well, that the first assault on our human lives in Adam and Eve, came to Eve, first of all, that the first assault from evil, from the evil one, was to do with words, and to do with the words of God?

Can you trust God? Has he been truthful? Has he told you things as they really are? That was his thrust. And he fell for it, sadly.

And we fall for it ourselves all the time. Because he's still active, even in the case of Christians as well. Let's not imagine tonight that, just because we're Christians, we're converted people, we're people who follow the Lord, and confess the Lord, that Satan doesn't have access to our minds and to our use of words.

Of course he does. You have to watch against that. You have to pray against that. You remember how it was with Peter? In Matthew 16, verses 22 and 23, the Lord had just divulged to them that he needed to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things and be put to death.

[48 : 23] What did Peter do when he heard these words by Jesus? It says that he took Peter aside. He took the Lord aside. Peter actually took him, you can imagine, just him putting his arm on him and taking him away from the rest, as it were, at that time, just a wee distance.

And what did he say to him? This shall not happen to you. This is not going to be the case with you at all. Put that out of your mind, he's saying to Jesus.

That's really what his words amounted to. Don't think those thoughts. Don't go down that route. That's not for you. How did Jesus answer him?

Get behind me, Satan. Satan. An apostle of the Lord. And Satan has access to his mind and to his words.

And got him to use words by which he tried to deflect the Lord from the course that he was on towards the cross. Get behind me, Satan.

[49 : 29] So what we said at the beginning is important. That the whole of Scripture brings us teaching that we need to take stock of every single day we live in regard to our use of the tongue, our use of language.

It is always influential for good or for evil. And as we said, James is dealing with that evil side of it. And you notice he's saying it's an untamable evil from verse 7 there.

He says, every kind of beast and bird and reptile and sea creature can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. And that's a telling and a really solemn point that he's making there.

There is no human being that's a mere human being that can actually tame the tongue. To some extent, you can control it and to some extent, you can keep watch over how you use it.

Of course, it's necessary. But he's saying, literally, no human being can tame the tongue. It's a restless evil full of deadly poison. All of these animals that I mention is possible for a human being to tame a lion.

[50 : 39] I understand the only creature that's totally untamable is what's called the Tasmanian devil, made famous by the Looney Tunes cartoons. But that animal seems to be untamable.

Whereas even other animals like lions, tigers, to a great extent, they can be tamed. They can become your pets. You can have them as in friendship with them, human and animal terms.

But he says, the tongue, nobody can tame. No human being can tame the tongue. It has never been tamed by mankind himself. What do we need when we can't tame it ourselves?

We need every day to say, Lord, help me today by your grace to tame my tongue. Help me today, Lord, to think about the words that I should say before I say them. Help me, Lord, today to use words wisely, to use words cleanly, to use words in such a way that will not be destructive.

Help me to think even, especially when I'm feeling angry or annoyed, or concerned about something. Help me to choose words and to say them in such a way that honors you, that keeps to a purity of speech, and that doesn't set out in any way to destroy reputations.

[51 : 58] It's all too easy, isn't it, to throw back at someone when they've come at you with something that accuses you wrongly, that denigrates your name, that just calls into question or speaks about you in such a way as to really cause your hackles to rise and easy to return in kind, isn't it, just to do the same back.

And here is James saying, don't do that. Ask the Lord for His help. Ask the Lord for the help of His Spirit. Remember whose cause you belong to.

Remember who your Lord is. Remember who your fellow Christians are. Remember who your fellow human beings are. Remember the reputation of the Lord especially is at stake. And that's why he's saying a greater power is needed than actually we have ourselves.

And you go back to the likes of the book of Proverbs. The book of Proverbs is one of the great books of the Bible in terms of wisdom. And we'll see in a minute James is going on to speak here about wisdom or different kinds of wisdom.

The book of Proverbs chapter 10, for example, just picking out a couple of example verses. There's many in the book of Proverbs. It's a book to do with wisdom and how we have wisdom from the Lord that we need to carry through.

[53 : 21] Proverbs chapter 10 and verse 19. When words are many, transgression is not lacking. But whoever restrains his lips is prudent.

The tongue of the righteous is choice silver. The heart of the wicked is of little worth. Whoever restrains his lips is prudent.

I think we should give thanks to God if we're people of few words. Because if we're people of many words, if we're people who speak incessantly so that others can hardly get a word in edgeways, we're in much more danger than somebody who's not given to that sort of volume of speech.

Because many words will undoubtedly at some point lead to hurtful words and harmful words and words that we regret. Proverbs 13 and verse 3 also has something similar to that.

Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life. He who opens wide his lips comes to ruin. In other words, think before you speak.

[54 : 29] Weigh up your words, weigh up your thoughts, ahead of speaking. And James is really saying that. That's what he's teaching here, teaching us against. And remember again, Peter, to go back to Peter, not that we're picking on Peter, but he's there as an example in the Bible for us.

Chapter 14 of Mark, where he comes to be questioned about his relationship with Jesus. And of course, he came to deny Jesus in that context three times.

The third time, Mark tells us, that he invoked curses upon himself and vehemently denied that he was ever one of his disciples. There's a disciple telling lies, contradicting himself.

His use of words is the opposite of what it should be. And there is, again, an example in the Bible of where words are so important in the wrong use of them.

But our tongue finally should be an instrument of wisdom. Verses 13 to 18, that we said, that we're using the chapter as it leads up to the final verse. Evidence of true wisdom, the wisdom the Bible speaks of, the wisdom you gain from coming to know your Bible, but especially coming to know the Lord and to follow him and be taught by his Spirit.

[55 : 52] The evidence of that wisdom, that true wisdom, is that it is meek. It is teachable. The person that's wise is a teachable person. That's why he begins the chapter, not many of you should become teachers.

Because in what seems to be an incessant drive towards teaching others, not only in our day but previously, there's always a great danger in that. A great danger in the fact that we take to ourselves to be teachers when we have far more need to be taught at times.

And verses 14 to 16, you find this description, if we have bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, do not boast or be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes from above, but is earthly and spiritual, demonic.

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder in every vile practice. Now, just in passing, you can see from that, again, that it's what's in your heart that comes through in your words.

You won't have words that are destructive if you don't have selfish ambition, if you don't have something that's marked by jealousy and so on.

[57 : 01] It's when you're marked by these, when these exist in your heart, when they lurk in your soul, that's when your words accordingly show that that's what's in your soul and you'll use words that you regret sometimes.

But he says, the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. One of the great verses of the Bible is in Matthew chapter 5 and verse 9, part of the Sermon, the Mount, one of the Beatitudes as we call them, blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children or the sons of God.

See what it's saying? Blessed are the peacemakers. It's all too easy to be a peacemaker, but it's not so easy to be a peacemaker.

It means self-denial and many other things like that. But he says, a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. If our heart is set on making peace and being peaceful people, then we're sowing a harvest of righteousness, not just for ourselves, but for others as well.

[58 : 25] And that's why in Colossians chapter 4, we can finish with that. Paul also picks up that same theme in Colossians chapter 4, verses 5 to 6.

Salt applied to speech in the sense in which salts apply to food to make it savory, to make it more palatable, to give it a particular taste without which it wouldn't be the same.

Well, speech, she's saying, is the same. Let your speech, let your speech be with that sort of quality in it, as you find it there in the fourth chapter.

Let your speech always be gracious or with grace, seasoned with salt. Now, these things are hugely challenging for us. I haven't been led to this, I believe, part of the Scripture tonight because I know that there's something wrong in the congregation in this respect.

I'm not choosing, I haven't chosen this passage because I'm targeting some people here that I know are maybe not living up to what they ought to be as Christians. Nothing like that. I'm simply saying, here's something for me to live by.

[59 : 54] Here's something the Bible tells us from beginning to end is an important feature of a believing life. Here's something we can't afford to dismiss any day we live because our words can be hugely destructive and cause massive harm in the church or in society, wherever we are.

Instead, we need to come to God daily and come to God daily with that concern, with that prayer. Lord, keep me, I pray, from unwise, damaging speech.

May God bless these words to us. We're going to conclude with words that are very much in keeping with our thoughts this evening in Psalm 141.

Psalm 141 and sing Psalms to the tune Selma. That's on page 185. And it's interesting how the Lord here, how the psalmist here is calling on the Lord in a very difficult circumstance.

He's obviously surrounded by enemies and in many ways he says, verse 9 there, protect me from the traps the wicked set for me.

[61 : 11] And he's also obviously being attacked and buffeted by traps and by the doings of the ungodly. And it's interesting in that context that he says in verses 3 and 4, keep watch, Lord, on my mouth.

And guard my lips, I pray. Let not my heart to evil thoughts be drawn and led astray. We'll sing these three verses from the beginning. O Lord, I call to you.

O Lord, I call to you.

Come with me, I hear thee. And when I cry to you forever, do my love, you give me.
thee will murmur, before earth his eyes.

[62 : 26] The mercy of our hands be Panic. Let not hide the act, let delight, be me in sacrifice.

It was short on my heart, and dissipated by my Welcome Sea, and down thy lips I play.

Let not thy heart to evil's laws be torn and let us stay.

If you allow me to get to the main door, please, tonight I'll greet you at the door. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always.

Amen.