

Sincere Faith:

An Exposition of the Book of James

Sermon Ten: Sincere Speech [*James 3:1-12*]

August 8, 2021

Opening ILL: If one uses words a lot, they inevitably run into the danger of causing problems with these words. **Proverbs 10:19-21** “When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise. ²⁰The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver, The heart of the wicked is worth little. ²¹The lips of the righteous feed many, But fools die for lack of understanding.” From this passage, we see the following: (1) The more you say, the more STUPID things you say. (2) Saying what must be said...what should be said really helps people and (3) Teaching/Preaching is a life or death situation.

I. Introduction: The Danger of the Tongue

ILL: What I thought preaching would be like as compared to what preaching is like

A. What we think teaching/preaching is:

1. We think it brings prestige.
2. We think it brings authority or power.
 - a. In most cases, at least, teaching the Bible doesn't bring with it power over people.
 - b. Sometimes, though, people will use a teaching position to exert power over people.
3. We think it brings an easy life.
 - a. It doesn't. Trust me. ☹️

B. What teaching/preaching really is:

1. It is soul-crushing.
 - a. This may be an over-dramatic way to say this. What do I mean?
 - b. The most often and constant emotion that I feel after preaching is shame and despair.
 - i. Because I want to see God glorified in the explanation and exhortation of the text, and feeling so inadequate for this calling.
 - a) **2 Cor. 2:15-17** For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; ¹⁶to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? ¹⁷For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.
 - ii. Because I feel exposed in preaching or teaching. Not only am I displaying my thoughts for your criticism, but on the internet, too. Yikes!
2. It is difficult.
 - a. It is hard work
 - i. **1 Timothy 5:17** The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.
 - b. It is time consuming...at least, for me it is.
 - c. It is heart work
 - i. Spurgeon quote: Spurgeon said, "Ours is more than mental work—it is heart work, the labour of our inmost soul".
 - ii. We must be praying for each other...praying for our teachers.
3. It is the greatest work in the universe.
 - a. I love teaching/preaching the word of God!
 - i. Spurgeon: If God calls you to ministry, do not stoop to become a king!
 - b. This is not only my job...it is my life's passion.
 - c. Seriously, could there be anything better than giving one's life to the understanding of God's word and investing in his people?
 - i. **Ezra 7:10** For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Point: What's the point? Teaching/Preaching is humbling, it is hard, but it is wonderful, beautiful and great!!! However...it is also very dangerous!!! Why? Because of our nature and the fact that our sinful nature finds its most consistent expression through what we say.

C. Why is the tongue so dangerous?

1. We can use it to tear people down.
2. We can use it to confirm people's doubts.
3. We can use it to worsen their deception.
4. We can use it to lead them to their death.

II. The Dilemma of the Tongue (James 3:1-5a)

Quote: "We need the divine influence to keep us back from saying many things which, if they actually left our tongue, would mar our message. We need the Spirit of God to put bit and bridle upon us to keep us from saying that which would take the minds of our hearers away from Christ and eternal realities, and set them thinking upon the groveling things of earth."—Charles Spurgeon

A. What is James' point?

1. Obviously, he cannot mean that nobody should be teachers.
 - a. Notice that James says that "not many" should teach...not that "nobody" should teach.
 - b. Teachers are given to the church for the edification of the church.
 - i. **Ephesians 4:10-11**
 - c. The author of Hebrews criticized some of the people because they should have been teachers.
 - i. **Hebrews 5:12**
2. Don't be hasty in becoming a teacher!
 - a. Think this through...make sure you understand what you are agreeing to.
 - b. Point: Some people will make life decisions based on what you say. If that doesn't scare you a little bit, then you are probably not qualified to teach.
3. Hold high standards for those who handle the Scriptures!
 - a. This is for the good of the church.
 - b. This is for the good of the prospective teacher.

B. Why? What's the problem?

1. You will face a stricter judgement.
 - a. By whom? People or God?
 - i. Answer: Yes.
2. Why is this?
 - a. Because to whom much is given, much is required.
 - i. **Luke 12:48** ... From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.

ILL: Coloring outside the lines. If your 2-year-old does it, it's cute. If your 15-year-old does it, it's concerning.

- b. Because of the damage that we can cause in our failure.
 - i. People die for lack of knowledge
 - a) **Proverbs 5:23** He will die for lack of instruction, And in the greatness of his folly he will go astray.
 - b) See **Proverbs 10:21** above
- c. Because of the pitfalls that attend to a teaching position.
 - i. Pride
 - ii. Willfulness
 - iii. Etc.

C. The prevalence of this weakness.

1. We all stumble in many ways.

- a. Let's be honest, we each have a ton of things to work on. Nobody's perfect.
- 2. Everybody stumbles in **this** way!
 - a. Let's be honest, we each struggle with this specific sin! Does anybody here have a perfect control over their mouths?
 - b. We may have the right to remain silent, but we lack the ability.

D. Two pictures for our instruction.

- 1. Horses—huge animals let around by a little bit in their mouths.

ILL: I rode a horse once. It was terrifying! Nope, never again. I failed to pull hard enough on the reins. I let the horse take the lead. Both the horse and I knew who was boss...him!

- 2. Ships—huge sea-going vessels with comparatively small rutters.

ILL: The Titanic. Ultimately, what sunk the ship was that they couldn't turn sharply enough. Well...and they were going too fast. 6 of one, half dozen of the other.

E. How do we know when we SHOULD teach/preach?

- 1. You have to have a desire to teach.
- 2. You have to have the ability to teach.
- 3. You have to enjoy teaching.
- 4. You have to accept the responsibilities of teaching.

III. A Description of the Tongue (James 3:5b-12)

A. It is set on fire by Hell (vv. 5b-7)

- 1. That's pretty bad!
 - a. We are so concerned to avoid the effects of Hell in our world and society. That is good, but we must also deal with the Hell inside our mouths!
 - b. It is safe to say that the part of our body that does the most damage is our tongue!

ILL: Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me? Not sure this is true.

- 2. What does this mean?
 - a. This means that everything sinful about us, everything that is not yet changed in us is expressed by the tongue.
 - b. An entire "world of iniquity" lives in our mouths!
 - c. Our tongues are "set on fire" by Hell!
- 3. How does this sharpen our focus?

B. It is untamable (vv. 7-8)

- 1. We can tame animals, but we cannot tame the tongue.

ILL: There are people who make a living training lions! There are people who are experts in training bears! If you could tame the tongue like people train these animals, you would be rich beyond your wildest dreams!

- 2. It is a restless evil.

ILL: Bosco's "Taz Times". He just can't sit still. He runs, He bites, He terrorizes the cats! He is all but uncontrollable! He is, in those moments, a restless evil.

- 3. It is full of deadly poison.

C. It is hypocritical (vv. 9-12)

- 1. We use our mouths to praise.
- 2. We use our mouths to curse.
- 3. It shouldn't be this way.

ILL: We don't get our water from the toilet (at least, I HOPE we don't). I remember when I was a kid, seeing a flight attendant come out of the airplane bathroom with a carafe full of water for the coffee maker. I was very relieved to see that the toilets had that mysterious blue liquid and not clear water.

IV. Conclusions

A. How should I respond to this?

1. In fear—Your words are sharper than you think and they reveal more than you think.
2. In awe—Your words are set on fire by Hell, but God loves you anyway and sent His Son for you.
3. In humility—Let this somber passage kill your sense of self-sufficiency.
 - a.
4. In repentance—mourn over your hurtful words, emails, texts, posts, etc.
 - a. **Isaiah 6:5** Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.
5. In resolve—Deal with your mouths! Deal with your hearts so that you may deal with your mouths!
 - a. **Matthew 12:34** You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.
 - b. **Psalms 19:14** Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

Quote: "The pastor is not called upon to cater to the various tastes which may perchance prevail among his auditors. His duty is to study God's book, to expound its doctrines, to enforce its precepts, to urge its motives, to present its promises, to recite its warnings, to declare its judgments."

Proverbs 4:20 Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life. ²⁴Put away from you a deceitful mouth And put devious speech far from you. ²⁵Let your eyes look directly ahead And let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you. ²⁶Watch the path of your feet And all your ways will be established. ²⁷Do not turn to the right nor to the left; Turn your foot from evil.

To the Praise of His Glory,

Amen