

August 23, 2020

“Taming the Tongue”
Lesson 4 of Unit

James 3:1-12

Intro

In this epistle, James has been addressing practices that have run counter to what those people were saying. James has written about multiple modes of negative speech: claiming that God is the one who tempts a person (1:13), speech that reveals partiality to the rich and shames the poor (2:3-6), wishing the poor well but doing nothing to help them (2:16), claiming to have faith but lacking the deeds which would support that claim (2:18).

In chapters 4-5, James also includes judging and slandering (4:11), boasting (4:13-16), and grumbling (5:9). Today’s lesson falls in between these two sets of speech issues.

Today’s lesson heavily uses metaphors. Metaphors are comparisons which take something familiar and then compare it to something the writer wants the reader to understand by the comparison. Our text uses the example of “Joseph is a fruitful vine” (Gen. 49:22). Joseph is obviously not a vine, but he’s being compared to one to show he is productive in the same way a vine is.

Read James 3:1-12

1. What reasons can you think of for why James warns people against being teachers (in the church)? Why will teachers “be judged more strictly” than those who don’t teach? See Matt. 12:36-37, Romans 16:17-18, I Thessalonians 2:3-5, and Jude 16 for some ideas.

2. What does James say about those who never stumble in what they say? Is this possible? What larger point is James making about a person’s life who can control what they say?

3. What metaphorical comparisons does James use to compare controlling the tongue in vs. 3-4? What larger point is James making for all believers, not just teachers?

4. What point about the tongue's size is James making in the first half of verse 5?

5. In verse 5b-6, what is the third comparison James uses to describe the tongue? In what way can the tongue be like a forest fire?

6. The tongue is described as "a world of evil" in verse 6. What examples of how this is true does James present? How have you seen this be true?

7. James' last comparison is in vs. 7-8. What is that comparison? What is the potentially incorrect understanding of vs. 8? How should Christians correctly understand our accountability for our tongues in light of Rom. 3:12-14 and Ps. 140:3?

8. What is the root cause of the inconsistency of speech James notes in vs. 9? (See Is. 29:13)

9. If we do what James says in vs. 9 that some (many? All?) believes do, what impact does that have on the influence we have for Christ?

10. Verses 11-12 ask rhetorical questions, questions designed to encourage thought and reflection rather than seeing an answer. What things does James want us to ponder after reading these verses?

Application: Today's study deals with the potentially destructive power present in what we say. All of us have said things that we later regretted, so we can all relate to this teaching. It's important to remember that taming one's tongue is a lifelong task, and we aren't all at the same point of success, no matter how long we've been followers of Christ. This passage calls on us to examine what we say, and more importantly, **why** we are saying it. We are all teachers on some level, whether that's with the non-believers in our lives, or with fellow believers who hear what we say, whether about spiritual or secular matters. What we say has importance and consequences.

Prayer: Father God, help us to be mindful again this week of how powerful our words can be on others. Help us to control our tongues so we speak words that are helpful, encouraging, and instructive. Forgive us for those things we've said from a bad heart, and give us strength and desire to be more like you ask us to be. In Jesus' name, Amen.