

## Self-control: A Power that is Able

James – God's Work in Us and through Us

Hillsboro Presbyterian Church

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Father's Day. The Bible talks a lot about fathers. God Almighty is known to Christians as **"Our Father in Heaven."** (Matthew 6:9). The 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment tells us to **"Honor your father"** (Exodus 20:12) while Paul says **"Fathers don't exasperate your children"** (Ephesians 6:4). That is funny to me...but the truth is guys can be exasperating! So maybe it is a "God thing" that our sermon is in **James 3:1-12**, which is all about the power of words and how to manage your mouth. Every chapter in James addresses this common topic. **James 3:2 "WE ALL stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check."** "We all" is how us Southerners say "everybody!" Everybody says the wrong thing at some point... everybody. This is a discipline that everybody has to learn. It is a sign of maturity. "Perfection" here doesn't mean "sinless", it means "mature or healthy". You tell the doctor "I'm not feeling well", the first thing asked is "Stick out your tongue." Your tongue reveals what is going on inside of you...physically AND spiritually. So, **don't let your tongue lick you! WHY ARE WORDS SO IMPORTANT?**

**BECAUSE YOUR TONGUE DIRECTS WHERE YOU GO \* 3:3-4 "...we put bits in the mouths of horses to make them obey us...or take ships...steered by a very small rudder..."**

Where are you headed in life? Where are you going to be ten years from now? Look at your conversation. What do you talk about? We shape our words and then our words shape us. James uses several examples to make his point. Example #1 - A bit in a horse's mouth. A 3,000 pound stallion controlled by a 95 pound jockey because of a little piece of metal stuck strategically over the horse's tongue. Example #2 - A rudder on a ship. The Queen Mary has 3 acres of deck. Yet a small rudder steers the huge ocean liner in the middle of the winds and the waves. Your tongue is the steering wheel of your life...the guidance system. If you don't like the way you're headed, change the way you talk. You learned to talk, you can relearn to talk. Some wrongly decide it is best to say nothing at all...to be silent. But your silence can speak volumes...your ship will drift – and crash.

**BECAUSE YOUR TONGUE CAN DESTROY WHAT YOU HAVE \* 3:5-6 "...a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue is a fire...It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals...have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison."**

Example #3) – A spark causing fire. Think the "Tillamook burn". Your tongue can destroy like that. You can lose it all. A careless camper can destroy an entire national forest overnight. A careless word can destroy a life overnight with thousands of lives affected. Gossip is like fire...it spreads quickly and it wrecks havoc. Careless words destroy marriages, careers, reputations, friendships, and churches. The tongue not only has the power to direct where you go but also to destroy what you have - if you don't learn to control it. Have you ever met a verbal arsonist? Their words are always inflammatory. 50 years ago, Senator Joseph McCarthy was a verbal arsonist. He spoke and destroyed lives. James says words, like fire, can burn people. A couple comes in for marriage counseling. "I said this and then she said that, then I said this..." Then what happened? "All hell broke loose". Our words can cause "all hell to break loose." If heaven is God's presence, peace, harmony, love, and no pain - then hell is the opposite. Hell is isolation from God and others, tension, strong negative feelings, sick in your stomach pain. And words can put you there. Example #4 – A dangerous animal. Entering Lion Country Safari there is a sign warning: "Do not get out of your car. Do not roll down your window." Why? Because those animals that look so tame and peaceful can rip your head off. Mouths can be just as dangerous. The word for "poison" here means "snake venom". Just a few drops can kill somebody...assassinate their character. The tongue can be deadly.

**BECAUSE YOUR TONGUE DISPLAYS WHO YOU ARE \* 3:9-12 "The tongue we praise our Lord and Father and with the same tongue we curse men who've been made in God's likeness. From the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water."**

Your words reveal your character...they show we are inconsistent. We sing praises to the Lord and then argue on the way home. "Cursing" here doesn't necessarily mean profanity; it means any kind of put down or label. Any kind of put down is a curse because people bear God's image. Do you struggle with an inconsistent tongue? James says we all have it. We speak lovingly in one breath and then lash out in the next. Why do we do that? James says it is because of what is inside of us. Example #5 – Olives from a fig tree. Example #6 – Fresh water from the ocean. Neither is going to happen. What is inside is what is going to come out. The problem isn't the tongue, it is the heart. Jesus said in **Matthew 12:34 "For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."** Jesus said the tongue just displays what is in the heart. **WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?**

**GET A NEW HEART \* Ezekiel 18:31 "Rid yourself of all the offenses you have committed and get a new heart and a new spirit."**

Painting the outside of the pump doesn't make any difference if there is poison in the well. I can change the outside, I can turn over a new leaf, but what I really need is a new life. What I need is a fresh start. I need to let go of all the past and be born again and start over. How do I get a new heart? **2 Corinthians 5:17 "Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun."** New person, new life, new heart. When you come to Jesus Christ, he wipes out our past and we are born again. Then as Christians, we need to daily pray **"Create in me a clean heart, O God"** (Psalm 51:10) because what is in my heart is going to come out in my mouth.

**ASK GOD FOR HELP CONTINUALLY \* Psalm 141:3 "Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips."**

We each need God's help with our words. We cannot do it on your own. For each of us, our life is a living proof of that. We cannot always control our words. So we ask God to help. "O Lord: Don't let me be critical or be judgmental or say something I will regret." And on the positive side: "O Lord, May I speak words that are kind, helpful, loving, and true." May I **"be quick to listen, slow to speak"** (James 1:12). Getting into God's word is a part of asking God for help. As you ask God to help you with your words, you need to read God's word. What goes into your mind, goes into your heart, and comes out your mouth. So fill your mind with things that are praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8).

Let Jesus control your bit and rudder to direct your life. Let Jesus watch over your spark and animal to keep you from hell. Let Jesus change your fruit and water by changing your heart.