

22S29 James 3:1-12 (Part 6) the Tongue

Hello everyone. Thank you for joining me today @ the PUNLA Coffee Table. I hope everyone is doing well. Today we are beginning our study of James with James 3:1-12. the Tongue

Before we start, we need to understand a little about this amazing short letter from James. Who was James? Historians are not sure. Many believe this is James the half-brother of Jesus or even another early Church leader. Most believe this is the same James that appears in the book of Acts and was the leader of the Jerusalem Council in Acts Chapter 15. We don't know the exact date it was written but there are indications that this was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD, but we really don't know. The best guess is 50-60AD. Which would make this one of the earliest New Testament letters. James was writing to Hebrew believers scattered among the nations who are facing many trials and persecution. The main theme in this letter is patient perseverance in the midst of the trouble of life. James is encouraging his readers to actively live what they have learned in Christ. He has strong messages about various sins but includes pride, hypocrisy, favoritism, and slander.

I'm reading from the New American Standard version (NAS) today. But of course, you can use whatever translation you choose.

Let's read James 3:1-12 (NAS) *¹Do not become teachers in large numbers, my brothers, since you know that we who are teachers will incur a stricter judgment. ²For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to rein in the whole body as well. ³Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their whole body as well. ⁴Look at the ships too: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are nevertheless directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot determines. ⁵So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! ⁶And the tongue is a fire, the very world of unrighteousness; the tongue is set among our body's parts as that which defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. ⁷For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. ⁸But no one among mankind can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people, who have been made in the likeness of God; ¹⁰from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, these things should not be this way. ¹¹Does a spring send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? ¹²Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, bear olives, or a vine bear figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.*

Let's pray. Dear heavenly father, guide our discussion today such that your message is clear to each of us. As we read your word from James, help us see what James wants his readers to understand and why. I pray that you help me stay out of the way so your hope and peace can be shared with us. I pray this in your name Lord Jesus. Amen.

Let's take a closer look at these verses, James 3:1 (NAS) *¹Do not become teachers in large numbers, my brothers, since you know that we who are teachers will incur a stricter judgment.* This is a very important warning for all of us. James is reminding us that no one should take the job of teacher lightly. There will be a much stricter punishment for those that teach wrong ideas or cause others to fail. I personally take this warning very seriously. Every teacher should. We need to be very careful what we teach is what God wants us to teach and our motives must be to honor God, not personal gain or recognition. Sadly many teacher don't and I am sad for them.

Let's read on, James 3:2-3 (NAS) *²For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to rein in the whole body as well. ³Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their whole body as well.* This is such a great example. I grew up around horses so this makes perfect sense to me but I know many of you probably don't know about horses. A bit is a small metal bar that is put across the tongue of a horse and attached to the reins. The reins are the straps of leather you hold onto to control the horse. The bit does not hurt the horse but a slight tug side to side with encourage the horse to turn. A gentle pull back on the reins will cause the horse to stop. With this little thing, the huge horse can be controlled with little force. So, the idea is if we can control our tongue and speech, then we are able to rein or control our whole body.

Then James says in James 3:4-5 (NAS) *⁴Look at the ships too: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are nevertheless directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot determines. ⁵So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things.* Here is another great example. If you know anything about boats, the part that controls the boat is a small flap called a rudder. Even huge ships are controlled by relatively small rudder. So too our tongue is like the rudder of our bodies. It is small compared to the body but still can cause a lot of problems if we don't control our words.

Then James says in James 3:6 (NAS) *⁶And the tongue is a fire, the very world of unrighteousness; the tongue is set among our body's parts as that which defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.* James is stating a fact here. Jesus actually said even more clearly in Mark chapter 7. Its not was goes in the mouth that defiles a man but what comes out of the mouth. Our words can be destructive, like a fire. Our words are the very things that result in much unrighteousness. Our tongues get us into a lot of trouble. I know my poor choice of words and words spoken in anger or pain have been far more destructive to my relationship that any thing else I've done. Words are like swords which can pierce our souls.

But hear what James says next in James 3:7-10 (NAS) *⁷For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. ⁸But no one among mankind can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people,*

who have been made in the likeness of God; ¹⁰from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, these things should not be this way. I love this example. People can control animals but not our own tongues. We pray and praise God with the same tongue we curse people with. Praising and cursing with the same things our tongue. How can this be? James is right, it should not be this way.

James continues with James 3:11-12 (NAS) *¹¹Does a spring send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? ¹²Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, bear olives, or a vine bear figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.* James is using obvious metaphors here. Obviously a fig tree does not produce olives or grape vines do not produce figs. A water well does not produce both sweet fresh water and bitter water. These things can't be both. In the same way, our tongue is either bitter producing bitterness or wholesome producing good things. We should always build people up with our words, not tear them down. People should want to hear our words, not fear what we will say. Bad words destroy friendships, families, harm relationship at work and school. Speak life to the people around you, not death.

Let's review.

- 1) Teacher Beware? James is clear. Teachers are held to a high standard by God. I'll be honest, I never wanted to be a teacher or speaker, because I knew this. I have only begun teaching because this is what Jesus wants me to do. I must be obedient, but I also know I have taken on a great responsibility. I want to be very careful to honor God with anything I might say or do.
- 2) The tongue? We all need to hear this from James. Our tongue can do great damage. Destructive words are easy to say but very hard to take back. The damage words do, destroy relationships and damage us in ways few other things can.
- 3) Opposites? We can't be both. If we speak damaging words, it is very difficult for us to say words that build people up. If we speak hateful words, it is very difficult for us to say loving words. If we tell lies, it becomes difficult for us to tell the truth. Our words matter, so listen well and speak slowly and carefully.

Let's Pray. Heavenly Father thank you for this letter from James. Help us to read and meditate on this letter so we can hear the message you have for us. Help us to remember who you are Lord. You are our king, king of kings. You are our Lord, Lord over everyone. We can trust you, Lord. Help us to ask you for wisdom when we don't understand. I pray this in your Name Lord Jesus. Amen

Let me leave you with this, James is making a very important point. What we say and how we say it matters. We can be the person who everyone wants to hear from or the person everyone dreads will speak to them. We can be the person everyone comes to for encouragement or we can be the person that discourages everyone. Do you get my point. We are supposed to be a representative of Jesus, to be one, we have to control our tongue. Speak life into the death of this world. Help people to see Jesus in the words we use. Be a light in the darkness..

Thank you for joining me for our study of James. Please email me comments or feedback. And if you liked the message, please share the link with your friends. Until next time @ the PUNLA Coffee Table. God bless.