

Sermon Mark S. Aites

SINS OF THE TONGUE

(Special thanks to David Riggs, John Cripps, William C. Sexton, Nick A. Nelson, Darrell Broking, Kenneth E. Thomas, and Grady L. Scott)

TEXT: JAMES 3

INTRODUCTION:

1. "Half the world is composed of people who have something to say and can't, and the other half who have nothing to say and keep on saying it." (Robert Frost)
2. Perhaps of all the potential problems of a Christian, concerning stumbling and sinning, none is so troubling as the tongue.
3. What we say can often do more damage than we possibly can imagine.
4. There is a poem entitled *The Tongue*, which sums up this point:
"The boneless tongue, so small and weak, Can crush and kill," declares the Greek.
"The tongue destroys a greater horde," The Turk asserts, "than does the sword."
The Persian proverb wisely says, "A lengthy tongue -- an early death!"
Or sometimes takes this form instead, "Don't let your tongue cut off your head."
The tongue can speak a word whose speed, Say the Chinese, "outstrips the steeds."
The Arab sages said in part, "The tongue's great storehouse is the heart."
From Hebrew was the maxim sprung, "Thy feet should slip, ne'er the tongue."
The sacred writer crows the whole, "Who keeps his tongue doth keep his soul."
5. The Book of James is practical in nature, and offers us some thoughts concerning the tongue (**James 3:1-12**).

DISCUSSION:

I. THE POWER.

- A. James makes us aware that the tongue is in fact a powerful weapon, and as such, dangerous to the child of God.
- B. **Matt. 12:36-37**
- C. James illustrates this danger in a different ways. One of his examples comes from **vs 3**, that of the horse.
 1. In that era, horses were considered animals of considerable strength and power.
 - 1) For centuries, they had been used as a source of strength in military conflicts.
 - 2) Even in modern times, in a General Motors' town, we speak of engines for our automobiles in terms of horse power.
 2. Our fascination with horses still draws large crowds at Rodeos and races, such as the Kentucky Derby.
 3. As powerful as these horses are, James notes that they can be controlled by the bits which are placed in their mouths.
 4. The point is that the bit, the metal part of the bridle, is small, but it can control the horse.
- D. James also uses the illustration of the rudder of a ship.
 1. Attached to the stern, it has the power to guide a ship turning the entire vessel as it turns.
 2. While one may not think it has that much significance, it had great meaning in the sinking of the Battleship Bismarck on May 24, 1941.
 3. Once a torpedo had hit the rudder, it led to the demise of the great battleship.
 4. It is hard to believe that something so small in proportion can effect a battleship.

- E. Based then on **vs 5**, tremendous fires can start from a tiny spark or flame.
 - 1. Fires that have wiped out hundreds of acres and have led to the devastation of forests and homes, have started from carelessness; perhaps a cigarette, or small campfire getting out of control.
 - 2. Again, although small in size, it has the power to devastate far more than one may imagine possible.
- F. So it is with the tongue, although small in size, it can devastate lives, and even due tremendous damage to the Lord's church.
 - 1. As one expressed it so well: "It can cause neighbors to no longer be friends. It can cause damage and harm within a family. It can break up marriages. It is a major cause of division and dissension within a congregation of the Lord's people.
 - 2. It has been illustrated this way: "A servant was sent to buy the best piece of meat and he returned with a tongue. He was sent to purchase the worst piece of meat and he returned with a tongue."
 - 3. It has also been illustrated this way: "A laser guided bomb can cause a tremendous explosion but will do no more harm than in its immediate area; however, a tongue can do damage from sea to sea and around the world!"

II. THE POTENTIAL.

- A. It is troubling to read **vs 7-8**, and James' assessment that the tongue cannot be tamed.
 - 1. Man will capture and tame some of the deadliest animals.
 - 2. We may see them at a circus, or some other environment where they are not in chains or caged, and watch as a man stands with them.
 - 3. The famed act of a man's head in a lion's mouth has startled and amazed many; especially since the lion is considered the king of the beasts.
- B. In contrast, the tongue cannot be tamed, as it has free reign.
 - 1. Even the best of Christians have suffered from the words which they have spoken.
 - 2. There have been far too many cases where someone has said something, and wished that they could take it back.
- C. Even though the tongue is powerful, I wouldn't want us to think that it doesn't have the potential to be used properly.
 - 1. The tongue actually has the ability to be a force for good; even as we share with others the precious gospel of Christ.
 - 2. **Rom. 1:16**
- D. But even with that potential for good, comes the realization that Christians can bless God out of one side of their mouth, and curse Him out of the other (**James 3:9-10**).
 - 1. Just because we have the potential of doing good with our words doesn't mean that it will come automatically.
 - 2. There have been far too many Christians over the years who have wanted the blessings of heaven but not have the determination and discipline that it takes to get there.
- E. There was a man who purchased a bumper sticker for on his car. He liked it and thought it would be good to display.
 - 1. One afternoon someone pulled up behind him and began to honk their horn.
 - 2. He became so irate and angry that he got of his car to unleash the flood of words

which Christians should not speak.

3. The driver behind him said to the irate Christian, "You bumper sticker said to honk if you love Jesus."
4. How shameful to have displayed such a sticker, and then to carry on and act like a person of the world.

III. THE PROBLEM.

- A. The problem we have with our words is many faceted.
- B. Perhaps one of the greatest problems we face in the Lord's church today is gossip.
 1. "I am more deadly than the screaming shell of the cannon. I win without killing. I tear down homes, break hearts, wreck lives. I travel on the wings of the wind. No innocence is strong enough to intimidate me, no purity pure enough to daunt me. I have no regard for truth, no respect for justice, no mercy for the defenseless. My victims are as numerous as the sands of the sea and often as innocent. I never forget and seldom forgive. My name is Gossip."
 2. So often we jump to conclusions and get on the bandwagon and begin our character assassination of someone.
 3. Tyron Edwards said "... To murder character is as truly a crime as to murder the body, the tongue of the slanderer is brother to the dagger of the assassin."
 4. Alan Barth said "...Character assassination is at once easier and surer than physical assault, and it involves far less risk for the assassin. It leaves him free to commit the same deed over and over again, and may, indeed, win him honors of a hero even on the country of his victims."
 5. A little cartoon humor states: "Digging for the facts is better than jumping to conclusions."
 6. Too often we are drawn into believing something without being sure of our facts.
 7. **Prov. 26:20-21; Psa. 101:5**
 8. Paul warned Timothy of the younger widows and the potential problems that could arise (**1 Tim. 5:13**).
10. NOBODY'S FRIEND -- My name is gossip. I have no respect for justice. I maim without killing. I break hearts and ruin lives. I am cunning and malicious and gather strength with age. The more I am quoted, the more I am believed. I flourish at every level of society. My victims are helpless. They cannot protect themselves against me because I have no name and no face. To track me down is impossible. The harder you try, the more elusive I become. I am nobody's friend. Once I tarnish a reputation, it is never the same. I topple governments and wreck marriages. I ruin careers and cause sleepless nights, heartache, and indigestion. I spawn suspicion and generate grief. I make innocent people cry on their pillows. Even my name hisses. I am called gossip, party gossip, telephone gossip, and don't forget CHURCH gossip. I make headlines and headaches. Before you repeat a story, ask yourself, is it true? Is it fair? Is it necessary? If not, SHUT UP.
11. Not long ago a person indicated that they had stopped going to church due to the way people had reacted and misusing what they had said. Statement paraphrased: "You tell someone something and they tell another, and then it gets distorted and causes a lot of trouble.... It's just discouraging." (Quote)
12. A lot of harm can be done by people "repeating" supposedly what one said that

another said about still another person. It's difficult in the best of circumstances and with good intention to repeat exactly what another says. Most of us have our biases, points of interest, etc., which enable us to place a "flavor" on a statement or a phrase that is NOT exactly as the other person meant it. (Quote)

- C. Closely associated with gossip comes the backbiting.
1. The Greek word means "To slander, to speak evil of, to backbite; synonymous to whisperer, only more open."
 2. The concept is speaking evil of someone that is not present, not necessarily whispering about it, but open for others to hear.
 3. **Psa. 15:1-3**
- D. "The following list of questions will help us to determine when our speech has condemned us, and we have been involved in Gossip, etc. When Does My Speech Become Wrong? (Quote) (Assuming I did not start the rumor; if so, I'm guilty of sin).
1. Will I help or hurt the person's character by repeating this information?
 2. Would it be better left untold, even if true?
 3. Will anyone be edified if I repeat this information?
 4. What is my motive for telling it?
 5. Am I really seeking to build or destroy, to hurt or heal?
 6. Will I cause unnecessary suspicion to surround the person by repeating the information? (If so, I become guilty. An old saying: "You can never build yourself up by tearing others down.")
 7. Is the information true? Is there any basis for it? Is it rumor or innuendo?
 8. Will anyone be made better by telling it?
 9. Is the information about something which has been repented of and stopped? (If so, it should be left alone.)
 10. Will I help the one who is spreading the rumors by receiving what he is telling?
 11. Do I want to be an accessory in the commission of a sin against another by receiving information which I should not be privy to? (**1 Tim. 5:22**, remember, "There are always two sides to every controversy.")
 12. Will I feel better towards the one being talked about by hearing the things being spread by a gossip?
 13. Am I assisting in strengthening the character of one whom I allow to gossip about others?
 14. Can I, in good conscience, say that I am a friend of one from whom I receive information about the wrong doing of another?
 15. When I hear about the wrong doing of another, am I not obligated to go to that person?
 16. Do not I do much evil by, instead of going to that person, beginning to mention his wrong doing to others?
 17. Am I not responsible for the unfaithfulness of others when they have been hardened through my spreading unfounded charges about them, or by listening to others who do it?
 18. How many people have left active service to Christ because of unfounded charges and allegations made and received by others?
- D. In addition we bear the problem with lies.
1. My children know it as being mendacious -- a word referring to lying with the

attempt to deceive.

2. Among the seven things which God hates, is *a false witness that speaketh lies (Prov. 6:16-19)*.
 3. **Prov. 12:22**
 4. While we may not out right seek to lie to someone, at times we resort to half-truths which accomplish the same purpose.
 5. "A mate on a sailing vessel got drunk. The captain entered in the log: "Mate drunk today." The mate pleaded with the captain, "This is my first offense. Unless you put the whole truth, telling of my usual sobriety, it will cost me my post." The captain was obdurate and would not change the entry. Some days later, the mate was keeping the log. Among other entries, he made this one: "Captain sober today." The captain fumed when he read the entry. "That entry," he protested, "will create a false impression in the minds of the owners of the vessel. They'll conclude that it is an unusual thing for me to be sober!" This time the mate was obdurate and said, "it is a true fact, and it stays in the log!" Though a statement may be accurate, if it misrepresents the circumstances it is, in essence, lying."
 6. **Eph. 4:25**
- E. And what analysis of problems of the tongue can go without a comment on profanity?
1. **Eph. 4:29**
 2. "George Washington's Orderly Book of August 3, 1776, included this comment: "The general is sorry to be informed that the foolish and wicked practice of profane swearing, a vice hitherto little known in the American army, is growing into fashion; he hopes the officers will by example as well as influence endeavor to check it and that both they and the men will reflect that we can have little hope of the blessing of heaven on our arms if we insult it by our impiety and profanity. Added to this, it is a vice so mean and low, without temptation, that every man of sense and character detests and despises it." --- Mary Stover
- F. This by no means is an exhaustive list of the problem, for we still have foolish talking and jesting, slander, meddling, prating, and whispering.
1. Even though the problem list is not complete, we have observed enough to realize that this is a grave problem for the Lord's church.
 2. Hence the wisdom of James statement: **James 1:19** *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.*

IV. THE PURPOSE.

- A. Having the ability to communicate can be a tremendous blessing if we would learn to guard our tongues.
- B. We should be teachers of the good news of Jesus Christ (**2 Cor. 4:7; Col. 4:6**)
- C. It is absolutely imperative that we use our words to build up, not destroy!
- D. By your words, you can edify this congregation and lead others to Christ.
 1. But if you fail to govern your tongue, and give thought to what you say, you can do just the opposite.
 2. The question: Are you building up the church, or are you, by your words, tearing it down?
- F. Jesus taught His disciples to bless God, to use their mouths and minds to pray (**Matt. 6:9**).
- G. We know that as Christians we must strive to glorify God, as Jesus exhorted us to do

(Matt. 5:13-16).

- H. We can use our words; and more importantly, God's Word to save souls.
- I. Have you been sowing the seed, or have you been working to bring shame and reproach on our Lord?

CONCLUSION:

1. Sins of the tongue is a grave matter, and one that we, by no means, should take lightly.
2. If you find that you have been sinning with your tongue, by gossiping, backbiting, deceiving, and even swearing; you need to repent!
3. Hear again the words of Jesus and let them sink in **(Matt. 12:36-37)**.
4. Remember the warning Jesus gave in **Luke 13:3**, and the words of Peter **(2 Pet. 3:9)**.