

James 3:1-18 Taming the Tongue

Read James 3:1-18

1. (vs. 2-4) What are the benefits that James promises to the one who is able to tame their tongues? What do these benefits look like practically?

Perfection – the goal of the Christian life (1:4). Taking on the character of God (Matthew 5:48)

Control your whole body. As a bit guides the entire horse – if we could control our tongues every other desire, every other impulse in our lives would be ours to direct. This could mean that since the tongue is the most beyond our control, controlling it would mean we had at our disposal the tools to control every other one. It could also mean that the tongue is the key to everything else, our tongue clothes our thoughts and reinforces our thoughts. We could create new patterns of thoughts in our lives by the creative power of our words.

Utilize the external forces that push through our lives to a desirable end. Just as a rudder allows a captain to use the external force of wind to enable a desirable trajectory having a handle on our tongues gives us the ability to navigate external forces without it blowing us off course.

2. (vs. 5a-6) In the sermon Tim spoke to the power of the tongue – a creative power – and a destructive power. Reflect together on the impact of our words on us, on others, on our communities.

Our self-image is based on an accumulation of the words – of the verdicts - that we have heard spoken over us.

We have the ability to reinforce behaviors in others by our words. Noting other behaviors through affirmation can bring them more into being.

Our words clothe our thoughts and reinforce them. If we say I hate you we said it because we felt it – but now we feel it because we said it. Our words reinforce patterns in our lives.

One word can set our lives, our relationships, our world on fire. Many examples could be shared of how a destructive trajectory began with a simple word.

3. (vs. 12) Read Matthew 12:33-37. Discuss together Jesus' statement – "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks". How are our words a barometer for the state of our hearts?

The hope here is to bring a little self-reflection on how our own words express the state of our hearts – are simply symptoms of who we really are. If there is a good level of trust and confidentiality in the group do nudge the conversation toward that kind of self reflection. Self reflection can only get us so far here – as Tim did in the sermon perhaps some encouragement for participants to ask those closest to them – what do my words tell you about the state of my heart- would be in order.

4. (vs.7-8) Why does James desperately want to get us to a place where we recognize we have no control over our tongues? Is he right?

So that we reach out in utter dependence upon Christ for the healing of our tongues. If we still think we can change ourselves – if we still think we can do it on our own – we will never reach out.

For sure we could avoid the destructive impact of our tongues if we just stopped speaking – but then we would never use our tongues to affirm – to bless – to build up – to give life to others. Self-control won't get us where we want to go – we need healing from above.

5. (vs. 13-18) Read Galatians 5:16-25. Notice the similarities in the language of these passages. It is apparent that James wants us to receive the fullness of the Spirit in order to tame the tongue. How do we receive the Spirit, and how does the Spirit enable us to tame the tongue?

Spend sometime reflecting on the language that is similar – that which is of the flesh and that which is of the Spirit.

How do we receive the Spirit – it is a gift. The Father longs to give us good gifts but we must ask. We will only ask if we acknowledge our need.

The Spirit's role is to remind us of Jesus, to reveal to us who we are because of what Jesus has done for us. We are loved, we are forgiven, we are accepted, we are an heir of everything that Jesus has won for us. If those are the words that are spoken by the Spirit to the heart - our hearts will be transformed, made anew, and out of that heart the mouth will speak.