

JAMES 3

A STUDY THROUGH THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

The Tongue: Tiny and Terrible

James 3:2-6



Words, Words, Words...

“Communicating with words is one of the distinguishing marks of life. It makes possible the clearest level of understanding, the conserving and transmission of knowledge from the past, and the sharing of thoughts between one intelligent being and another. By this means, God Himself has communicated with man, whether by the written words of Scripture or by His Son, who is the unique Word of God.”

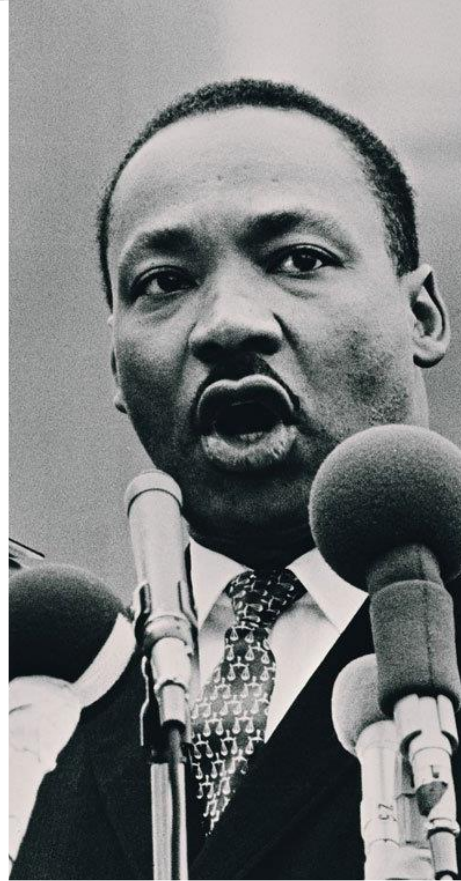
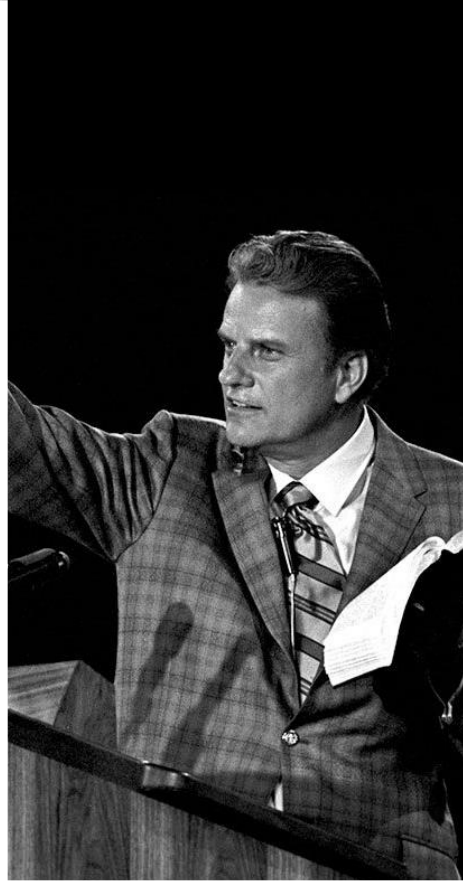
• **Homer Kent**



If the tongue had not been
framed for articulation, man
would still be a beast in the
forest.

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson





The Power of Speech

The Power of Speech

- The body owes its successes, whatever they are, to the effectiveness of speech.
- Speech exerts so much control in our world.
- We forget the destructive, self-deceiving power of speech.
- And we esteem people greatly for their power of speech.

S I N N E R S

In the Hands of an

Angry G O D.

A S E R M O N

Preached at *Enfield*, July 8th 1741.

Reaction to the Sermon:

- An eyewitness described an audience so moved by the sermon that people moaned, shrieked, and cried out for salvation while the preacher was speaking.
- Apparently the reaction was so strong that Edwards was unable to finish the sermon, “possibly the only time such an interruption had happened to him except for the day several years earlier when the gallery of the old Northampton meetinghouse fell.”

But Like So Many Good Things

- The tongue has a darker and evil potential.
- Sometimes speech can injure.
- It can do more harm than good.
- It can convey wrong information that leads to disaster.
- It can be used irresponsibly.
- It can be used to manipulate and control.



James Has Been Addressing It

- In 1:19, James urged his readers to be “quick to hear” and “slow to speak.”
- In 1:26, they were told to “bridle” the tongue.
- Based on what we read in Chapter 2, there had obviously been contention over faith and works.
- In 4:11, we will see Christians both judging brothers and placing themselves in authority over the law.

The Main Idea:

The tongue has its way much like the human will without the bridle of the Word of God and the realization of coming judgment.

Outline for this Morning

I. Stumbling to Perfection (2)

II. Bits and Rudders (3-4)

III. The Boasting Tongue (5a)

IV. The Combustible Tongue (5b)

V. The Defiling Tongue (6)

James 3:2-6

2 For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. **3** Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. **4** Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. **5** So 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! **6** And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.

James 3:2

“For **we all stumble** in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.”

- Paul said it like this in Romans 3:23 –

“for **all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God”



Sometimes...

**It is safer to say little or
not to speak at all.**



Thomas Fuller said:

“Learn to
hold thy
tongue;
five words
cost
Zacharias
forty
weeks of
silence.”

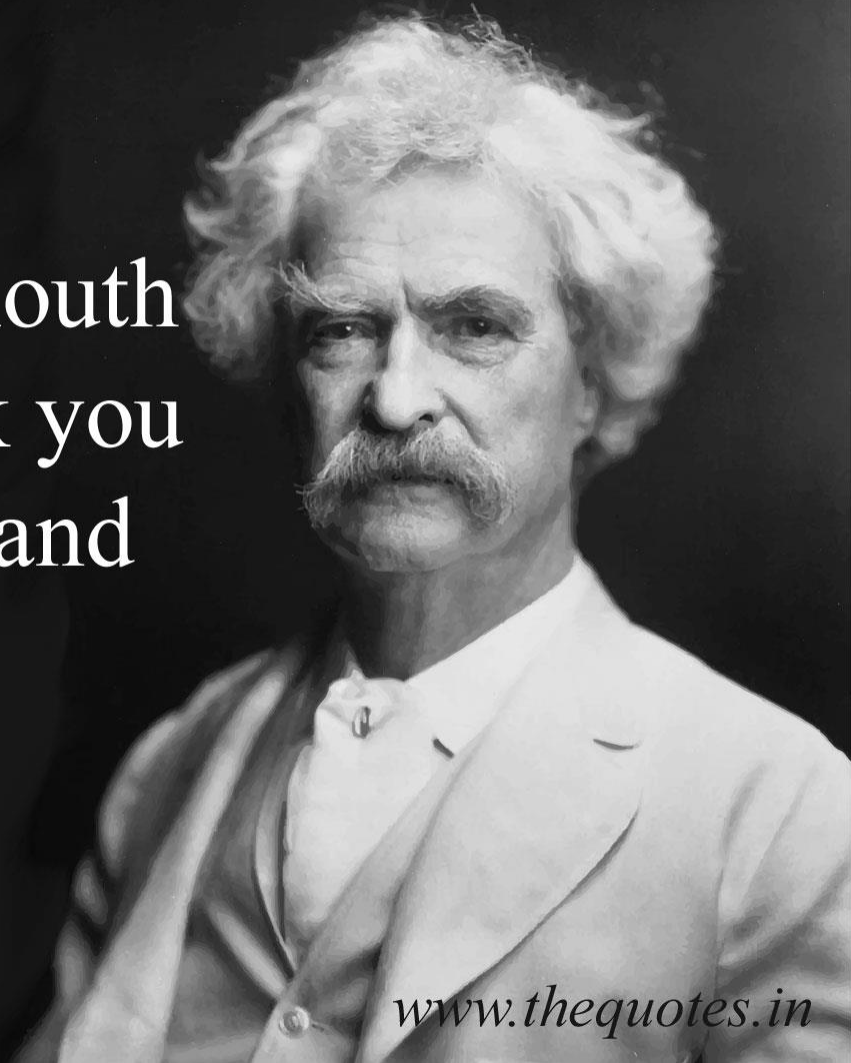
Wisdom from the Proverbs

- **10:19** – “When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise.”
- **17:27** – “He who restrains his words has knowledge, And he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.”
- **18:4** – “The words of a man’s mouth are deep waters; The fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook.”
- **29:20** – “Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”

It is better to keep your mouth
closed and let people think you
are a fool than to open it and
remove all doubt.

Mark Twain

www.thequotes.in



James' Illustrations

1.A Bit in the Mouth
of a Horse (v. 3)

2.A Rudder on a Ship
(v. 4)



James 3:3

“Now if we put the bits into the horses’ mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well.”

Such a Great Illustration

With just a small bit, the rider can control the movement of the whole horse.

- Now look back at the end of verse 2 –
“If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, **able to bridle the whole body** as well.”

In the Ancient World

- The physical body and its appetites were seen as bestial, brutish, and far too unwieldy to control.
- But James says that those base desires can be directed towards holy desires and goals.
- With the proper instrument, the trainer or the rider can accomplish wonderful ends.

George Washington:

“There is no
restraining
men’s tongues
or pens when
charged with a
little vanity.”





CALGARY STAMPEDE

James' Point is This:

With the proper instrument,
what would otherwise be a
beast too large for humans to
handle becomes
domesticated and useful to
the one who masters it.

Connect This Back to 2:14

“What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works?”

Or perhaps...

“What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he loves God but he cannot control his tongue?”

Kent Hughes:

“The true test of a man’s spirituality is not his ability to speak, as we are apt to think, but rather his ability to bridle his tongue.”



James 3:4

“Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires.”

Two difficulties:

1. The Size of the Ship
2. The Strength of the Wind



The Sea Captain

- Must be someone with great training and integrity who can be trusted with getting the ship (and everything aboard) safely to its destination.
- This man has wisdom; this man has read the manual; this man knows his ship.

Against the Wind

- An immense and rudderless vessel is uncontrollable.
- Without a mechanism for steering, a sea captain would have no ability to keep the ship on course.
- The ship would be tossed about and at the mercy of the waves that carried it along.
- Wait a second...

Look Back at James 1:6-7

6 But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the **one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.** 7 For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8 being a **double-minded** man, unstable in all his ways.

James is All About Faith!

- **Chapter 1:** Faith with doubt is not real faith.
- **Chapter 1:** A Hearer who does not “do” has no real faith.
- **Chapter 2:** Faith without works is not real faith.
- **Chapter 3:** A tongue without control shows no real faith.

That person is “a double-minded man,
unstable in all his ways.”



James 3:5a

“So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things.”

The Tongue is So Small...

**And yet, the influence of the
tongue over the body is
immense.**

Why?

**Because of its Proclivity to
Boast.**

Why Did God Do These Great Things?



Ephesians 2:8-9

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; **9** not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.



“See how great a forest
is set aflame by such a
small fire!”

James 3:5b

James 3:6

6 And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by **hell**.

Only use outside Synoptic Gospels

“hell” - γέεννα (*Gehenna*)



Connecting James' "Big Picture"

- Back in 1:27, James told us:
“Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the *world*.”
- And in 3:6, he tells us:
“And the tongue is a fire, the very *world* of iniquity...”

And as Such...

- The person, once corrupted by evil speech, becomes part of the larger system of wickedness in the world.
- Evil speech is an extension of hell itself.

The Tongue is
Ground Zero for
Sin and
Corruption.

This Present World Sets Itself in Opposition to God.

**Fallen man identifies himself as
from this world by using his tongue
to express evil, and that defiles
him.**

**His hatreds, impurities, slanders,
and violent desires eventually find
their way to the surface “and sets
on fire the course of our life.”**

This is Why Paul says in Eph. 4:29

“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.”

Believers edify; the world tears down.

Evil speech is of its father, the Devil.

You May Ask: Where Do I Start?

- James told us back in 1:6 –
“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”
- He gave us practical advice in 1:19 -
“be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger”
- And in 1:21, he said –
“Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.”

Read the Psalms

- **17:4** – “As for the deeds of men, by the word of Your lips I have kept from the paths of the violent.”
- **119:9** – “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word.”
- **119:11** – “Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.”
- **119:67** – “Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.”

Some Final Application

Do you have a wild horse?

Put a bit in its mouth.

Is your ship listless?

Fix the rudder.

Is it hot in here?

Stop playing with fire!

And Just in Case You Missed It...

- In 1:27, James wrote:

“If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless.”

Luke 6:45

“The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.”

**John Piper puts
it this way:**

**“When the heart
full of God’s
love can draw on
the mind full of
God’s word,
timely blessings
flow from the
mouth.”**

