

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 12/4/94 PM
James 3:6-8 "The Battle of the Tongue"

Intro: For eight years Sally had been the Romero family pet. When they got her, she was only one foot long. But Sally grew until eventually she reached eleven-and-a-half feet long and weighed eighty pounds.

Then on July 20, 1993, Sally, a Burmese python, turned on 15-year-old Derek, strangling the teenager until he died of suffocation. Associated Press Online (7/22/93) quoted the police as saying that the snake was 'quite aggressive, hissing, and reacting' when they arrived to investigate (from Leadership Journal, Fall 94, p. 42).

We're in trouble when we become too familiar with an enemy. When we underestimate its power, its potential destructive capabilities. Most of us would never allow that to happen with a Burmese python, but many of us let down our guard when it comes to another enemy. We underestimate this foe. It's the tongue.

Why do we struggle with our tongues? How can we win in the battle of the tongue? We'll find out tonight in James 3:6-8.

Review:

Week #1: We learned three lessons about taming the tongue, in James 3:1-2.

I. God holds me responsible for my tongue (1-2a).

II. My tongue is a barometer of my spiritual maturity (2).

What comes out of my mouth reveals what's in my heart (Matthew 12:34).

III. There is great potential in my tongue (2).

A. For bad (we can "offend")

B. For good (If we can control the tongue, we can control the whole body)

Week #2: In James 3:3-5, James helps us to understand the incredible power of our tongues by giving us three, practical illustrations.

I. Illustration #1: A small bit can turn a large horse (3).

II. Illustration #2: A small rudder can guide a large ship (4).

III. Illustration #3: A small spark can cause a large fire (5).

Implications:

1. My tongue may be petite, but it sure is powerful.

2. My tongue can boast of great things.

a. The solution is not silence.

b. The solution is control.

Tonight, we're going to delve into the topic, "The Battle of the Tongue." Why do we struggle with our tongues?

Proposition: We struggle for three reasons, according to James 3:6-8.

I. We struggle because of what the tongue IS (6).

Five things that are true of the tongue...

A. It's a fire.

B. It's a world of iniquity.

- C. It's the most potent of our members.
- D. It sets on fire.
- E. It is set on fire of hell.
- II. We struggle because of what the tongue is NOT (7-8a).
 - A. Creatures can be tamed (7).
 1. Beasts
 2. Birds
 3. Reptiles
 4. Sea creatures
 - B. The tongue can't be tamed (8a).
- III. We struggle because of what the tongue CONTAINS (8b).
 - A. The tongue contains evil.
 - B. The tongue contains poison.
 - 13 types of deadly poison in our tongues...
 1. Slander/Gossip (Col 3:8)
 2. Deceit (Job 27:4; Ps 50:19; 120:2; Rom 3:13)
 3. Bragging (Ps 31:18; 59:12; Prov 27:2)
 4. Flattery (Ps 12:3; Prov 26:28)
 5. Immorality (Prov 5:3; 6:24; Col 3:8)
 6. Folly (Prov 15:2)
 7. Lying (Jer 9:5)
 8. Evil (I Pt 3:10)
 9. Perversity (Prov 4:24; 10:31)
 10. Strife (Prov 18:6)
 11. Wickedness (Isa 59:3)
 12. Blasphemy/Swearing (Mt 15:19; Col 3:8)
 13. Malice (Prov 17:4)

I. We struggle because of what the tongue IS (6).

He highlights five things that are true of the tongue...

A. It's a fire.

In v 5, James likened the tongue to fire. Now in v 6, he continues, "And the tongue is a fire..." Fire is destructive, so is the tongue. Fire burns, so does the tongue. Fire can be useful when it's under control but deadly when out of control, so the tongue. The great Chicago fire in 1871 destroyed almost one-half of the city, and made almost 125,000 people homeless (Strauss, 132). How great a matter a little fire kindles!

B. It's a world of iniquity.

What does James mean by that? He highlights, one, the magnitude of its influence ("a world of"), and two, the nature of its influence ("iniquity"). Joe Stoll, in his book Tongue in Check, writes (15), "It is a 'world of evil,' literally an entire network of sin. We have an organized crime syndicate right in our mouths."

C. It's the most potent of our members.

The tongue is "among our members," yet of all the parts of body, ounce for ounce, the tongue is the most potent. Why? Because it has the capability to "defile the whole body." It corrupts.

Jesus said, "What comes out of the mouth defiles a man (Mt 15:11)." Calvin said, "A slender portion of flesh contains the whole world of iniquity." Douglass Moo observes, "No other member of the body, perhaps, wreaks so much havoc to the godly life (125)." For every word in Hitler's book, Mein Kampf, 125 lives were lost in WWII (Wiersbe, 360). The words we speak have power to destroy.

Notice that word "defile" again. It means to "stain." The tongue spreads spiritual pollution to the whole body. The next two are related...

D. It sets on fire.

E. It is set on fire of hell.

V 6 reads, "And sets on fire the course of nature, and it is set on fire of hell." The tongue burns and destroys and devastates. Where does such a small creature get so much destructive potential? James tells us. From hell. He uses the term "Gehenna," which is the place of ultimate condemnation. The term is the transliteration of the Hebrew "Valley of Hinnom." In James' day, Gehenna was the name used for the garbage dump where the city's filth was thrown (Swindoll, 48). The tongue is energized by hell itself. Satan uses the tongue as one of his chief weapons of destruction.

Why do we struggle with the tongue? Because of what it is.

Observation: Turn to Mt 15:18, and read, "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man." Do you know what? Dressing up the outside won't tame the tongue. Why not? Because what comes out of the mouth originates where? In the heart. A tongue problem reveals a heart problem.

That's why you'll hear "gutter-mouths" in high school locker rooms, as well as down the hall in the teacher's lounge. Putting on a tie doesn't change the tongue. The battle is much greater than that.

II. We struggle because of what the tongue is NOT (7-8a).

What do the following have in common? Mr. Ed, Flipper, a homing pigeon, and a cobra that rises out of a basket when music is played? The answer--They are all creatures that have been tamed by man.

James says in v 7, "For every kind of beasts...hath been tamed."

A. Creatures can be tamed (7).

James lists four kinds/species of tamable creatures...

1. *Beasts*
2. *Birds*
3. *Reptiles*
4. *Sea creatures*

What makes those four types of creatures different from the tongue?

B. The tongue can't be tamed (8a).

V 8a "But the tongue can no man tame." The tongue doesn't cooperate. It acts as if it had a stubborn mind of its own. It can't be tamed.

In regions of South America (Stoll, 16), there is a snake called the "Two Step" snake. If it bites you, you take two steps and die. Its venom swiftly paralyzes your nervous system which stops your heart. Your tongue can be like that. It can paralyze and even destroy, ever so quickly.

The child's rhyme is right (Strauss, 136),
"I lost a very little word, only the other day;
It was a very naughty word, I had not meant to say.
But, then, it was not really lost--when from my lips it flew,
My little brother picked it up, and now he says it too!"

Why is tongue so destructive? Because of reason #3.

III. We struggle because of what the tongue CONTAINS (8b).

James mentions two ingredients.

A. The tongue contains evil.

The word "unruly" (restless) appears in 1:8 translated "unstable." Here it modifies "evil" indicating that our tongue contains the kind of evil that is unstable, difficult to control, and always liable to break out (Moo, 127).

The tongue gets out of control easily. Picture an unruly child in school. He won't stay in his seat. He won't follow the teacher's instructions. She is disruptive. She is out of control. So the tongue is unruly, an unruly source of evil.

In the July 15, 1993 "Boardman Reports," Peter LeVine writes: "When the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey ran a help-wanted ad for electricians with expertise at using Sontag connectors, it got 170 responses--even though there is NO SUCH THING as a Sontag connector. The Authority ran the ad to find out how many applicants falsify resumes." (from Leadership Journal)

Why do we say things that are not true? Why do our tongues spew forth falsities? Because not only does our tongue contain evil, but it also...

B. The tongue contains poison.

David described evil men with these words in Ps 140:3, "They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips." James agreed when he said the tongue is "full of deadly poison" (8).

What kind of deadly poison is in our tongue? Poison comes in all shapes and sizes. So the poison that spews forth from our lips. Looking through the Scriptures, I came up with 13 types of deadly poison in our tongues. As we look at this list, use it as a checklist. Test yourself. Has your tongue been shooting out poison this week?

1. Slander/Gossip (Col 3:8)

Col 3:8 "But now ye also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth."

2. Deceit (Job 27:4; Ps 50:19; 120:2; Rom 3:13)
Job 27:4 "My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit."
3. Bragging (Ps 31:18; 59:12; Prov 27:2)
Ps 59:12 "For the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips, let them even be taken in their pride; and for cursing and lying which they speak."
4. Flattery (Ps 12:3; Prov 26:28)
Prov 26:28 "A lying tongue hates those who are afflicted by it, and a flattering mouth works ruin."
5. Immorality (Prov 5:3; 6:24; Col 3:8)
Prov 5:3 "For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil."
6. Folly (Prov 15:2)
Prov 15:2 "The tongue of the wise uses knowledge aright, but the mouth of fools pours out foolishness."
7. Lying (Jer 9:5)
Jer 9:5 "...they have taught their tongue to speak lies..."
8. Evil (I Pt 3:10)
I Pt 3:10 "For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile."
9. Perversity (Prov 4:24; 10:31)
Prov 4:24 "Put away from thee a crooked mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee."
10. Strife (Prov 18:6)
Prov 18:6 "A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calls for strokes."
11. Wickedness (Isa 59:3)
Isa 59:3 "For your hands are defiled with blood...your lips have spoken lies, your tongue has muttered perverseness."
12. Blasphemy/Swearing (Mt 15:19; Col 3:8)
Mt 15:19 "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders...blasphemies."
13. Malice (Prov 17:4)
Prov 17:4 "A wicked doer gives heed to false lips, and a liar gives ear to a mischievous (NIV "malicious") tongue."

The tongue contains poison. Guy H. King writes (in Strauss, 135): "The deadly drug does not need to be taken in large doses--a drop or two will suffice; and the tongue does not need to distil long speeches, it has but to drop a word, and the mischief is set afoot. Thus has a peace been ruined, thus has a reputation been blackened, thus has a friendship been embittered, thus has a mind been poisoned, thus has a life been blasted."

Implication: Only God can tame our tongue!

V 8 says, "But the tongue no man can tame." James isn't saying no one can tame the tongue. He's saying no MAN can tame it. There is One who can tame our tongue. God can. By the help and grace of God, we can experience victory in the battle of the tongue.

How? It starts by admitting our need for help. We must confess the sin of our tongue, and surrender our tongues to God. We must ask Him to replace our destructive words with wholesome words. That takes discipline on our part to appropriate His grace, and cooperate with His Spirit in His efforts to tame our tongues.

We need to pray each day the prayer of Psalm 141:3, "Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."

Communion