

JAMES – PRACTICAL LESSONS IN SPIRITUAL MATURITY

THE TONGUE: BLESSING OR CURSE – JAMES 3:1-12

1. **REVIEW: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS.** (James 2:14-26)

A. **DEAD FAITH INVOLVES ONLY OUR MIND;**

1. **DEMONIC FAITH INVOLVES BOTH OUR MIND AND OUR EMOTIONS;**
2. **BUT... DYNAMIC FAITH INVOLVES OUR MIND, OUR EMOTIONS, AND OUR WILL.**
3. **THE WHOLE PERSON PLAYS A PART IN TRUE SAVING DYNAMIC FAITH.**
 - a. **OUR MIND UNDERSTANDS THE TRUTH;**
 - b. **OUR HEART DESIRES THE TRUTH;**
 - c. **OUR WILL ACTS ON THE TRUTH.**
 - d. **DYNAMIC FAITH LEADS TO ACTION BY DOING GOOD WORKS.**

B. **IN THE FIRST THREE CHAPTERS OF HIS BOOK, JAMES EXPLAINS THREE CHARACTERISTICS OF MATURE CHRISTIANS:**

1. **THEY ARE PATIENT IN TIMES OF TROUBLE (JAMES 1).**
2. **THEY PRACTICE THE TRUTH (JAMES 2).**
3. **THEY HAVE POWER OVER THEIR TONGUE. (JAMES 3).**

2. **James 3:1-12 (NLT2)** Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly. Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way. We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself. People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring.

JAMES – PRACTICAL LESSONS IN SPIRITUAL MATURITY

THE TONGUE: BLESSING OR CURSE – JAMES 3:1-12

A. IN 2:14-26, JAMES ZOOMED IN ON HIS **CENTRAL MESSAGE: REAL FAITH PRODUCES GENUINE WORKS.**

1. THROUGHOUT THE BOOK OF JAMES, A PROBING **QUESTION** HOLDS HIS WHOLE **THEME** TOGETHER: **“IF YOU SAY YOU BELIEVE LIKE YOU SHOULD... WHY DO YOU BEHAVE LIKE YOU SHOULDN'T?”**

B. IN 3:1-12, HE **DEVELOPS HIS GENERAL THEME** IN A VERY **SPECIFIC DIRECTION: CONTROLLING THE TONGUE.**

1. **NO** OTHER **SECTION** OF THE **BIBLE** SPEAKS WITH GREATER **CLARITY** AND **IMPACT** ON THE **POTENTIAL DESTRUCTIVE POWER OF OUR WORDS.**

2. WE MIGHT **SUMMARIZE THIS POWERFUL PASSAGE** IN THE FORM OF A **QUESTION: “IF YOU SAY YOU BELIEVE LIKE YOU SHOULD, WHY DO YOU SAY THINGS YOU SHOULDN'T?”**

3. JAMES CONTINUES HIS **FAMILIAR PATTERN** OF WRITING:

A. **FIRST HE STATES THE PRINCIPLE:** James 3:1-2 (NLT2) Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly. Indeed, we all make many mistakes. **For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.**

B. **APPARENTLY, MANY IN THE EARLY CHURCH WANTED TO TEACH AND BE SPIRITUAL LEADERS, SO JAMES HAD TO WARN THEM:** “Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church” (James 3:1).

1. **PERHAPS THEY WERE IMPRESSED WITH THE AUTHORITY AND PRESTIGE OF BEING A TEACHER AND FORGOT ABOUT THE TREMENDOUS RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY!**

a. **JAMES SAYS THAT THOSE WHO TEACH THE WORD:**

1) **WILL FACE STRICTER JUDGMENT.**

2) **MUST USE THEIR TONGUE TO SHARE GOD'S TRUTH.**

3) **MUST PRACTICE WHAT THEY TEACH... OTHERWISE, THEIR TEACHING IS HYPOCRISY.**

JAMES – PRACTICAL LESSONS IN SPIRITUAL MATURITY

THE TONGUE: BLESSING OR CURSE – JAMES 3:1-12

C. WHY DO TEACHERS RECEIVE STRICTER JUDGMENT THAN LEARNERS?...

1. FIRST, A TEACHER IS RESPONSIBLE TO SPEAK THE TRUTH... NOT PERSONAL OPINIONS.
2. SECOND, WHAT A TEACHER SAYS AFFECTS OTHER'S LIVES.
 - a. THE RESPONSIBILITY TO TEACH GOD'S WORD ACCURATELY CAN NOT BE TAKEN LIGHTLY.
3. THIRD, TEACHERS ARE EXPECTED TO LIVE THE TRUTH, NOT JUST TEACH IT.
 - a. THE REAL TEST OF TEACHERS IS NOT WHAT THEY SAY, BUT WHAT THEIR FAMILIES SAY WITH THEIR ACTIONS.
 - 1) THE EXTENT OF PEOPLE'S MINISTRIES IS NOT THE SIZE OF THEIR CHURCHES/CLASSES... IT'S THE DEPTH OF THEIR FAMILY LIFE.
 - i. TEACHERS MUST NEVER FORGET THAT.
4. JAMES IS NOT CONDEMNING TEACHERS... HE'S URGING SELF-CONTROL.
 - a. AND THIS SELF-CONTROL DOES NOT BEGIN WITH THE TONGUE BUT WITH THE HEART.
 - b. THE TONGUE IS JUST THE MESSENGER THAT CARRIES THE WORDS FROM THE HEART.

D. James 3:2 (NLT2) "Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way."

1. James 3:2 ESPECIALLY APPLIES TO TEACHERS:
 - a. NOBODY IS INFALLIBLE... EVERYBODY "MAKES MANY MISTAKES".
 - b. BUT WHEN TEACHERS STUMBLE... THEY CAN CAUSE OTHER PEOPLE TO STUMBLE WITH THEM.
 - c. IF YOU HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF TEACHING, BUT HAVE A LOOSE TONGUE, JAMES SAYS YOU'LL BECOME THE OBJECT OF GOD'S JUDGMENT.

JAMES – PRACTICAL LESSONS IN SPIRITUAL MATURITY

THE TONGUE: BLESSING OR CURSE – JAMES 3:1-12

E. JESUS TELLS US THAT THE BASIC PROBLEM IS NOT THE TONGUE... *BUT* THE HEART.

1. THE TONGUE IS JUST THE MESSANGER THAT CARRIES THE WORDS FROM THE HEART.

a. JESUS ADDRESSED THE SERIOUS RESPONSIBILITY OF TEACHERS... REGARDING THE PHARISEES (WHO WERE TEACHERS), HE SAID IN Matthew 15:14 "... so ignore them. They are blind guides leading the blind, and if one blind person guides another, they will both fall into a ditch."

F. THE POWER OF SPEECH IS ONE OF THE GREATEST POWERS GOD HAS GIVEN TO US.

1. WITH OUR WORDS/TONGUE, WE CAN PRAISE GOD, PRAY, TEACH GOD'S WORD, ENCOURAGE OTHERS, AND LEAD THE LOST TO CHRIST... WHAT A PRIVILEGE!

2. *BUT*... WITH THAT SAME TONGUE WE CAN TELL LIES THAT COULD RUIN A PERSON'S REPUTATION OR BREAK A PERSON'S HEART.

3. THE ABILITY TO SPEAK WORDS IS THE ABILITY TO INFLUENCE OTHERS AND ACCOMPLISH TREMENDOUS TASKS... BELIEVERS MUST NOT TAKE THIS ABILITY FOR GRANTED!

4. FOLLOWING HIS PATTERN, AFTER GIVING THE PRINCIPLE, JAMES GIVES ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE PRINCIPLE:

A. IN ORDER TO IMPRESS ON HIS READERS THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTROLLED SPEECH AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF OUR WORDS, JAMES GIVES SIX ILLUSTRATIONS ABOUT THE TONGUE:

1. A BIT, A RUDDER, FIRE, A POISONOUS ANIMAL, A FOUNTAIN, AND A FIG TREE.

B. THESE SIX PICTURES/ILLUSTRATIONS FALL INTO THREE CLASSIFICATIONS THAT REVEAL THE THREE POWERS OF THE TONGUE:

1. THE POWER TO DIRECT: A BIT AND A RUDDER.

2. THE POWER TO DESTROY: FIRE AND ANIMALS.

3. THE POWER TO DELIGHT: A FOUNTAIN AND A TREE.

JAMES – PRACTICAL LESSONS IN SPIRITUAL MATURITY

THE TONGUE: BLESSING OR CURSE – JAMES 3:1-12

5. THE POWER TO DIRECT: A BIT AND A RUDDER.

A. **James 3:3-4 (NLT2)** We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong

B. IN SELECTING A BIT AND A RUDDER, JAMES USES TWO ITEMS THAT ARE SMALL OF THEMSELVES, YET EXERCISE GREAT POWER... JUST LIKE THE TONGUE.

1. A SMALL BIT ENABLES THE RIDER TO CONTROL A GREAT HORSE... AND A SMALL RUDDER ENABLES THE PILOT TO STEER A HUGE SHIP.

2. SIMILARLY, THE TONGUE IS A SMALL MEMBER IN THE BODY, AND YET IT HAS THE POWER TO ACCOMPLISH GREAT THINGS.

C. NOTE: BOTH A BIT AND A RUDDER MUST OVERCOME CONTRARY FORCES.

1. A BIT MUST OVERCOME THE WILD NATURE OF THE HORSE.

2. A RUDDER MUST OVERCOME THE WINDS AND CURRENTS THAT WOULD DRIVE THE SHIP OFF IT'S COURSE.

3. THAT MEANS THAT BOTH THE BIT AND THE RUDDER MUST BE UNDER THE CONTROL OF A STRONG HAND.

a. THE EXPERT HORSEMAN MUST KEEP THE POWER OF HIS HORSE UNDER CONTROL.

b. AND THE EXPERIENCED PILOT MUST STEER THE SHIP THROUGH THE STORM COURAGEOUSLY.

D. SIMILARLY, THE TONGUE ALSO MUST OVERCOME CONTRARY FORCES.

1. WE HAVE AN OLD NATURE THAT WANTS TO CONTROL US AND MAKE US SIN BY SAYING THINGS WE OUGHT NOT TO SAY.

2. SIN ON THE INSIDE AND WORLDLY PRESSURES ON THE OUTSIDE SEEK TO GET CONTROL OF THE TONGUE.

JAMES – PRACTICAL LESSONS IN SPIRITUAL MATURITY

THE TONGUE: BLESSING OR CURSE – JAMES 3:1-12

3. WHEN/IF JESUS CHRIST CONTROLS OUR TONGUE, THEN WE DO NOT NEED TO FEAR SAYING THE WRONG THING... OR EVEN SAYING THE RIGHT THING IN A WRONG WAY!
 - a. Psalm 141:3-4a (NASB) Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips (put a watchman at my mouth). Do not incline my heart to any evil thing,
 - b. Proverbs 18:21 (NLT2) The tongue can bring death or life; those who love to talk will reap the consequences.
 - c. Matthew 12:34b (NASB) "For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart."
4. WHEN JESUS CHRIST IS THE LORD OF OUR HEART, THEN HE IS LORD OF OUR LIPS, TOO.
- E. A BIT AND A RUDDER HAVE THE POWER TO DIRECT, WHICH MEANS THEY CAN AFFECT THE LIVES OF OTHERS.
 1. A RUNAWAY HORSE OR A SHIPWRECK COULD MEAN INJURY OR DEATH TO PEDESTRIANS OR PASSENGERS.
- F. SIMILARLY, THE WORDS WE SPEAK CAN ALSO AFFECT THE LIVES OF OTHERS.
 1. NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE GUIDANCE WE GIVE BY THE WORDS WE SPEAK, OR DO NOT SPEAK.
- G. THE BOTTOM LINE: OUR TONGUE IS LIKE A BIT AND A RUDDER:
 1. IT HAS THE POWER TO DIRECT.
 2. SO... IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT OUR TONGUES DIRECT PEOPLE IN THE RIGHT WAY!
- H. OUR WORDS CAN BUILD UNITY... OR DEMOLISH IT.
 1. OUR TONGUE CAN ENCOURAGE FELLOWSHIP... OR DESTROY IT.
 2. OUR TONGUE CAN FORM COMMUNITY... OR FRACTURE IT.
 3. OUR TONGUE IS A SMALL BUT POWERFUL MEMBER, AND IT HAS THE ABILITY TO DO TREMENDOUS GOOD... BUT IT ALSO HAS THE POTENTIAL TO DO INCALCULABLE HARM.

JAMES – PRACTICAL LESSONS IN SPIRITUAL MATURITY

THE TONGUE: BLESSING OR CURSE – JAMES 3:1-12

I. **DISCUSS: HOW** WE CAN USE OUR **WORDS** AND **ACTIONS** TO **ENCOURAGE:**

1. UNITY

2. FELLOWSHIP

3. COMMUNITY

a. IN OUR **FAMILY** AND IN OUR **CHURCH**.