**The Power of the Tongue Part 2: It May be Small, but it is Powerful!**

**James 3:2-5**

Good morning! Please open your Bibles to the Epistle of James chapter 3. Today we will be looking at verses 2-5. This is the second part of a three-part message addressing the power of the tongue. As we have been discovering in this Epistle, the Apostle James is laying groundwork for his readers in the disciplines of the faith. For someone to say they are a believer in Christ is one thing, but to support that proclamation with deeds makes that statement of faith complete. In chapter 3 of the Epistle James is discussing how the way in which a follower of Christ speaks shows the faith that person has in Christ. Three weeks ago, in part one of this message we discussed chapter 3 verse 1 in which James warns that not all people should desire to become teachers because those with that title will be held to a stricter judgment by God. Another point we can make regarding verse 1 is the fact that when someone gives themselves the title of teacher they have in essence made themselves to be an example for others to follow. If that is the intent of the teacher, then the words that teacher uses with others will be held under a higher level of scrutiny that someone who is a listener to that teacher. The words used by a follower of Christ are very important and today we will learn the way in which the tongue is used has a huge impact on the lives of others. Please read James 3:2-5 with me.

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

The point is made that all of us stumble with this struggle of taming the tongue as well as many other sins. We must be careful not to judge others with a standard that we are not willing to follow ourselves. When we hold others to a standard of behavior that we are not willing to follow ourselves that results in harsh speech that harms the body of Christ. In Matthew chapter 7 Jesus teaches regarding judging others. This teaching is often misquoted because when it is used in the world today it has important words removed from it. Let us read **Matthew 7:1-2 “Do not judge, so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.”**

Anyone who does not have this struggle can be referred to as someone who is perfectly able to maintain control of their speech as well as the other actions they take with their bodies. Is this something that is even possible? This is possible when someone has matured in the faith and has developed the ability to think through things they say before saying them. Earlier in the Epistle James refers to this as a perfected faith.

James is reminding the reader that each one of us is a sinner in need of salvation. What this leads to then is the next comment he makes. Only those with perfect speech can say that they are perfect and do not have sin in their mouths. Scripture teaches that the only perfect man to ever live was Jesus Christ, therefore He is the only One who can carry such a title as this. Being able to perfectly control the tongue means that the same person can control the actions of the entire body as well. Once again, only Jesus Christ has ever been able to do this.

**3 Now if we put the bits into the horses’ mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their whole body as well. 4 Look at the ships too: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are nevertheless directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot determines. 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!**

Just like a horse is guided by the bit, we also need guidance. If we do not take control of our speech then we will be led astray by it. Our tongues can take us off track and cause us to lose control. Our whole body is either kept on the right track or thrown off course by the way in which we use our tongues.

When I was little my family and I used to go to the horse races at the county fair quite a lot. We really liked seeing the horses running so fast. What is amazing about these races is that such a small person, the jockey, can use the bit in the mouth of the horse to direct every direction the horse will go. An animal of that size would easily be able to overcome such a small person, but training and discipline allow the jockey to control what the horse does.

This is what James is getting at as he discusses horses and ships. He is making the point that our tongues are just as powerful as a bit in the mouth of a horse or the rudder on a big ship, the way in which it is used has powerful consequences. Just one word said using the tongue has life altering consequences.

When thinking of people in the past who have made monumental impacts I the world because of their words we can think of people like Martin Luther King, Jr. who used his strong speaking skills to lead the Civil Rights Movement. He was a challenge to the political leaders of the day because not only did he preach equality, but his speech regarding non-violent protesting was a new approach to a problem that had been hurting the country. His words made positive change whereas other people like Hitler used their words to teach hatred and promote violence. You and I can have a very powerful impact during our time on this earth, so we must use the opportunities we are given to speak very carefully making certain that our speech honors God.

In verse 5 we have another illustration provided by James saying that a great forest fire is started by a small spark. This illustration is easy for us to understand because every year we see the great forest fires that break out in the western states. These normally start because of man, not just by natural causes. The type of speech this represents is gossip or the act of spreading untruths about someone out of spite or revenge. Starting a small rumor can escalate and spread among several people. This is a major concern in the world today because of social media. We must guard ourselves and fight the temptation of spreading vicious rumors or information that is not accurate. Christians using the tool of social media can be using it either positively or negatively. We will discuss this further in out applications.

**Applications**

1. The way in which we use our tongues impacts how we use the rest of our body. It is a normal situation to meet someone new and immediately have a negative feeling about that person because of the way they speak. Others can tell a lot about us by the way we speak. James tells us that just as a horse is guided by the bit in its mouth we also are guided around by the way we use our tongues. What comes out of our mouths reflects what is in our hearts. Therefore, before speaking we need to think carefully and consider what we are going to say before we say it. Jesus says that what a person says in a reflection of what is in our hearts (Matthew 12:34).
2. The appropriate attitude for us to have when addressing the sin and weaknesses of others is to first acknowledge that we have weaknesses and sins of our own that we need to deal with. We need to deal with our own sins more seriously and have patience with the sins of others. Just as Jesus teaches in the Gospel of Matthew, if we still have a log in our own eye we need to remove that log so that we may better see the speck in the eye of our brother. We must not hold others to a standard that we ourselves are unwilling to live by.

1. Whenever we are encountered with a post on social media and feel the urge to share it with others, we must keep in mind before sharing what message that post will say about us, the church family, as well as the Christian faith. The Apostle Paul in his letter to the church in Philippi gives his readers this advice when it comes to how they should behave towards others **“Finally, brothers *and sisters*, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Philippians 4:8).** We should apply this principle whenever we are speaking with others and especially when we are using social media. Before sharing any post or comments we see on social media we need to ask ourselves this important question: Is this post or comment true, honorable to God, right, pure, lovely, commendable excellent or worthy of praise? If there is anything in the message that might cause division, strife, anger, a false representation of God or the Christian faith or a negative view of the church we should not be sharing or approving such messages. Also, we need to be cautious as to what we are liking and/or approving on social media as well. We need to practice discretion in how we use these tools of communication. In this manner we are using self-control to decipher our use of language which is a responsible way of living out what James is teaching in these verses.

**Conclusion**

 Today we have discussed how powerful the tongue is and what we can do in our lives to practice what James is teaching in these verses. The way we speak and the messages we share with others serve as proof of our faith and the relationship we have with Jesus Christ. As James makes it clear, we cannot and should expect perfection regarding these matter because Jesus Christ is the only perfect person to have ever lived. However, we are instructed to follow His example by using the opportunities we are given to speak to others in a way that will life them up and represent God appropriately. None of this possible if we only rely on our own strength. We can control the tongue only by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the study of Scripture as well as the support of the family of God.