

# FAITH WORKS

LIVING THE FAITH WE CLAIM - JAMES

**The Tongue:  
The World's Smallest But Largest Troublemaker**

## James 3:1-2

- “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. 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.”

## James 3:3-4

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

## James 3:5-6

- “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! <sup>6</sup> 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 3:7-8

- “For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.”

## James 3:9-10

- “With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.”

## James 3:11-12

- “Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.”

## James 3:1-12

- Power to Direct: the Bit and Rudder (James 3:1–4)
- Power to Destroy: the Fire, Animal and Poison (James 3:5–8)
- Power to Delight: the Fountain and Tree (James 3:9–12)
- Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 360.



## Power to Direct: James 3:1 and Teachers

- James 3:1 (NASB) Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.
- Context with previous chapters about speech
- In the early church, people would often give a testimony or exhortation in the worship service. Some may have aspired to be teachers.

# Power to Direct: James 3:1 and Teachers

- Caution to teachers about
  - ❖ Motive
  - ❖ Content
  - ❖ Character
  - ❖ Stricter Judgment

# Motive

- Ellsworth says, “We are not to teach to satisfy our own ego needs, but to bring glory to God and to deliver his Word accurately to the eternal benefit of those who hear us.”
- Illustration with girl in singles department
- Roger Ellsworth, *Opening up James*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2009), 105.

# Content

- Be sure to ensure that your content is accurate
- Even Jesus and Paul spent several years preparing for their teaching ministry
- Paul spent three years in Arabia as God prepared him for a lifetime of ministry (Gal. 1:17-18)
- Illustration: White Horse and Revelation 6:2

# Character

- Not only does God expect accurate content and good motives, but he expects the teachers' lives and characters to reflect His commands.
- Illustration: Driving on my way to class at CBS.

# Stricter Judgment

- Judgment Seat of Christ
- For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10 NASB).

## Stricter Judgment

- Do not allow the seriousness of teaching to keep you from teaching. Let it keep you from not teaching seriously.
- Illustration: My experience with Jason – you will be judged for not using your gift as much as for using it incorrectly.
- If we wait until we have it all figured out to teach, we never will start teaching.

## We All Stumble with Words

- 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 (Jam 3:2 NASB)
- Teachers are imperfect – we cannot expect pastors or teachers to be sinless saints.
- Teacher, do not be surprised if there are some stumblings in your many words. It is natural, but try to overcome them.



# We All Stumble

- The word *pollá*, translated in many ways, also means “many times, often, repeatedly.”
- Our stumbling is repeated, unfortunately quite often.
- Since we all stumble, we need to show grace to those who do (this is for me).
- Spiros Zodhiates, *Faith, Love, & Hope: An Exposition of the Epistle of James*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Exegetical Commentary Series (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1999), Jas 3:2.

# Clarification

- Everyone should teach
- “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food” (Heb 5:12 NASB).
- Illustration: my experience at DTS and Marilyn Manson discussion board.

# Clarification

- The fact that we are going through hardships can make us think that we ‘deserve a break’ and that we are entitled to take a few liberties or talk unlovingly.
- James wanted his readers to know that the persecution they were enduring did not give them the right to throw off all restraint.
- Roger Ellsworth, *Opening up James*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2009), 109–110.

# Perfection

- If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man. (Jam 3:2 NASB)
- Now the word translated “perfect” in Greek, *téleios*, actually means “the one who has reached his goal.” It is not the goal set by himself, but the goal and the standard set by God for us. We should aim at that, but it is hard to reach.
- Spiros Zodhiates, *Faith, Love, & Hope: An Exposition of the Epistle of James*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Exegetical Commentary Series (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1999), Jas 3:2.

# Power to Direct: The Bit and the Rudder

- James notes that although the tongue is very small, it is extremely powerful.
- He demonstrates this by describing two large things that are affected or controlled by very small things: the horse and the ship. The bit and rudder each have power that is out of proportion to their size.

## James 3:3-4

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

## Power to Direct: The Bit and the Rudder

- The horse is a very large and powerful animal, but it is easily controlled by a very small thing—the bit in its mouth (v. 3).
- A ship is also a very large and powerful thing, but it is easily controlled by something that is quite small—the rudder (v. 4).

# The Power to Direct: The Bit and the Rudder

- The tongue is a comparatively small part of the body, but it is most important when it comes to the direction and influence of life.
- Application: How is your tongue influencing those you love (video)?
- Spiros Zodhiates, *Faith, Love, & Hope: An Exposition of the Epistle of James*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Exegetical Commentary Series (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1999), Jas 3:5.



# The Power to Direct: The Bit and the Rudder

- An unrestrained horse seeks to satisfy its passions and its body. It needs restraint.
- The only way a horse can be helpful is if a person bridles him – he cannot bridle himself.
- A ship does not have the power to steer itself; someone must steer it.
- Are you willing to invite God to control your tongue? (Tripp *War of Words* Illustration)

# The Power to Direct: The Bit and the Rudder

- According to James, if we can learn to allow God to control our tongue, we can effectively allow Him to control our whole body, “If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well” (Jam 3:2 NASB). Our tongue is a test of maturity.
- The Gospel and the tongue (the only perfect speaker: The Word of God)
- Application Prayer

## Power to Destroy: the Fire

- A forest can be a very large thing, sprawling over thousands of acres, but the whole thing can be destroyed by a cigarette butt (v. 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!” (Jam 3:5 NASB).

## Power to Destroy: the Fire

- “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Prov. 18:21).
- Are we speaking death or life to our loved ones? Words are not generally neutral.
- David prayed, “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips. Incline not my heart to any evil thing” (Ps. 141:3–4).

# Putting Out the Fire

- “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (Prov. 15:1).
- Even when someone else uses immature speech, the mature are expected to use godly speech.
- Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 359.

## Power to Destroy: the Fire

- “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” (Jam 3:6 NASB)
- A destructive tongue is a sign of a destructive heart that is being influenced at that moment by the powers of hell. Hurt people hurt people.

# Power to Destroy: the Fire

- For every word in Hitler's book, *Mein Kampf*, 125 lives were lost in World War II.
  - ❖ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 360.
- People who would never think about setting fire to their neighbour's house can and do commit spiritual arson!
  - ❖ Roger Ellsworth, *Opening up James*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2009), 111.

## James 3:7-8

- “For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.”



# The Power to Destroy: The Animal and Poison

- James comments on how large animals can be tamed by humans (e.g. killer whales at Sea World), yet no human can tame the tongue.
- Just as animals cannot tame themselves, humans cannot tame their own tongues. No diversity or communication class solves this problem.
- Only God can steer and tame the tongue.

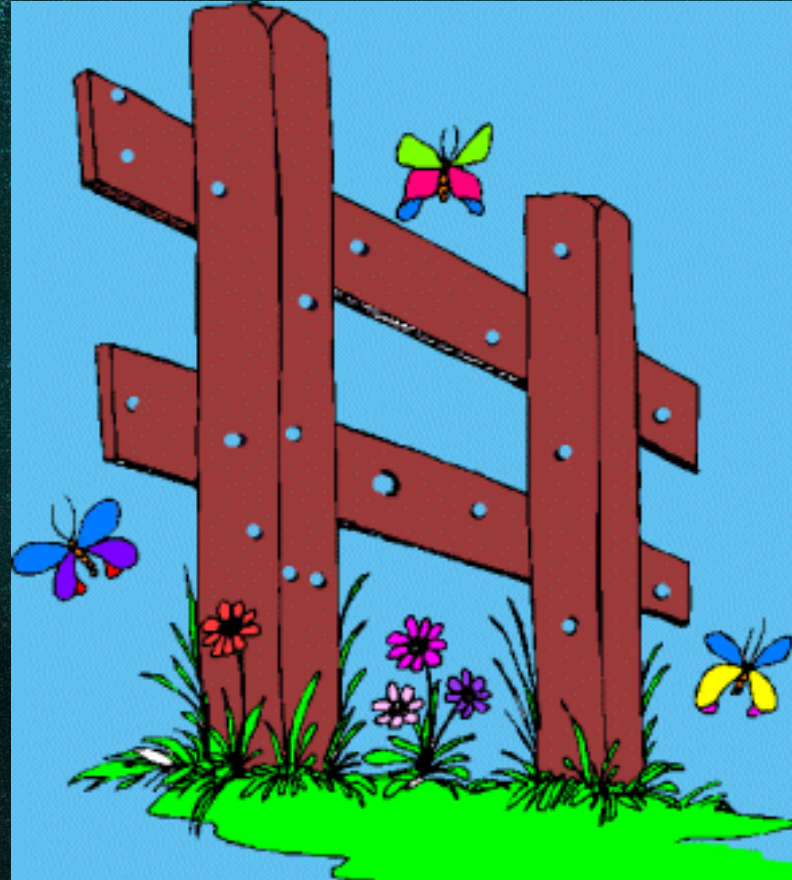
# The Power to Destroy: The Animal and Poison

- When you tame an animal, you get a worker instead of a destroyer. When you control fire, you generate power. The tongue cannot be tamed by man, but it can be tamed by God. Your tongue need not be “set on fire of hell” (James 3:6).
- Knife Illustration – use your words to bless
- Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 360.

# The Power to Destroy: The Animal and Poison

- James says the tongue is ‘an unruly evil, full of deadly poison’ (v. 8). According to him, there is such a thing as ‘verbal cyanide’, which does its killing work before its presence can even be detected.
- Application: Sometimes our identity has been defined by others and we do not realize it.
- Roger Ellsworth, *Opening up James*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2009), 111–112.

# Fence Illustration



## James 3:9-10

- “With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.”

## James 3:11-12

- “Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.”

# Power to Delight: the Fountain and Tree

- The remarkably inconsistent nature of the tongue (vv. 9-12)
- Water is life-giving, and our words can give life. However, if water is not controlled, it brings death and destruction.
- Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 360.

# Power to Delight: the Fountain and Tree

- The tongue is the little hypocrite in our mouths that can make big hypocrites out of us.
- Our tongue ultimately reveals our heart, which is the fountain from which our speech comes.
- Roger Ellsworth, *Opening up James*, *Opening Up Commentary* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2009), 112.



## Power to Delight: the Fountain and Tree

- Luke 6:45, “for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”
- Because words are the expression of that which is in the heart and mind. The Bible teaches that even thoughts that are voluntarily retained, before they can express themselves in words, are counted as sin if they do not meet the standard of God.
- Spiros Zodhiates, *Faith, Love, & Hope: An Exposition of the Epistle of James*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Exegetical Commentary Series (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1999), Jas 3:2.

## James 3:9-12

- The power of speech is one of the greatest powers God has given us. With the tongue, man can praise God, pray, preach the Word, and lead the lost to Christ. What a privilege! But with that same tongue he can tell lies that could ruin a man's reputation or break a person's heart.
- Illustration: Baby speaking
- Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 358.

## James 3:9-12

- James 3:9 in the Faithlife Study Bible: James asserts that it is logically inconsistent to curse humanity, the image bearer, while blessing God, the One who is imaged.

# He's Not Scary, He's A Boy



<http://www.godvine.com/read/when-people-saw-this-little-angel-fb-gv--692.html>

## James 3:9-12

- With our tongue, we not only insult people but we insult the God who created them
- Illustration: My experience on Facebook – Texans football and Gary Kubiak
- Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 361.

## James 3:9-12

- If the tongue is inconsistent, there is something radically wrong with the heart. The tongue that blesses the Father, and then turns around and curses men made in God's image, is in desperate need of spiritual medicine!
- Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 361.

# James

- Power to Direct: the Bit and Rudder  
(James 3:1–4)
- Power to Destroy: the Fire and Animal  
(James 3:5–8)
- Power to Delight: the Fountain and Tree  
(James 3:9–12)