

James 3

James 3.1-5 – The misuse of the tongue

V1 – Notice “*my brethren*” – a favorite phrase of James – It shows his love and the intensity of his writing

-**What warning does James give in v 1?** Not many should become teachers

-**Why not?** They will be judged more strictly

-**Why would teachers be judged more strictly?** Because of their influence over others

-**Was Jesus ever called a teacher?** Yes, 45 times in the New Testament (he was never referred as a preacher)

-If a congregation has a false teacher at the head of a class, imagine the damage that such a person could do, especially with our young people

V2 – **What does it mean to stumble?** To fall into sin (when not being careful, when not looking where we are going)

-**How can we be saved if we stumble in many ways?** Read 1 John 1.7-9

-**How can we be perfect people?** By not stumbling with our tongues

-**Is that possible?** No, as hard as we try, we all talk when we should keep quiet, and we say things we later regret

-**What famous people in the Bible stumbled with their tongues?**

-Sarah laughing at the three angels

-Zaccheus not believing the angel about the birth of John the Baptist

-Apostle Peter (bragging about how he would never deny Christ)

-**What is the relationship between the tongue and the rest of the body?** It controls the whole body

V3 – **Where does a horse’s bridle (bit) go?** In the mouth and under the tongue

-So here is this gigantic animal weighing hundreds of pounds that is controlled by its tongue and mouth

-**What is the size of the bit compared to the size of the horse?** Very tiny

-But James' point: when we control the tongue of the horse, we control the entire horse

V4 – **What is James' next point?** A small rudder can control a giant ship

-So we can control a huge ocean ship a thousand feet long with a small rudder – sometimes we see a ship out of water, and it is amazing how small the rudder really is

-In canoeing, just one paddle in the water can control the direction of the canoe

V5 – **How does the size of the tongue compare to the rest of the body?** Very, very small – tongue weights 1-2 pounds

-**But what do we do with the tongue?** We boast great things (we all like to brag, as Peter did)

-The tongue is like a small fire – it can start forest fires – **Read 1 Peter 3.8-9**

-We are not to exchange insults with each other (it takes two people to carry on an argument; if one refuses to participate, then there will be no argument)

-**How did the Great Chicago Fire (October 8, 1871) get started?**

-Mrs. Patrick O’Leary’s cow kicked over a lantern – the fire burned for 24 hours, 300 people

killed, 90,000 people homeless, and the center of the city was destroyed

Show a match or light a match – What can I burn down with this flame? This church building?

-If I can burn down this church building with this little flame, can the human tongue destroy this congregation (which meets in this building)? Of course

-Read Proverbs 26.18-28 – Many dangers of the human tongue

-This is what James is talking about: one person who does not have his or her tongue under control can create a lot of trouble and cause grief for the elders

James 3.6-12 – More thoughts on the tongue

V 6 – **What is James' assessment of the tongue?** A dangerous fire

-What is good and bad about a fire? It can be used for heat in a house and for cooking, but can also be so destructive

-Some of us have seen a house on fire – it is a frightful thing to see!

-Guy N. Woods (p. 164) says in his commentary that he believes that if we also were to suddenly lose our power of speech, the number of sins that we commit would go down very sharply –

Agree?

-James is not too optimistic about the tongue

-Remember the speeches of Hitler - he was able to inflame an entire nation

-But there were the fireside chats with President Roosevelt that encouraged people, and there were the speeches of Winston Churchill

V 6c – **Meaning: “set on fire by hell”?** – A reference to gehenna (the garbage dump outside the city of Jerusalem) and a reference to hell

-It is hell that sets our tongues on fire

-Conclusion? If people would study this passage carefully, they would not talk so much, and they would guard their words very closely

V 7 – **What are some ferocious animals that have been tamed?**

-We can go to a circus and see a giant elephant controlled by a little short guy (maybe 120 pounds)

-Elephants do everything the trainer wants them to do

-Examples from James? Beasts, birds, reptiles, creatures of the sea

-Our navy has trained dolphins to assist in detecting mines in harbors

-Can you think of other animals that have been trained? Many animals can be trained by behavior modifications (positive and negative responses to their behavior)

V 8 – But we cannot tame the human tongue

-What did James mean here with the word “restless”? Always trying to get out of control, never fully under control

-Remember that the tongue is always wet and in a slippery place; it has no bones, so it is hard to grasp

-If it is left unguarded for a moment, we can say something that we will regret for years

-What sins can be committed with the human tongue? Blasphemy, gossip, slander, lying, perjury, discord among the church members

-We must ask ourselves: **Is this how God wants us to use our tongues?**

Take the sin of lying (that is usually committed with the tongue)

-Mark Twain: "One of the most striking differences between a cat and a lie is that a cat has only 9 lives"

-Saying in World War II: "Loose lips sink ships"

V 9 – Is there any good that can come from the human tongue? Yes, with it we bless the Lord (we preach the Word of God to the dying world)

-Some people are converted through the written word, but most are converted because of the spoken words of another person or of the preacher or elders

-But evil? We also curse people (frequently done)

-What is so bad about cursing people? They are also made in the image of God

V 10 – Apostle John asked Christ to bring down fire from heaven to destroy a certain Samaritan village, but then John went on to record the Fourth Gospel – very inconsistent

V 11 – What illustration from nature does James use here? A spring does not produce both good and bad water

-Some wells and springs produce bad water (sulfur, etc.)

-Old Faithful in Yellowstone National Park smells terrible – we would not want to drink that water (one geyser is called "Devil's Breath")

-Point? We can use our tongues for both good and evil – we have to make a decision about the tongue

V 12 – Other illustrations? A fig tree does not produce olives, and a grape vine does not produce figs

-Salt water does not produce good water

-Will there be people who will be lost in the Day of Judgment because of their tongues?

Read Matthew 12.36-37 and Proverbs 15.1-2

James 3.13-18 – Some thoughts on wisdom

V 13 – Again note the similarity of *James* and *Proverbs*

-*James 3.13* seems to be a reference back to *Proverbs 3.1-2* (teachers)

-Maybe a teacher in James' day claimed to be wise

-How does James describe wisdom? It is demonstrated by good deeds (same as in *Ch. 2*)

-Why "gentleness of wisdom"? Because an arrogant person cannot be a wise person

-Godly wisdom produces gentleness, as in the life of Christ

V 14 – Sounds as if some people were bragging about themselves, when in fact they were suffering from jealousy, etc.

V 15 – There is the false wisdom that comes from below

-How is this wisdom "demonic"? It makes people act like demons

V 16 – What is the result of jealousy and selfish ambition? Disorder and evil things

-Not all ambition is bad, just selfish ambition

V 17 – James begins to list the characteristics of wisdom from above

[See: Guy N. Woods, p. 190-196 for commentary on these terms]

V 18 – What did Christ say about peacemakers?

-Matthew 5.9 - Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

-How does a congregation have peace? People have to make it (it does not come by accident)

-What does peace produce in a congregation? Righteousness

-We have to work at having peace in a congregation, by keeping our tongues under control

Revised 2013-01-28