



Ed Miller  
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## JAMES 3:1-12

It's always a pleasure to be able to stand here and to be able to teach. I don't get to do it that often and usually it's when Pastor Scott is not here because he's stuck in some airport someplace from his trip earlier in the week. But this week he gets to be with us as well. So it's a privilege to be able to teach today and have Scott to be able to be here with us as well.

I'd like to actually take a minute before we dive into our passage for this morning to pray again. I don't know about you, but I've been very moved by the tragedy in Nepal, a fairly poor country in Asia. Devastation like this, I don't think we quite understand it because our building codes and everything here in the United States are different. In a poor country, the building codes and such are such that buildings easily collapse.

I read a story of a pastor during this earthquake was having a Bible study and their whole building collapsed. Most of those folks are missing or presumed dead. So we don't even quite understand some of the things that happen in our world, but my heart goes out to folks in a country like that who are struggling. There are Christians in Nepal and there are those who love the Lord in Nepal. So let's pray for them and let's lift them up in prayer.

[PRAYER] Lord, thank you that we can worship together this morning. Thank you that we worship a God who loves and who cares. We know that you right now, you care about the people of Nepal, those who are grieving, those who are hurting, those who are mourning, those who are lost. Many of them are lost because they don't know you. We pray for those who do know you, that you would use them in this time of tragedy, that you would strengthen them. Fill them with your power and your Spirit to be instruments of your mercy and your grace. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

When I get a chance to preach I'm working through the book of James. So it's a little disjointed here. We come back to James every two or three months and we're going to come back to James again. We're in chapter 3. So if you do have a Bible and you want to turn, otherwise it will be up on the screen. James 3. I'm going to read verses 1-12.

*Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.*

*When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise, the tongue is a small*

*part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.*

*All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.*

*With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.*

Those of you who were here when I preached from this passage back in December remember that I only got through the first two verses. We spent our whole time on verses 1-2. We talked a lot about leadership and about the importance of leadership but the awesome responsibility of leadership. I shared a lot about Pastor Scott at that time. We are blessed to have great leadership in this church. The importance of humility in leadership – in fact standing here and teaching in this church setting is very humbling because it is an awesome responsibility. It's an awesome responsibility for many reasons, which I shared about last time.

But we're going to talk about the power of words today. It's an awesome responsibility because words carry great power.

I was always taught that actions speak louder than words. That's true. That's a statement I remember hearing in my home growing up a lot – actions speak louder than words. All kinds of people talk, but it's what you do that matters. It's what you do that matters.

When I coach baseball, I teach my players let your actions, let what you do on the field speak. Don't get mad at somebody else for what they do, just let your actions speak.

But, you know, it's also true that words are powerful. I'm not sure I quite understood that in the earlier parts of my life, but I understand it now very well. Words are powerful and they can carry with them the possibility of great good. It can influence others in a wonderful way with words. But they can carry great evil, the potential of great harm.

Just a simple illustration. I remember in my life a number of times when I have had some regret over something I've done. Not too much regret because I've learned and grown through the experience, but it's often been connected to words.

I remember one time (in the context of being angry or frustrated in the middle of a baseball game) I just was really frustrated with one kid who was pitching at the time. I said, "You're such a baby!" Right away as soon as I said that I realized [sigh]. I could see it on this kid's face. I could see how I cut right to his heart. What I meant to say was "you're *acting* like a baby right now." I explained that to him and everything afterwards. But I couldn't take that back. Those

words cut right to his heart. I demeaned him was what I did. I used my words and I demeaned him. Our words are powerful.

So James really is a very practical book in a lot of ways. He wants to get this message across to us. He's going to use three illustrations, isn't he, to teach us about the power of words. He's going to teach us how something small can have a huge impact. I love these three illustrations, so let's look at them each carefully. Shall we?

First one – *the bit in the mouth of a horse*. The bit. I don't know who invented the bit and the concept and who figured out that you could put this piece of metal in the horse's mouth, attach some leather to it, and ride the horse and you could get the horse to go wherever you wanted. I don't know who invented that, but it was brilliant. Isn't it an amazing concept how a simple piece of metal in the mouth of a huge animal, a gigantic powerful animal, can turn that animal and get that animal to stop, do all kinds of things.

Anybody into horses, riding horses, racing horses, showing horses, jumping horses? Anything like that? A few people are. Then there's a few of us who just kind of ride horses casually. When you ride horses casually, you don't really do too much with the horse. The horse kind of knows where it's going. But people that really know how to ride horses know the power of the reins and the bit. You can get a horse to do almost anything you want if you work hard enough at it. A little tiny thing, a piece of metal in the horse's mouth can turn a huge animal.

I watch one horse race a year, the Kentucky Derby. It happened to be yesterday. It takes about three minutes, two minutes, whatever. It's a real quick thing. But I enjoy it. These big, powerful animals are turned and moved around that track with such skill by jockeys who have reins in their hand and can move the animal. Great illustration.

Second one – *the rudder of a ship*. Compared to the size of a ship, the rudder is small. Now in the day this was written, ships weren't as big as they are today. We have huge ocean liners. Let's see, where's Tim Brown? Tim Brown just came back from a cruise. He was on one of those huge ships. Those cruise ships are gigantic. It's a small rudder in the back of a ship that turns. The water flows over that rudder and it turns that whole ship in a different direction. That's a powerful image, isn't it? Powerful.

And then a third image – *a spark can set a whole forest on fire*.

When I was a kid I loved and dreaded *Bambi*. *Bambi* was one of those movies that I enjoyed watching, got scared. The thing that scared me was the fire. The fire was one of the scariest things. The fire, a spark, a casual spark set that whole forest on fire. If John Snee were here he would be smiling or something now because he certainly understands. He's a fireman. He understands the power of fire.

We're going to get on with that in a minute, but let's talk a little bit more about the small thing that impacts the large. Let's go back to leaders again. This is why we're cautioned in this passage by James that not everyone should be a leader. Because a key element of leadership is casting

vision, is teaching. Whether a coach, a teacher, a pastor, a parent, someone in leadership, our words are powerful.

Scott and Joanne teach parenting workshops. They're teaching parents all the time throughout the country. One of the things they talk a lot about is the power of a parent's words. We don't often realize how powerful our words are to kids. Again, for negative impact and positive impact.

When we say something derogatory to a child or we're constantly bombarding them with negative messages or constantly on their behavior and bashing them in some way, we do a lot of harm in their soul and their heart.

But message is a blessing. Say, "I believe in you. I know that God is going to work in your life." We talk about one thing we call the positive conclusion when we work with parents. No matter what kind of discipline time we're having, no matter what someone has done, have a positive conclusion to that time. One of the key factors of it is saying, "I believe in you. Now go and sin no more. Go and do differently. I believe in you and I bless you." Powerful words when we say those things.

My strength probably in my work with people is encouragement. That's a gift God has given me. My negative is that I'm not as strong at being firm and tough when I need to be. But I see a lot of people out there, I work with a lot of other coaches and a lot of other parents. I see a lot of nastiness, meanness, and I see kids' spirits crushed by words that are said carelessly. I think a lot of people don't even know what they're doing. They don't know how powerful their words are and how much they're crushing somebody by constantly being on them about negatives. Words of encouragement, words of blessing carry a lot of weight.

Let's talk about fire. I don't know about you, but I've always loved fire. There's something really attractive about fire. I can picture my living room in my home growing up. The fireplace was a place that we gathered. We built a fire. I loved to build a fire with my dad. He taught me how to build a fire and we'd have an outside fire when we went camping as well. I just loved fire. There's something incredibly intriguing, just look into that fire and the embers are burning.

My son, Dave, loves fire. He's not with us here this morning unfortunately. He allows me to tell stories about him. He would love it. He'd love to actually be here. He'd be smiling. Dave loves fire. Dave is curious as well. So Dave loved to do experiments with fire. There are a lot of experiments that you can do with fire. When you're young and a kid you don't quite know the real power of fire.

I'm not going to tell you all the details of his stories. We'd be here all morning doing that. But he learned a lot about the power of fire through experimentation. A spark that sets a fire that is not within control and in some controlled environment is a powerful thing.

We woke up in the middle of the night, waking up in my bedroom and windows right over here, and all of a sudden there's lights, lights, lights. I looked out the window; I never saw so many police cars, fire engines, ambulances. I never saw so many. Our whole street was filled. It was

backed up. I mean it was like I thought it was a parade. But it's in the middle of the night and I'm thinking, "What's going on?" So I get my shoes on, go outside.

Two houses away, the house is blazing. It is blazing. They're getting the water hooked up, they're getting ready, they're figuring out how to attack this fire, figuring out how to protect the house next door. I'm thinking about my house next door too to that one.

But the first thing that struck me was the heat. You couldn't even get very close. It was hot. These flames were just out of control. This house was being consumed. The power of fire, man. I don't even remember being that close to a real fire, but that was just unbelievable, striking.

Fire. Good illustration. A spark starts it, a little thing. Often it's a careless little thing. In a house it's often a wiring problem – something that's not carefully wired, too many things plugged into an outlet, an extension cord with too many things in it. It's a little thing, but it almost always starts with a little spark that sets the whole house on fire.

I spent a little bit of time on this because I think there are a number of ways that we need to be thinking about the power of our words in our day today. Things are different today than they were. We have this thing called social media. We got the internet. We communicate in very different ways. It used to be that when you wanted to talk to somebody you had to either talk to them face to face, you had to talk to them on the phone, or you wrote them a letter. Now we've got all this instant communication and nonstop communication.

It's also not as personal. It's dangerous. It's actually dangerous. I'm not sure we quite understand the danger of this. You say something to somebody face to face and you have to deal with an immediate feedback. So you're careful about what you say. But if you text somebody, or send an instant message to somebody, or whatever, or shoot a post on Facebook, you don't have to deal with the immediate feedback. So what happens is when you're frustrated or angry you just type out that post and you just send it.

I've done that. I regret the number of times that I've done that. Fortunately I've had many wonderful people around me who have counseled me and I have a rule. I have a rule now. If I'm upset, if I'm mad at somebody, if I'm frustrated (it's called the 24-hour rule), I may compose that email, I may compose that post, I may even think about what I want to say, but I do not hit "send" until I calm down, settle down, and look at that again. Do I really want to send that? What impact is that going to have on the other person?

So I just remind us all about the power of social media today. It's wonderful in many ways. We can communicate. We can be at an event and take a picture of it and let the whole world know what we're doing. That's great. We share life together in some wonderful ways through social media. But it's powerful and it can have great harm. Be careful what you say.

If you haven't instituted a 24-hour rule or something like that I just recommend you institute it. I've sent emails that after I hit "send" about one minute later I said, "I want that back. I want that back. I wish I hadn't sent that email." 24-hour rule. Good thought.

On a larger scale today of the power of words, I believe we're heading into a difficult time. I'll say more about this as we get further into James, but we're in a difficult time. I've said this before and it's nothing new to you, but we're in a difficult time.

Things that are communicated today are all about how things look. Image. So our leaders often try to spin things, don't they, to make things look a certain way, to make things appear a certain way. So the substance of things isn't always what we deal with. We don't deal with the real substance of issues; we deal with the look of something. But there is a power in the words that are chosen. Because they still communicate a powerful message.

There is a message that's being communicated in our society today in the media, in the political circles, and elsewhere, a powerful message that is not in line with the gospel message and the word of scripture. It's a message that is very much a humanistic message. That message is that nothing is really inherently true. Everything is just what's true for me or what I want to believe. Everything is relative. There's nothing that is really good or really bad.

Now there's some inconsistencies in that whole message, but that's the message that we hear. All religions are alike. Everything is just the same. We know that that's not true. It's not a politically correct thing to believe these days, but it is not true. We're not all the same. We hear this from our top leaders when we talk about what's happening in the Middle East and the terrorism. We hear messages that Islam is just a peaceful religion. Well, that's not true. We'll go into that more at some other point as well.

It's striking to me that when we look at ISIS or something like that, what's going on, our leadership doesn't even want to mention the word 'Islam' in connection with what's going on there. Because all religions are peaceful, all religions are equal, all religions are the same. We want to just get along. We want to just all be happy, believe whatever we want to believe.

As Christians we're not going to have the choice of just sitting back. We still have somewhat the luxury of sitting back and not having to make a stand, but as we go in the days ahead, we're going to have to make some stands. So we're going to need to be prepared for that. We're going to need to know what we believe.

That's what I think James is teaching here. He's teaching about the power of words. Because the message that we speak is going to have to be crafted wisely and carefully, full of love and grace and truth.

Let's continue on in this passage. Three wonderful illustrations. Now James talks more about the power of these words by using fire again. I love how he talks about the tongue here. *The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body.* The fire. *A world of evil among the parts of the body.* That's striking.

When I was studying this passage I didn't quite know what to do with that at first. I read a number of different people's views on what this means. But I think I understand.

You've seen this. The words that we use influence the whole essence of our being. You've probably discovered, you've seen people out there, you know people like this who are angry people. They have been frustrated in their life and they've harbored anger and resentment and they've let that fester and they become angry, bitter people. That's the words that they speak. The words that they speak and the things that they believe in their heart and then their mind, they've allowed those things to consume them. So I think it's another reminder for us of not to harbor anger and let it go. We need to deal with it. If we have some issue or some problem with somebody, we need to get on it. Deal with it. Don't let it fester.

My grandmother was a person like this. She was a wonderful person in many ways, but she was very bitter. A number of things in her life that happened caused her to be a bitter person. She talked constantly in negative ways about people that she didn't like. She did a lot of gossiping, a lot of evil talk that was really demeaning to people.

She continued to do that and you could see overtime what it was doing to her. Her evil talk and the gossip, the evil words that she said had a negative impact upon other people around her. But they impacted her. Her being was negatively impacted. Even into the latter days of her life she was a bitter woman. I really felt for her. I tried to help her in many ways, but at that point I was not able to do so. She's no longer with us.

Don't let that happen to you. Don't let any bitterness or anger fester in your life. Deal with it. If you can't deal with it in terms of reconciling with the other person, deal with it in your heart. Find a way to forgive and let it go.

Let's continue on. The scripture says we're able to tame animals, but we can't tame the tongue. Interesting, isn't it. I didn't know what to do with this either when I studied it. What do we do with this passage? How can it be possible that we can't tame the tongue? There's got to be a way to tame the tongue. How is it possible?

I think this is what James is getting at here as well. Without the power of the Spirit of God in us, if we just try to focus on taming our tongue and dealing with our language, we're going to fail.

I think it goes further. If we look further in the passage we'll understand this more carefully too. Let me read it again. *All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.*

*With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.*

Hmm. This is another perplexing passage for me, but I'm reminded of the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount when He talked about the fact that *not everyone who claims to follow me,*

*'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven.* He talked a lot about what we see in a person's life reveals their heart. The fruit of a person's life does reveal what's in their heart.

So James is saying here that a *salt spring cannot produce clean, fresh water*. It can't happen. It's impossible. One kind of tree can't bear the fruit of another kind of tree. It can't happen. It's not possible. And a person who claims to be a Christian, and yet on a regular basis their pattern of life is to be mean and nasty and not careful with their words and demean other people, that can't be. That can't be.

Now we're not really able to judge the heart of a person. That's up to God to do. But we can judge what we see. I think really God wants us to judge our own hearts. He wants us to think about our own hearts. I think we dare not be too careless about thinking about our heart and what is the condition of our heart. Is our heart really given over to Jesus? Have we given our life to Jesus and is our heart turned to Him? Are we born again?

In our day today it's easy for us to say we've said a prayer, we've said certain words, we've confessed our sins, and then just go about our life like that never even made a difference. It's easy for that to happen sometimes. I think it's important for us today to realize that going to church doesn't save us. Saying certain words doesn't save us. Having our heart transformed and changed by Jesus and made new, that's what's really going to change us. What will come out of that is a life that's new and different.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that we will not sin and we will not mess up. I don't believe that's what James is saying here either. If you think about a spring, a salt spring, there's got to be minerals and impurities and other things that come through that spring. There are going to be times that we falter. What he's talking about here is the essence of who we are.

The reason that we can't tame the tongue by ourselves is because we need to change the heart first. We need to change who we are and then we have the Spirit of God living in us. We can then see God transform how we talk, how we address people, how we interact with people. God will do it through us, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Challenging words. I encourage you to examine your heart. I encourage us to be cautious about being judgmental of other people's hearts. Again, we choose our words carefully how we challenge and exhort one another. We do need to challenge and exhort one another, but we need to do that with grace and with truth.

I like this passage a lot. It challenges me. My words, just like yours, when I get angry, when I get frustrated, words that can come out of my mouth can be that fire. That evil has that potential if I'm not cautious about it. We need to live every day thinking carefully about how we speak so that we don't do that kind of evil to others, so that we are communicating with love and grace, administering mercy to everyone that we encounter.

We have a strong commitment here at Calvary Chapel Living Hope to taking Jesus home with us, applying the things that we learn, and trying to live differently as a result. Not just

understanding something in our mind but understanding it in our heart and letting it work its way out.

I'd like to take a few moments and have just a reflection time, a brief reflection time. So we'll do that. Let's just take a few moments. Reflect on what we've talked about. Think about it for your life, what it means for your life. I like to think about one thing. Try to focus on one thing that struck me today. One thing and what can I do differently in the week ahead or how can I think differently in the week ahead that will change my life. So I encourage you to do that. Let's pray, let's reflect quietly, and then I'll close.

[PRAYER] Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you that we have the privilege of reading your word, of studying your word, of hearing others teach about your word. Thank you. Thank you for giving us your word. Now we ask that you would help us to apply it and live it out as we go out in this place throughout the week ahead. Thank you that we have your Spirit to change us, transform us. We particularly ask that your Spirit would transform us in how we speak. The words that come out of our mouth are so important. Help us to allow those words to be full of grace, full of mercy, and full of truth. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.