

## **“You Say What?” James’ focus on our words**

### **8/2/2020**

Last week I ended my sermon by challenging you to read through the book of James this week and make note of all the times he mentions the use of our words and how that might apply to your life. If you did that, you realize that James talks a lot about the use of our words in a variety of ways.

So, I want to begin by talking briefly about all the different ways he mentions our use of words. And then I want to end by spending more time on his most lengthy discussion of our words.

For the beginning part, I’ve divided James’ instructions into **Improper** and **Proper** ways to use our words. Let’s start with the **Improper ways**. And since on video I don’t have the capability of using Powerpoint – I’m going to utilize a modified version of Flashcards. So, grab a piece of paper and a pen and let’s go.

#### **Improper:**

1. **Blame God for your temptations** (1:13) – James flat out says, it ain’t God who’s the cause of your temptations. And you can’t blame Satan either. If you want to blame someone, look in the mirror.
2. **Preferential treatment of others** (1:26) – James calls this lifestyle, “*worthless*” or useless – your religion has no purpose (or at least not a God honoring purpose). Then right after that, James gives us a striking example of this “*worthless*” religion and it’s in the form of **prejudice** or **discrimination**. It’s about a **rich man** and a **poor man** coming into church and you rush over to cater to the needs of the rich man (offer him the best seat, offer to get him something to drink, etc.) but the poor man you just tell him to set on the floor, so that he doesn’t stain the pew cushions with his dirty clothes.
3. **Empty words of help** (2:14-18) if you claim to be a follower of Christ and yet there’s no evidence of it outwardly, then he calls you out as a fake. Once again, James illustrates what this looks like with a real-life example. A fellow believer comes to you and asks for help with some clothes or food and you respond with: “*Go, I wish you well, keep warm and well fed.*” But does nothing to help, then your empty words reveal your empty faith. But if you’re not already aware, for most of you that’s not been happening here at Knollwood. To help people in need in Minneapolis you’ve given
4. **Self-centered prayers** (4:1-4) Read this passage. James starts with the **external symptoms** (quarrels, fighting, unanswered prayers) and works back to the **root – you love and want a friendship with the world more than you want a life sustaining relationship with God**. So it’s not wrong to pray for your needs, Jesus taught that, “*Give us this day our daily bread.*” But that request was surrounded by requests that express the desire for God’s name to be honored and His kingdom to come with all of its power and glory. So, praying for your needs to flow out of a deep dependency upon God and His glory being displayed in and through your life.
5. **Slandering and judging each other** (4:11-12) It’s absolutely a lie that “***Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.***” And we have a much more sophisticated and effective way of slandering today, which is called “**trolling**” and I’m not talking about trying to catch fish. As it relates to internet, it is “*the deliberate act, of making random unsolicited and/or controversial comments on various internet forums with the intent to provoke an emotional knee jerk reaction from unsuspecting readers to engage in a fight or argument.*” Let me read you one example of the destructiveness of “trolling”. This summer, after endless bullying from her peers, 15-year-old Sadie Riggs took her own life. She had experienced bullying in school, but it was social media that made it so difficult for her to escape the torment. Classmates were seeking her out, sending cruel messages through multiple social media platforms and messaging apps, encouraging her to end her own life. The cyberbullying became so intense that her aunt, with whom she lived, went to the school and even reached out on Instagram, hoping

someone would make the bullying stop. In June, she took Sadie's phone and broke it, hoping to keep her from experiencing any more hate. Tragically, it seems that Sadie had already reached her limit, as she took her life less than a week later. Cyberbullying is far more destructive than traditional bullying, because the perpetrator can remain anonymous and once it's posted it can quickly spread to hundreds or thousands of people. Then the victim often feels helpless and overwhelmed in trying to end or correct it.

6. **Making plans arrogantly independent of God** (4:13-17) Instead, follow Jesus' example of seeking the Father's plans for each day
7. **Grumbling against each other** (5:9) And then as if to add a little extra umph to this command he makes note: "*if you judge others, you'll be judged and by the way – "The Judge is standing at the His door watching you."* You never grumble or complain about others in a vacuum or in secret. God is always witnessing what you say toward or about each other.

### **Proper:**

1. **Ask God for wisdom** (1:5) Hate to break this to you – but **God's way smarter than you are**. So, He's offering to help you why not take Him up on that. I was the beneficiary of this on Thursday. All throughout the day God kept putting a friend of mine on my mind and heart. I hadn't spoken to this person in probably 6 weeks. So, later in the day I reached out to them, only to find out that things had been rough for them lately. We had a really good talk via texting. It wasn't until the next morning that they shared that it was interesting that I'd chosen that day to reach out to them because it was the anniversary of their best friend 2 years ago, and they were quite depressed over that. I was blown away but not surprised. I shared that God had put them on my mind and heart all day, and although I didn't know the significance of that day – He did.
2. **Speak last – listen first** (1:19-21) This is a great application for the saying, "**Seek to understand before seeking to be understood.**" We could all benefit from that advice. And be fully vested in listening. Don't be formulating your response to this person while you're listening. And I think James is referring specifically to arguments in this context, because he also refers to being slow to anger. Work at becoming a really good listener. Which also means, work at getting good at asking open ended questions of other people – which allows them to express themselves.
3. **Let your words be trustworthy** (5:12) so that people can depend upon what you say. Build a reputation that when you commit to something, you can be counted on.
4. **Pray in faith** (5:13-18) (5:16) *The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.* "**Great power**" means a force that will prevail or overpower. This same word is used in **Acts 19:16** where it describes a fascinating encounter in between the physical and the spiritual realms. The setting is that God was doing some extraordinary miracles through Paul. People were bringing handkerchiefs and aprons and if they just touched Paul's skin, they quickly brought them to people they knew who were sick or demon possessed and when they touched them they were healed and set free. Well, there were some Jewish exorcists that were traveling around and so they thought they'd try this. Couldn't hurt right? Wrong!! They came around some people who were demon possessed and said, "*I command you by the Jesus who Paul proclaims to come out of them.*" But the evil spirit answered back, "*Jesus, I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?*" I bet them didn't expect that response. And it says "*the man who possessed the demon, leaped on them, mastered all of them and **overpowered** them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.*" The word used for "**overpowered**" is the same word used to describe the power we have available to us through prayer. Amazing.
5. **Confess your sins to each other** (5:16) There's power in being open and transparent with each other. But that's going to take an environment where you know you won't be judged by your confession. An environment where we all admit that we're redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ but that we haven't

yet perfected living just like Jesus yet. But we want to and we need help from others to pray for us and to hold us accountable – and giving them permission to ask us for how we're doing.

### Summary:

I want to wrap this all up by looking at James' longest treatment of the power of our tongue. And what he has to say about it's potential influence – for both good and bad – shouldn't surprise us, as you look back over our list of the 13 areas James addresses.

Let me read this section of 11 verses. If you want to follow along it's found in [James 3:2-12](#).

James uses 3 objects to illustrate the power of the tongue.

1. **Bits in the mouths of horses** – a bit is a 5 inch piece of metal and yet if it's properly used it can control the direction of a ½ ton horse.
2. **Rudder on a ship** – a huge ship, though it's being tossed around by strong winds – this relatively small hidden rudder can determine the direction the ship goes. And isn't that so true when it comes to our tongue and the words it produces? Throughout history there's been many individuals who spent a lifetime heading in a certain direction, only to have a statement they make destroy it all. And now many of those words are captured on video and posted online for everyone to see. Many people have been fired from their jobs because of an outburst they had that was posted online.
3. **A spark that set a forest on fire** – The largest fire in California history, was sparked by a hot fragment from a property owner hammering a metal stake into the hole in the ground where a bees nest was. It broke out in July 27, 2018 and killed a firefighter and burned more than 410,000 acres – destroying more than 280 structures.

James says *"...no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water."*

**While we might not be able to tame our tongues – God can!!** But He wants to go deeper. He wants to control your tongue by changing your heart first. That's James point of springs, trees and vines only producing what they are. We utter out of our mouths what's in our hearts. So, you could and should work on these other points that James makes throughout his book. But the very best way to change control your words is to first undergo a heart change. Because as that happens, in conjunction with working on your words, you become a person who is a blessing to others and God is excited to use to make a difference in the lives of others.

Let me end this with an illustration of the power of our words.

**John Trent** tells the story of the first time a father took his little girl out for a daddy date. After getting their pancakes at a fast food restaurant, the dad decided this would be a good time to tell her how much she was loved and appreciated. "Jenny" he said, *"I want you to know how much I love you, and how special you are to Mom and me. We prayed for you for years, and now that you're here and growing up to be such a wonderful girl, we couldn't be prouder of you."*

Once he had said all this, he stopped talking and reached over for his fork to begin eating...but he never got the fork to his mouth. His daughter reached out her little hand and laid it on her father's. His eyes went to hers, and in a soft pleading voice she simply said, *"Longer, Daddy, longer."* He put down his fork and told her some more reasons they loved and appreciated her, and then again he reached for his fork: a second time, and a third, and a fourth, each time hearing the words, *"Longer, Daddy, longer,"* Though this father did not get much to eat that morning, his daughter got exactly what she needed. In fact, a few days later, she spontaneously ran up to her mother and said, *"I'm a really special daughter, Mommy. Daddy told me so."*

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5. \_\_\_\_\_ your sins to each other (5:16)

**What analogies does James use to describe the power of our tongues?**

1. A \_\_\_\_\_ in the mouth of a horse
2. \_\_\_\_\_ on a ship
3. \_\_\_\_\_ that starts a fire

What’s God’s strategy for changing your words?

Which point is God leading you to work on? How?

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