

Victory of the Lamb – Faith Works – Faith Speaks Wisely – James 3 –

November 13, 2022 – Pastor Ben Sadler

James 3:2-10 (EHV)

²To be sure, we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a fully mature man, able to bridle his whole body as well.

³If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they will obey us, we also guide the whole animal. ⁴And consider ships: Although they are very big and are driven by fierce winds, yet they are guided by a very small rudder, wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵So also the tongue is a small part of the body, yet it also boasts great things.

Consider how a little flame can set a large forest on fire! ⁶And the tongue is a fire. It is set among the parts of our body as a world of unrighteousness that stains the whole body, sets the whole course of life on fire, and is set on fire by hell. ⁷Indeed, every kind of animal, bird, reptile, and sea creature is being tamed and has been tamed by mankind. ⁸But no one is able to tame the human tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people, who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰Blessing and cursing come out of the same mouth. My brothers, these things should not be this way.

Have you ever said something you wish you could take back? Maybe that has already happened today. This is what usually happens. A person is angry with someone close to them. You might be angry with a parent, maybe your spouse, maybe your kid, maybe a teacher, coach or co-worker. You are angry with them and because you know them so well, you also know their jugular. You know what they take pride in and what they are worried about. And so you say the thing that will hurt them the worst. You say, “Nobody likes you anyway.” “You are such a failure.” “I wish you were never born.” “I hate you.”

Almost immediately you regret what you said. But words are like toothpaste squeezed out of the tube, you can't take it back. It has already left an impact. It has already hurt the person you love. You know that these kinds of words, destroy relationships, your marriage, your career and your family. But you just can't seem to stop.

Today we are continuing our sermon series **Faith Works**. It is a sermon series through a letter by a man name James, Jesus' half-brother. And this is one of my favorite letters in the whole Bible. In this letter, James gives real practice advice on how to put our faith in to action, how to make our faith work into our everyday actions. And today we are going to talk about put our faith to work in how we use our mouth. And so the question I want to answer today is **How can we control the words that come out of our mouth?**

James begins by saying, Nobody is perfect. **²To be sure, we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a fully mature man, able to bridle his whole body as well.**

We all stumble in many ways. But if you would not stumble in how you talk, then you would be a mature Christian and you would be able to bridle your whole body. A mature Christian is able to control their mouth. And if you could bridle your mouth, then you could control your whole body.

It's interesting that James uses the term bridle. Bridle is that bit you put in the mouths of horses. In fact, James goes on to use that as an illustration. He says, ³**If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they will obey us, we also guide the whole animal.** This little bit that we put into the mouth of a huge animal like a horse, will guide the horse wherever it goes. Pull the bit to the left and the horse goes to the left. Pull it to the right and the horse goes to the right.

The same is true for your tongue. If you could control your tongue, you could control your life. Speak encouraging words to bless this person, and you will have a blessed friendship in this area. Say this helpful thing at work and you will be more helpful to the whole staff.

You see how this little organ in your body directs your whole life? In fact, James has another illustration that makes this point. ⁴**And consider ships: Although they are very big and are driven by fierce winds, yet they are guided by a very small rudder, wherever the pilot wants to go.** ⁵**So also the tongue is a small part of the body, yet it also boasts great things.**

The rudder is very small compared to the boat it directs. Large boats can stand up against large winds and storms. But this little rudder on the bottom of the boat has the power to direct in the way it should go. And the tongue has that same power. It is very little but it can boast that it is the reason our lives turn out a certain way.

Here's the point that James is trying to make: **Control your mouth. Control your life.**

Our mouth has the power to guide our whole life. Even though it is small compared to the rest of our bodies. And even though it doesn't seem to have the strength as other muscles. Our tongues control us. Just think about the ramifications of saying some of these phrases:

- We are moving.
- We are staying.
- You're hired.
- You're fired.
- I love you.
- I hate you.
- Will you marry me?
- It's over.
- I'm sorry.
- I forgive you.

Once you say one of these phrases, your life will never be the same. This little organ is like a bit on a horse or like a rudder on a ship, it will control, guide, and direct your life.

The problem is our tongue is very hard to control. James says, **Consider how a little flame can set a large forest on fire!** ⁶**And the tongue is a fire. It is set among the parts of our body as a world of unrighteousness that stains the whole body, sets the whole course of life on fire, and is set on fire by hell.** Our tongues are like this match in this box of matches. What kind of destruction could I do with

just one match. With this one match placed at just the right place, I could burn down my whole house. With one word, one phrase, one tweet, I could ruin my ministry and destroy my whole marriage. And that's all it would take for you. You are just one sentence away from destroying your career, family, your life. With one sentence, you could turn your life into a living hell.

We have a yellow lab named Scout. She has lots of energy. So when she was a puppy we took her to a training school, Sit Means Sit. And they trained her with this collar. This collar sends beeps, vibrations, and even little shocks to guide her in the way that she needs to go. Sometimes I wonder, because our mouths can be so dangerous and cause us so many problems, maybe I should just wear this collar. And then I could give the button to my wife. And every time I was about to say something that hurt someone she could push this button. Or every time I said something hurtful she could shock me. Maybe I could just train my tongue to act the way it was supposed to.

Well, James has already thought of that and it doesn't seem to matter. He said, ⁷ **Indeed, every kind of animal, bird, reptile, and sea creature is being tamed and has been tamed by mankind.** ⁸ **But no one is able to tame the human tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.**

We can train all kinds of animals. But no one is able to train and tame their tongue. It is a wild and restless evil.

And so I think this gives us an answer to our opening question: **How can we control the words that come out of our mouth?**

James says, **We can't.** We just seem unable to really control all the words that come out of our mouth. No matter how hard we try. No matter how much deep breathing we do. Or how much sleep we get. Or even when we've had a good meal. And everything about our psychology and physiology is going well, we still vomit poison out of our mouths. We still say things that we wish we could take back.

Why is that? Well James tells us that the problem goes deeper than our tongues. ⁹ **With (our tongues) we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people, who are made in the likeness of God.** ¹⁰ **Blessing and cursing come out of the same mouth. My brothers, these things should not be this way.** James reminds us In the beginning of the Bible, God says that he made humans in the image of God, in God's likeness. That means every human being, no matter who they are, what they look like, or what they believe is made in God's image. They are a representative of God. James wonders how then we could bless God but then in the next breath curse a person who is made in God's image, in his likeness.

So how could this be? Well, we actually don't have a mouth problem. We have a heart problem. Jesus famously said, **For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. (Luke 6:45)** In other words, the mouth is not where we need to be putting our focus. What comes out of our mouth is just a symptom of what is going on in our hearts. And that's the real issue.

So let me ask you? What's going on in your heart? And you know the answer to that question by paying attention to what's coming out of your mouth. The reason we are vomiting hurtful words out of our mouth is because there is something going wrong in our hearts. There is some truth of God that we don't actually believe in our hearts. Maybe we struggle to believe that we are loved. And because we don't know we are loved in our hearts, hatred comes out of our mouths. Maybe we struggle to believe that God is in control of our lives, and so our fear and worry come out in anger out of our mouths.

Maybe we struggle to believe that we are truly forgiven, and so envy and prideful words come out of our mouths.

And so it is my prayer that the good news of Jesus loving presence would get rooted deep in your hearts. That you and I would believe that Jesus is in charge and he loves us and all people. And that he created us and that he is going to work out all things for our good. I pray the good news of Jesus and his truth would get so deeply rooted in our lives that it would change our action and be put to work.

How could you do this on a very practical level? Well, there is a prayer in the Old Testament, in the Psalms, that I want to teach you. I'll say it and you repeat it. (Please keep this on the screen during this last section of the sermon)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, Lord, my rock and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14 CSB)

This is a wonderful prayer to say throughout your day, especially before you are going to speak. What I love about this prayer is that it not only addresses the words of our mouth, but also the motivations of our hearts. At the same time, recognizing that we are in desperate need of the Lord, our rock and redeemer.

Let's say you are about to talk to your boss about a challenges situation at work. You can pray: **May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, Lord, my rock and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14 CSB)**

Let's say you need to talk to a family member about a disagreement you have between the two of you. You know that you might be tempted to lash out and say things that you don't mean. And so you pray: **May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, Lord, my rock and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14 CSB)**

Let's say you are about to talk to your teenager about a concern you have. You know that you might be tempted to get angry and frustrated. So you pray: **May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, Lord, my rock and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14 CSB)**

Maybe you are about to have a discussion with your spouse. You are concerned about your financial situation or about another area of your marriage. You know that these discussions usually end in unresolved arguments. So you pray **May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, Lord, my rock and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14 CSB)**

If we could control our tongues, we could control our lives. The problem is we can't control our tongues automatically project what is in our hearts. So we need God's truth to go down deeper. When we see that we are lashing out and cutting people down with our words, we need to check our hearts and what we actually believe. We might not be able to control our tongues, but God can change our hearts. And if he changes our hearts, he can change our lives. Amen.

Let's pray: May the words of our mouth and the meditation of our heart be acceptable to you, Lord, my rock and my Redeemer. Amen