

DEVOTIONAL: 19 - 25 May 2024

The Tongue, the Bridle, and the Blessing

Readings: James 3:1-12 ~ The Message Version

1-2 Don't be in any rush to become a teacher, my friends. Teaching is highly responsible work. Teachers are held to the strictest standards. And none of us is perfectly qualified. We get it wrong nearly every time we open our mouths. If you could find someone whose speech was perfectly true, you'd have a perfect person, in perfect control of life.

3-5 A bit in the mouth of a horse controls the whole horse. A small rudder on a huge ship in the hands of a skilled captain sets a course in the face of the strongest winds. A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything—or destroy it!

5-6 It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire. A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell.

7-10 This is scary: You can tame a tiger, but you can't tame a tongue—it's never been done. The tongue runs wild, a wanton killer. With our tongues we bless God our Father; with the same tongues we curse the very men and women he made in his image. Curses and blessings out of the same mouth!

10-12 My friends, this can't go on. A spring doesn't gush fresh water one day and brackish the next, does it? Apple trees don't bear strawberries, do they? Raspberry bushes don't bear apples, do they? You're not going to dip into a polluted mud hole and get a cup of clear, cool water, are you? The Word of God, for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Welcome back as we continue our study of James 3:1-12.

There is a “something” — almost indescribable — about the person who has clearly been converted to Christ. Dr. Lloyd-Jones put his finger on the essence of it — the humbling of the proud, self-sufficient heart, the breaking of our native arrogance. Our tongues are so often the most obvious index of that ungodly drive at the center of our being.

But the slaying of inner pride and the illumination of our minds in regeneration create a new disposition and affection. The true convert will have a Jacob-like limp in his speech as well as in his walk — because in spiritual anatomy (as distinct from physical anatomy), the heart and the tongue are directly connected to each other. The subduing of the heart leads to the silencing of the tongue; humility within leads to humility expressed. Only when we have been thus silenced are we in any position to begin to speak. And when we do, by God's grace, we speak as those who have first been silenced.

James is not yet finished with his devastating analysis of the tongue. He draws attention to a fourth characteristic as the analysis now rises to a crescendo of exposure: No human being can tame the tongue. 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 and sisters, 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 and sisters, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water. (James 3:8–12)

James expresses a damnable contradiction in our very being. It is an “ought not to be,” like a spring that spouts forth both fresh and salt water. It is more contradictory than anything we find in nature, like a fig tree bearing olives, a grapevine producing figs, a salt pond yielding fresh water.

We were created as the image of God to bless God. It is blatant hypocrisy, double-mindedness, and sin to bless God and then casually curse those who have been made as God's very likeness. But the divided tongue enslaves a person. He or she thinks the unthinkable and speaks unspeakable contradictions. James is blood earnest as he rips up the consciences of his contemporary readers, many of whom were, perhaps, once members of his dear flock in Jerusalem before being scattered abroad.

If such words could be spoken to professing Christians serious enough in their faith to experience persecution and suffer privation in a world that was becoming increasingly inhospitable to the followers of the Way — how much more devastating are they when addressed to pampered, often self-indulgent professors of Christianity in the early twenty-first century?

But now that our consciences have been, “shredded up,” a question arises. Why does James apparently give no practical counsel about how we are to deal with the tongue? Are we left to go to the local Christian bookstore, or attend a seminar or conference, to know how to sanctify the use of the tongue? Why is there no practical counsel?

“Words can consume and destroy a life.” But in fact there is — if we will only stay with James long enough to hear it. Indeed, whenever there is such analysis in the New Testament letters there is ordinarily practical counsel written into the teaching itself. True, it may not be immediately evident, but if we keep our minds and spirits in the passage long enough and learn to wait patiently on the Lord in his Word, it will become clear.

Even where there are no obvious imperatives to tell us what to do next, they are almost invariably implied in the text, that we are sanctified. Did not James's brother pray “sanctify them in [or by] the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17)? To help us to grasp how James does this, it will be helpful, further, to consider how this teaching fits in with the rest of the book.

James 3:1–12 in the Context of the Entire Book: We are told in the sacred record that when Job felt himself to be under special pressure in his sufferings (and, unknown to him, under the specific assault of the Devil to destroy his enjoyment of God) he made “a covenant with his eyes” in order thus to bind in his heart the pattern of holiness he needed to develop (see Job 31:1). Guarding the eyes implied guarding eyes in the heart as well as in the head.

Temptation, and therefore spiritual compromise, often find their easiest access route to the heart via the eyes. By the same token, sin may find its easiest exit route from our hearts via the mouth. The exhortation of Proverbs to “keep your heart with all vigilance” is immediately followed by an exhortation to “put away from you crooked speech and put devious talk far from you” (Proverbs 4:23–24). Guarding the heart involves guarding the tongue. To apply Job's principle to our present subject, we need to learn to say, “I will make a covenant with my tongue.”

Rather wonderfully, this is what James helps us to do throughout his letter. From Jonathan Edwards' book, “Resolutions”, we find twenty resolutions on the use of the tongue to which James's teaching gives rise: (we'll begin with the first eight resolutions:

- 1) Resolved: To ask God for wisdom to speak and to do so with a single mind. - “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him, in faith with no doubting. For that person must not suppose that they will receive anything, he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:5–8).
- 2) Resolved: To boast only in my exaltation in Christ or my humiliation in the world. - “Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away” (James 1:9–10).
- 3) Resolved: To set a watch over my mouth. - “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one” (James 1:13).
- 4) Resolved: To be constantly quick to hear, slow to speak. - “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger” (James 1:19).
- 5) Resolved: To learn the gospel way of speaking to the poor and the rich. - “My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing

and say, 'You sit here in a good place,' while you say to the poor man, 'You stand over there,' or, 'Sit down at my feet,' have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?" (James 2:1-4).

6) Resolved: To speak in the consciousness of the final judgment. - "So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty" (James 2:12).

7) Resolved: To never stand on anyone's face with words that demean, despise, or cause despair. - "If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?" (James 2:15-16).

8) Resolved: To never claim a reality I do not experience. - "If you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth" (James 3:14).

I pray this teaching is encouraging us to be mindful of our words; for our speech, just like the rest of our actions, should reflect the character and the kingdom of God...see you next week.

YOU'RE NOT ALONE, LET US PRAY WITH YOU & FOR YOU

- **Mrs. Sandy Wamser** has had a little health setback, but she has returned home. Let us pray: Creator God, You are the wind in my sails You guide me as I steer and find direction. You give me the strength to keep on going. You watch over me as I navigate stormy seas. You are the harbor where I stop for rest. You are my encourager when I lose hope. You are the lighthouse that keeps my path safe. You are with me always. Thank you. Amen. Please send cards and notes of love, encouragement and support for Ms. Sandy and Mr. Pat to: **Mr. Pat and Mrs. Sandy Wamser, 3742 Pleasant Valley Road, West Bend, WI 53095.**
- Sincerest and heartfelt condolences are extended to Mr. Dean and Mrs. Carol Pok, and the Pok Family, on the passing of their father and mother, **Mr. Jerry J. Pok and Mrs. Margret "Marge" Louise Pok** who God whispered their name on January 23, 2024, and February 2, 2024, and lovingly welcomed them to their eternal home. Cards and notes of sympathy and condolences can be mailed to: **Mr. Dean and Mrs. Carol Pok, 1915 Hwy 28 E., Kewaskum, WI 53040.**
- **Mrs. Elizabeth "Betty" Nelson**, well known and beloved in the community of West Bend, passed away on March 12, 2024. We continue to keep the Nelson Family in our thoughts and prayers.
- Our beloved Christian sister, **Mrs. Joy Lynn Kuhaupt**, 69, of Sussex, passed away March 7, 2024, after a brief illness at Froedtert of Milwaukee. A Celebration of Life Service will June 8, 2024, at Fifth Ave. United Methodist Church. Card and notes of condolences and support can be mailed to: **Mr. Robert Kuhaupt, Sussex Mills Apts., W240 N6345 Maple Ave., #116, Sussex, WI 53089.**
- Your continued prayers for healing and strength for **Mrs. Janice Liepert-Kempf** over the past years, has been needed and appreciated, as Ms. Janice suffered a major stroke, cancer, and cardiac surgery. **Mr. Allan Kempf** is suffering with the pain and stiffness of arthritis. Holy Spirit, thank You for being with Mr. Allan and Ms. Janice through all the ups and downs of their lives and for the many blessings God has given them for which they praise and thank God. You can send emails of prayers and support to: alankempf33@gmail.com; or cards and notes to **Mr. Allan and Mrs. Janice Liepert-Kempf, 414B. South Pleasantview Road, Plymouth, WI 53073; phone number: 920.838.1830.**
- **Mrs. Nancy Whitson** extends her grateful appreciation to you for taking the time to send cards of love and support. Cards and notes of encouragement and support can be mailed to: **Mrs. Nancy Whitson, Aria of Brookfield, 18740 West Bluemound Road, Room 103, Brookfield, WI 53045.**
- **Bro. Bob Krell**, our beloved faithful brother is doing well and appreciative of your continued prayers and supported. Let us pray: I give you my worries and concerns and I ask for your guidance. You see it all, the outer circumstances, the inner turmoil. I know that you understand my life, that sometimes my heart weighs heavy with trouble. Right now I lay all these things before you. I breathe in, safe in the knowledge that I am held by grace. I breathe out, knowing that I am held secure in your arms. And I wait on you. For you are all truth, you are overflowing love, you are a beacon of hope and a fortress of faith. Lord, I choose to be attentive to your voice. May I be alert to your Spirit's guiding as I continue this journey. Amen. Cards and notes of love and encouragement can be mailed to: **Mr. Bob and Mrs. Jean Krell, 804 Lenora Drive, West Bend, WI 53090.**

- We continue our prayer vigil for **Mr. Dennis Liepert** on his extensive journey of recovery. Lord, you know me inside and out. You know about my pain and distress; you understand the fears of my heart. At the cross you endured unabating agony. You have gone before me into the darkness and emerged in power and glory. At this time I lean on You; I draw my strength from Your endless love and live in Your limitless grace trusting in You. Amen. Cards and notes of love and support can be mailed to: **Mr. Dennis and Mrs. Tammy Liepert, 7361 Tower Drive, West Bend, WI 53090.**
- **Mr. Michael Cahoon**, son of Mr. Jim and Mrs. Sandy Cahoon, has been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and is still on a journey of healing. His latest imaging showed no growth in the cancer. To God be the glory. Lord, I reach out to you for your guidance. Please show me which way to turn. Calm my anxious thoughts, come speak into my mind. Strengthen me as I falter and feel weary. May I feel strength rising up within my heart. Bring clarity into my visions and dreams. I trust that you are with me, no matter where I go, or what I decide to do. You journey with me always. Amen. Cards and notes filled with prayers of encouragement and support can be sent to: **Mr. Michael Cahoon, C/O: Mr. Jim and Mrs. Sandy Cahoon, 1615 Beverly Lane, WI 53090.**
- We give thanks and praise that **Mr. Ben Barth**, husband of Ms. Heather Wolf, granddaughter of Mr. Roger and Mrs. Mary Rogge. recipient of a new heart and new lungs. Let us pray: Do not look forward to what may happen tomorrow; the same everlasting God who cares for you today will take care of you tomorrow and every day. Either God will shield you from suffering, or God will give you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace, then. Put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginations and say continually: "The Lord is my strength and my shield. My heart has trusted in God, and I am helped. God is not only with me but in me, and I in God. Correspondence can be mailed to: **Mr. Ben and Mrs. Heather Barth, 223 South 11th Ave., West Bend, WI 53095.**
- We remain in prayer and support for **Mrs. Ann Cording**. Thank you, Lord, for being there for me and allowing me to cry out to you in my times of need. It is amazing to me that the Lord of the Universe would take time to listen to me and to care about what I say. God, things are happening around me right now that I do not understand. Some of these things make me feel weak, helpless, and afraid. Even in this, I know that you are Lord. I know the situation is in Your hands, and I trust You. I beseech you for strength and wisdom that I would be able to endure this situation and handle it in a way that would bring glory to Your name. In Jesus' name. Amen. Cards and notes of love and care can be mailed to: **Mrs. Ann Cording, 1416 S. Silverbrook Drive, West Bend WI 53095.**
- **Mr. Chuck Rogge** is still on a journey of healing. He is grateful for the cards and notes of support. Please continue to flood the mailbox with love and support to: **Mr. Chuck and Mrs. Sue Rogge, 5011 Hwy. P, West Bend, WI 53095.**

*We celebrate and give thanks as FAUMC enters its 176th year of service,
Commitment, and Methodism in West Bend, Wisconsin.*

"Honoring Our Past, Celebrating Our Present, Anticipating Our Future"

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, I thank you for loving me. I thank you for sending your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to the world to save and to set me free. I trust in your power and grace that sustain and restore me. Loving Father, touch me now with your healing hands, for I believe that your will is for me to be well in mind, body, soul, and spirit. Cover me with the most precious blood of your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ from the top of my head to the soles of my feet. Cast anything that should not be in me. Root out any unhealthy and abnormal cells. Open any blocked arteries or veins and rebuild and replenish any damaged areas. Remove all inflammation and cleanse any infection by the power of Jesus' precious blood. Let the fire of your healing love pass through my entire body to heal and make new any diseased areas so that my body will function the way you created it to function. Also touch my mind and my emotion, even the deepest recesses of my heart. Saturate my entire being with your presence, love, joy, and peace and draw me ever closer to you every moment of my life. And dear God, fill me with your Holy Spirit and empower me to do your works so that my life will bring glory and honor to your holy name. I ask this in the precious name of my Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Your humble Pastor-servant leaders,

Pastor Clarissa & Bro. Martin