

October 8/10/11, 2020

Dear Children of God Living to Glorify Him:

I read that if an ant were the size of a human and have the same structure and weight ratio, it would be able to lift 4 ½ tons! Most of us have trouble lifting 100 pounds! Such a little creature with such amazing strength!

I also read that the human tongue weighs, on average, 2 ½ ounces -- about 1/6 of a pound. Yet, think how tremendously powerful it is! Words from human tongues can make people feel like a million bucks -- or they can start wars where millions die. Winston Churchill never lifted a rifle in WWII, but his speeches roused his fellow British to defend themselves with the tenacity of bulldogs against Nazi aggression. At the same time, unrelenting cruel words have caused people to give up all hope and take their own lives. And if the news media and politicians ever learned how to control their tongues, tweets, and texts, it would be a very much better world in which to live.

But **we** also need to do the same! Here's what the Lord says through James (3:3-12): ***"When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. ⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, ⁸ but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. ¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹² Can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water."***

James' truth here is this: **Tongue Trouble Indicates Heart Trouble**. (1) ***Our tongues can cause great hurt.*** (2) ***Jesus changes the heart that controls them.***

1

When do we have the greatest troubles in our relationships with others? We can usually trace it back to our tongues. *"I wish I wouldn't have said that!"* we lament. But tongue trouble indicates something deeper: heart trouble. No, I'm not talking about arrhythmia or congestive failure, but selfishness, conceit, pride, and anger. Our sinful hearts affect our actions and words. Someone called our tongues ***"dynamite in our mouths."*** There's an old Malaysian proverb that states: ***"However sharp the knife, sharper yet the tongue."***

The words that fly from an unrestrained tongue are often compared to **arrows**. Once we speak, we cannot take words back and once words hit, they can injure others terribly. When I grew up, I learned the old phrase: ***"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never harm me."*** Are you kidding? Things that mean kids said to me when I was small still ring deeply in my heart today. I have forgiven them, but it's almost impossible to forget their words.

Look how James describes little things with huge effects: (1) The bit in a horse's mouth. A little piece of steel and some rope can control a 1,000 lb animal. (2) A ship's rudder. A little plank, mostly invisible below the waterline, controls an immense ship filled with cargo and crew. (3) A spark. One little spark can cause a huge blaze that reduce 1000s of acres to smoldering stumps and homes to ashes. James is saying that this little 2 ½ ounce tongue can determine the course of our whole life and cause tremendous damage in the lives of others unless we control them.

Sometimes small things have huge effects. In the 1970s, MIT meteorologist Edward Lorenz presented a scientific paper entitled, *“Predictability: Does the Flap of a Butterfly’s Wing in Brazil Set Off a Tornado in Texas?”* According to the theory, the wing-flapping of an insect doesn’t actually cause a tornado, but it can possibly start a chain reaction leading to big changes in weather patterns affecting millions of lives.

2

So it is also with the tongue. Our words can have huge consequences in the course of our lives and the lives of others. Pastor Mark Jeske wrote in his commentary: ***“Controlling our mouths is not on the edges of Christian life; just one small detail among many other minor matters; but it is the key to controlling the whole self.”*** (*The People’s Bible Commentary* on James, NPH). What did mom used to say? ***“If you don’t have anything good to say, don’t say anything at all.”*** Such wisdom our mothers possess!

This little tongue, however, can also do great things! James says, ***“Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.”*** Why does he say this? Because what we say reflects on Jesus, whom we represent, and what comes from our mouths can actually save people from hell! He says it makes no sense to sing God’s praises in church and then scorch people with foul, angry words elsewhere. All that does is reflect badly on the Savior. Fig trees don’t grow olives. Christ-like hearts don’t bring forth devilish words. Our mouths can be used in such better ways.

There’s a set of questions I was taught to ask myself before allowing anything to come out of my mouth. I wish I could say I always ask them and say exactly the right thing, but I can’t. That’s why Jesus’ forgiving love is so important and such a relief. These are the questions: Before I speak, I need to ask myself: (1) Is it true? (If not, don’t say it.) (2) Is it kind? (If not, don’t say it.) (3) Is it necessary? (If not, maybe silence is best.) And (4) (which is really the most important question of all) Would Jesus approve? If we’d all stop and think before words leave our mouths, life would be so much better, Jesus would be honored, and the Savior would have to forgive us a lot less!

When we write essays, reports, sermons, etc., they go through *drafts*. There’s the first draft (rough draft); then a second, and sometimes a third and final draft. With each draft we refine our words, checking them over carefully, making sure they are appropriate. James is directing us here to do that also in our hearts and heads as we plan what we are going to say. Loose cannons can cause great destruction! On the other hand, tempered lips filled with grace can delight the hearts of God and his people. He says, ***“A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver”*** (Pr 25:11). Brothers and sisters, let’s let our tongues sparkle like gold and silver for Jesus!

Amen.