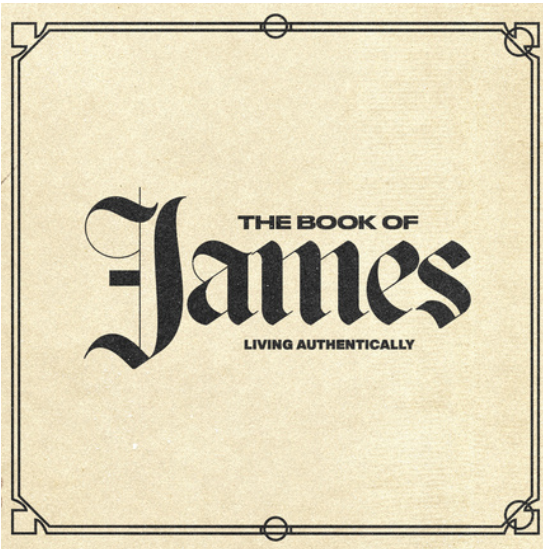


SERMON STUDY GUIDE



05.05.24 // Week 4 // “Your Words Have Power”



The world's landscape rapidly changed after the resurrection of Jesus. As God's work of redeeming people continued, communities were formed. But the truth is we are still messy even while we are redeemed. James writes with a bluntness and candor that is unique in the New Testament. But amidst the direct, proverbial nature, he speaks truths that still land with us 2,000 years later. Here we learn how to put feet to our faith and live lives congruent with our beliefs!

ICE BREAKER QUESTIONS

- What was the best speech you have ever heard and what did you like most about it?
- What's a compliment you've received that has stuck with you? What about it made it so memorable?

GOING DEEPER INTO THE MESSAGE

Let's read James 3:1-10

1 Not many should become teachers, my brothers, because you know that we will receive a stricter judgment. The more influential your leadership is, the more important this is. 2 For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is mature, able also to control the whole body. 3 Now if we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we direct their whole bodies. 4 And consider ships: Though very large and driven by fierce winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5 So too, though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts great things. Consider how a small fire sets ablaze a large forest. 6 And the tongue is a fire. The tongue, a world of unrighteousness, is placed among our members. It stains the whole body, sets the course of life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. 7 Every kind of animal, bird, reptile, and fish is tamed and has been tamed by humankind, 8 but no one can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With the tongue we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in God's likeness. 10 Blessing and cursing come out of the same mouth. My brothers and sisters, these things should not be this way.

Point 1 – My words have the power to bring life or death

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Although well intended, this children’s rhyme is not true. In an article entitled “Sticks and Stones,” David Julian reminds us that “sticks and stones hurt, but those wounds will heal with time. However, the scars inflicted by words may never heal. Like dropping a stone into water, the ripple effects can be felt long after the stone has sunk to the bottom and is forgotten.” Isn’t that so true? Words have the power to affect us long after they are spoken. For this reason, it’s vital that we heed the wisdom found in James 3:1-12.

James begins this section by warning those who take on the role of teaching others because they will be held to a higher standard (vs.1). The more people you lead or the more people you are responsible to nurture, the more in control of your tongue you must be.

Our children, our spouses, our neighbors, our co-workers, our employees, and our friends are watching and listening to what we say. They will follow your lead in how they communicate and by the example you set (verbal, written, email, social media, etc.). You can set a good example for others to follow, or a bad example. It’s up to you. Even if you are not in an official leadership role, how you communicate with others will determine how they communicate with you and around you. If your language is coarse, or you gossip, chances are really high that people will speak that way to you or around you. However, if your words are uplifting and encouraging, people will usually refrain from gossiping or coarse language around you.

James further illustrates the power of the tongue by comparing it to three small but instrumental things: a small bit in a horse's mouth (vs.3), a small rudder on a large ship (vs.4), and a small fire that sparks a forest fire (vs.5b-6). In each of these illustrations, he wants to show us that something small has the power to control something very large. Although small compared to the rest of our body, the tongue wields incredible power (vs.5a). The point of James' message is that our tongue is simply a tool that can either bring life or death. If we were to examine the words that we speak and the way that we say them, would our words be building up or tearing down?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How has your speech changed since you have become a follower of Jesus? In what ways do you still need God's help with your words? Or your tone?

- Why do you think James chose fire to illustrate the power of our tongue? Have you ever experienced someone "burn" you or someone you love with their words?

- What do you think James meant when he said that "no one can tame the tongue" in verse 8? How can God help us control the things that we say?

- What habits can you implement to ensure having more control over your tongue? Who can you ask to be an accountability partner for you in this?

Let's read James 3:11-12

11 Does a spring pour out sweet and bitter water from the same opening? 12 Can a fig tree produce olives, my brothers and sisters, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a saltwater spring yield fresh water.

Point 2 – My words reveal where my heart is

Jesus says in Matthew 12:33-34, CSB, “Either make the tree good and its fruit will be good or make the tree bad, and its fruit will be bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you speak good things when you are evil? For the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart.” What is in our hearts will naturally flow out of our lips. If you don't like what is coming out of your mouth, it would be a good time to check what's going on in your heart.

Knowing the source of your words before you speak them can save you and those around you from much heartache. If we are led by the Holy Spirit, there will never be a time when we speak out in anger and don't regret the words that come from our lips. This is why David says in Psalm 141:3, CSB “*Lord, set up a guard for my mouth; keep watch at the door of my lips.*”

When we speak, we can use the Ephesians 4:29 test:

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

“Do not let any unwholesome speech come out of your mouths...”

Is it appropriate? Appropriate for the setting you're in and the people you are around? Are my words offensive? Obnoxious? Unwholesome?

...but only what is helpful for building others up...

Is it encouraging? Will speaking up be beneficial for the other person, or will it just shame them or make them feel bad? You can never go wrong with encouragement.

...according to their needs...

Does it meet the recipient's needs? Or does it just benefit me? Is it a way for me to get what I want? Am I just venting my emotions, and I feel better, but now the other person feels horrible?

...that it will benefit those who listen.

Will it help them? Are they in a position to hear from you right now, or are they clouded by emotion? Do you have the relational capital to speak truth to them, or will they dismiss your advice? Are you aware of who else is listening? Sometimes, your kids or your coworkers are around you and are listening to everything you do.

