Sermon Notes

THE TONGUE (1):
SO SMALL YET SO POWERFUL TO INFLUENCE LIFE
James 3:1-5a

Introduction
• Words are not insignificant.
• Proverbs 18:21a—“Death and life are in the power of the tongue.”
• The first actual sin after the fall was a sin of speech (Genesis 3:12).
• The depravity of all mankind (Romans 3:13,14).
• The cause of alienation from the presence of the holy God (Isaiah 6:5).

I. Preface: The tongue is a mark of our spiritual maturity (verses 1 and 2).
• The big responsibility of teachers and the dangerous character of the instrument (the tongue) they have to use.
• “Teachers” or “Master” may mean formal or informal teachers.
• In the early church the teachers were of first rate importance (Acts 13:1; 1 Cor 12:28).
• There were irresponsible teachers in the early Church:
  − Teachers who do not live out the truth they taught and brought dishonour on the faith they represented (Romans 2:17-29).
  − Teachers who tried to teach before they knew anything (1 Timothy 1:6,7).
  − Teachers who pandered to the false desires of the crowd who have “itching ears” (2 Timothy 4:3).
• God wants us to teach His Word and may use people with little knowledge:
  − Moses’ desire for all the Lord’s people were prophets (Num 11:26-29).
  − Jesus commands us to make disciples of all nations and to teach them (Matt. 28:19–20).
  − The writer of Hebrews rebukes his readers for not being teachers after a period of training (5:12).
  − Paul’s insistence to preach the gospel (1 Cor 9:16).
• We all, teachers and non-teachers alike, stumble in many ways.
• But severer divine judgment for those who teach.
• Conclusion: It is important for teachers to be spiritually matured men and that is shown by how they control their tongue.
• Why is controlling the tongue so important? Two illustrations follow.
II. The tongue has great power to control our life (verses 3 and 4).

- The control of the tongue is more than an evidence of spiritual maturity; it is the means of it.
- The horse illustration:
  - The horse has power to move by itself, but it needs a bit to be put into its mouth to control its tongue so that its motions and activities can be controlled into something useful for others.
  - The bit is only an instrument. The one who actually controls the horse is the man.
  - Like the horse, man cannot control himself as he cannot control his tongue (verse 8). God must set the goal and purpose for man’s life.
- The ship illustration:
  - Contrast: Horse can move by itself. Ship moves by external power (the wind).
  - Similarity: Small (bit and rudder) versus large (horse and ship). Bit and rudder do not move the horse and ship, respectively. To be useful, it must be controlled by man.
- So how are we to control the powerful forces within us that drive us into sin?
- James’ surprised answer is: Do we control our tongue?
- The tongue is key factor in consistent living in our varying circumstances.
- The “tongue,” used by James, does not only mean actual audible speech (it is only a small percentage of the use of the tongue). It includes words used in our thoughts, plan, imagination, resentful heart, etc. Mat. 12:34, “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”

III. Conclusion

- The tongue “boasts of great things.” Those can be great evils or great purposes according to God’s will.
- The tongue is a double edged sword (Proverbs 10:11; Proverbs 12:18).
- Let us resolve, by God’s grace, to be more careful over our tongues, and more particular about our use of them.
- Let us pray daily that our “speech always be gracious” (Col 4:6); and as with David pray, “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!” (Psa 141:3).

TO BE CONTINUED