

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