

**Today**, I want to share about a problem we all struggle with and one we need to deal with on a constant basis.

## Tackling the Tongue before we Trip

James 3:1-12

Isn't it true that nothing is opened more at the wrong time, in the wrong way, than our mouths? Its like the story of the stock boy at the grocery store. This lady asked him, "Can I buy a half a head of lettuce?" So the stock boy walks back to the manager to ask but, he didn't realize the lady was following right behind him. He found the manager said to him, "You're not going to believe this, but there's an old bag out there who wants to buy half a head of lettuce." Well lo and behold, he turned around and saw the lady standing there so he quickly said to the manager, "And this fine lady would like to buy the other half."

His tongue about tripped him up didn't it? Did you ever notice that when you go to the doctor and say, I'm not feeling good the first thing he says is "Stick out your tongue." Why, because our tongue reveals what's going on inside of us, not just physically but spiritually. James is basically saying in 3:1-12 that we need to tackle the tongue before we trip and get us and/or others in trouble.

I . Why must I watch what I say?

It is the little things we say that often cause the biggest fires. One word of gossip, one lie, one insinuation, one harsh criticism and the fire can begin. And human hearts, dry from a lack of genuine love, then catch fire, and that fire spreads from heart to heart across a community and in turn it leaves behind it, charred and burned reputations, broken hearts and broken homes. And the damage can be so severe and very extensive and usually irreversible!

The **story is told about** A young man, ridden with guilt during the Middle Ages, who went to a monk, and said, "I've sinned by telling slanderous statements about someone in town. What should I do now?"

The monk said, "First I want you to put a feather on the doorstep of every person to whom you have spoken in town." The young man followed the monk's instructions. When he was finished he returned to the monk to see what he was to do next.

The monk said, "Now, go back and pick up all the feathers." The young man replied, "That's impossible! By now the wind will have blown them all over town." Well, seizing the moment, the monk replied, "So has your slanderous word become impossible to retrieve."

I read where a dead woman was pulled from a river around Los Angeles. She had committed suicide. They searched her for identification but could not find any. In fact there was nothing on her person except one single piece of paper.

And on that scrap of paper there were two words. The words were, "They Said." Nobody knew or could find out who said them or what they said, but those words, whatever they were, *spoken as they were*, were as deadly as a smoking revolver or a twelve-inch knife.

USA Today once reported a story when CBS released The Karen Carpenter Story.

The story told how Karen died unexpectedly of heart failure at age 32 brought on by years of self abuse from the eating disorder Anorexia Nervosa. The reporter asked the question, "What brought on Karen's fatal obsession with weight control?" It seems a reviewer once called her, "Richard's chubby sister".

Contrary to popular opinion, words do mean something and words are powerful. When sparks fly, firestorms erupt and emotional infernos sweep through relationships, families, churches and communities.

## II. Three things about the tongue

### A. My tongue directs where I go

It has tremendous influence and control over my life. Where are you headed in life? Where are you going to be ten years from now? Look at what your conversations are about today and you can see pretty clearly where you will be in ten years

If your conversation is only about pleasure, in ten years you will still be unfulfilled. If your conversation is only about money, ten years later you will still never have enough. If your conversation is only about you, ten years from now you will still be only worrying about yourself. However if your conversation is only about servant hood and love then in ten years you will be a loving servant to others

We shape our words through our thinking and then our words shape us for our future thinking and direction. James uses the picture of a ship. And speaking of Ships: V 4 he says *"... they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go."*

**Applied to us**, our tongue and its conversation is the steering wheel of our life. It is the guidance system. If we don't like the way we're headed right now, just change the way we talk. Many people think, if the tongue has such influence maybe it's best to say very little or nothing at all.

A guy joined the Trapist monastery. For three years he was given a probation period where he was not to speak at all, but at the end of each year he could say two words. The first year at the end he said, "Bed hard."  
At end of the second year he said, "Food cold."  
At the end of the third year he's about had it. He comes in and says, "I quit".  
The head priest says, "That doesn't surprise me. All you've done is complain since you got here."  
James says my tongue directs where I go. So I've got to learn to control it.

### B . My tongue can destroy everything I have

It only takes a spark to get a fire going. I read where in 1983 in Australia, one fire overnight destroyed 600 miles of land, villages, livestock. All from a single match.

James says, your tongue can destroy like that. You can loose it all. One careless camper can destroy an entire national forest overnight. A careless word can destroy a life overnight. Actually maybe even thousands of lives.

Why do you think they call them "Celebrity Roasts"? Because you can burn people with what you say. You see, Fire and words under control can give tremendous warmth and light. Fire and words out of control can be devastating. It can destroy miles and miles of homes and lands and peoples.

It could also be said this way: When you're tempted to set a match to your brother's reputation with fiery words, stop! Ask God to help you speak words that build up instead of destroy. Don't be a verbal arsonist. Like fire, words can either burn or warm.

Proverbs 18:20 *"You have to live with the consequences of everything you say."*

Proverbs 21:23 *"If you want to stay out of trouble be careful what you say!"*

### C. My tongue displays who I am

It reveals my real character. It tells what's really inside of me. James points out how inconsistent we are in our speech. V 9,10 reminds us *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!*

Lets think about it this way: We come to church on Sunday and the highest use of your mouth is to use it praising God. So we sing praises to the Lord. Then we walk out,

get into the car and on the way home we argue about where we're going to eat lunch. One minute we're saying, "Praise the Lord", the next we're saying, "Shut up!" A real Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. One minute we're praising God and the next we're putting down other people made in God's image. Things like You good for nothing OR You'll never amount to nothing OR You're just like ..."

Now you've heard this excuse? Someone says something really mean or hurtful and they say, "I don't know what got into me. Or we will say, It's not like me to say that. I don't know why I said that. It's totally out of character. I didn't really mean it." James would say, No, really it's just like you. You meant it ***because it's a natural law: what comes out of the well is what is inside of it.***

If we've got a problem with our tongue, it's much more serious than we think. Let's look at some examples

- ◆ A person with a harsh tongue has an angry heart.
- ◆ A person with a negative tongue has a fearful heart.
- ◆ A person with an overactive tongue has an unsettled heart.
- ◆ A person with a boasting tongue has an insecure heart.
- ◆ A person with a filthy tongue has an impure heart. A person who is critical all the time has a bitter heart.
- ◆ A person who is always encouraging has a happy heart.
- ◆ A person who speaks gently has a loving heart.
- ◆ A person who speaks truthfully has an honest heart.

III. What the solution to the problem is. First,

A. Get a new heart

Isn't it true that painting the outside of the pump doesn't make any difference if there is poison in the well. We can change the outside externals, We can turn over a new leaf, ***but what we really need is a new life.*** What we need is a fresh start. We need to let go of all the past and be born again and start over. We need to get a new heart. How do I get a new heart? Read on a bit further and you will see just how to go about it

B. Ask God for help every day.

Psalm 141:3 says *"Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips."*

Every day we need to say "God, put a muzzle on my mouth. Guard my lips. Don't let me be critical today. Don't let me be judgmental. Don't let me say things off the cuff and then I regret." J. Sidlow Baxter says: "The proof that God's Spirit is in your life is not that you speak in an unknown tongue, but that you control the tongue you do know."

Getting into God's word is a part of asking God for help. Computer statement is: Garbage in, garbage out. In other words, What goes into your mind, goes into your heart. And what goes into your heart, comes out of your mouth. So fill your mind with the word of God Phil 4:8 gives us these instructions: *In conclusion, my friends, fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honorable.*

### C. Think before you speak

Engage your mind before you put your mouth in gear. James 1:19 *"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."*

First be quick to listen and then slow to speak. Logically, If we're quick to listen we will be slow to speak. If we're slow to speak, then we will be slow to become angry. And if slow to anger then slower to trip over the tongue Right??

To illustrate and assist us in our thinking about tongue control Hester Mundis, humorously offers these Preventive tactics -- or **things you should never say once, without thinking twice:**

- It's no trouble at all.
- I love dogs.
- We have plenty of room.
- Call me any time.
- Is there anything I can do?
- My husband is a doctor/lawyer/accountant.
- I'll try anything once.
- Of course, bring the kids.
- Why don't you stay for dinner?
- If worst comes to worst, you can use mine.
- Don't worry -- there's more where that came from.
- Over my dead body, you will!

We are often tripped up by our tongues because we failed tackle the issues surrounding it. But lets not be like some folks who never do learn to control their tongue. Lets not have these words put on our tombstones as this one I read about where it said,

***"Here lies Arabella Young, who on the 24th of May began to hold her tongue."***

Instead, if we will tackle this issue of the tongue before it trips us up, we can enjoy more of the journey and help others to enjoy theirs also.

In closing you might just want to use your tongue in a worthwhile project. You can use it to help you get to heaven. Just read a few more lines then open your mouth and pray that prayer. You will have used your tongue before you tripped up eternally. You will be glad you did.

Realize you are a sinner Romans 3:23

Understand that the payday for sin is death or eternal conscious separation from God.  
Romans 6:23a

Know that there is a way of escape for you. Romans 6:23b and John 1:12

Desire to escape and pray this or a similar prayer.

"Dear God, I know I am a sinner. I am truly sorry for my sins, and I confess them all to You [name them]. Lord Jesus, forgive all my sins and come into my heart as my Saviour and Lord. I receive You right now. Help me from this time forward to live for You. Thank You for hearing and answering my prayer. In Jesus' name. Amen."

On the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ I became a Christian by inviting Jesus Christ into my life to forgive my sin.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have further questions or have chosen to do this, be sure to let us know so we can help you, pray for you and encourage you in your new life.

You can reach us at [lapeerchurch@gmail.com](mailto:lapeerchurch@gmail.com) Subject line: (Salvation)