

Response to the Reading - James 3:1–12
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Proverbs 18:21 puts it this way: "*The tongue has the power of life and death...*"

The stakes are high. Our words can either speak life, or our words can speak death. Our tongues can build others up, or they can tear them down. Parents have devastated their children by repeated blasts..... Children have exploded at their parents with volleys that have leveled the family like a bomb.

Listen to what is written in the first chapter of James letter: "*You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; (19) "If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, ...their religion is worthless." (26)*

A professor was lecturing to his English class one day. "In English," he said, "A double negative forms a positive. In some languages, though, such as Russian, a double negative is still a negative. However, there is no language wherein a double positive can form a negative." A voice from the back of the room piped up, "Yeah, right." Have we ever answered anyone in a smart alec manner? Did we make a sarcastic remark to someone with the idea of perhaps putting them down?

If so, then we have stumbled. We have sinned with our speaking and this may be the easiest and quickest way we all sin!

Notice how James connects sins of the tongue with sins of the body. He does this because our words usually lead to corresponding deeds. The tongue can express or repress; offend or befriend; affirm or alienate; build or belittle; comfort or criticize; delight or destroy. It has been said... that great minds discuss ideas,... average minds discuss events, and small minds.... discuss people. The church that James is writing to was full of small-minded people who gossiped about each other and tore one another apart with their tongues.

In our reading James uses a number of different word pictures of the tongue to help us see how small, yet how powerful it is: Four of them are: A bit, A rudder, A fire & A spring.

The first metaphor is **the bit** that is put into a horse's mouth by its owner or its trainer. This relatively small piece of metal can control a very powerful animal,

directing the horse to the right.....to the left..... or to stop. When the bit is pulled back by the rider, it presses against the horse's tongue causing it to stop.

James also compares the tongue to a **rudder** on a boat. Just as a small rudder can control the direction of a large ship.... so too, the tongue can control our lives.

The bit controls the wild nature of a horse; the rudder must fight the winds and currents that would drive the ship off course. Both the bit and the rudder must be under the control of a strong hand.

After speaking to the power of a bit, and the power of a small rudder, James goes on to use the image of **fire**. James is pretty strong here as he tells us our tongues are set on fire by hell itself. Like a careless match thrown on dry wood, so to our words can consume people. When sparks fly in our homes, firestorms can erupt creating a blazing inferno that leaves deep scars and lasting pain.

The singer Karen Carpenter died of heart failure at the age of 32 brought on by years of fighting an eating disorder, afterwards It came to light her fatal obsession with her weight was triggered by a single reviewer's comment. When referring to Karen, this person called her "Richard Carpenter'schubby sister." Just a small word can be so very devastating. While I am sure there were other factors attributing to Karen Carpenter's struggles, this one comment unleashed a flurry of self-doubt.

Remember the saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me?" I don't know who came up with that line but we all know it is simply not true. Words can break our hearts. Words can break our spirits. Broken bones can heal with time, but a broken spirit caused by harmful words is not so quickly repaired.

How many people have we hurt with our word? Are our tongues too quick to criticize? Do our words build up or do they tear down?

James now draws another word picture to help us see that it should be impossible for us to both bless and blast out of the same mouth. He asks this penetrating question "*Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?*" James 3:11

James is saying that just as it is impossible for a spring to have both sweet and sour water, So too it is inconceivable for the tongue of a mature believer to send

forth both righteousness and rumors; blessing and blasting, compliments and cursing. James is calling us to be consistent. What comes out of our mouths is a reflection of what is in our hearts.

In Rotary, we open every meeting with what we call the 4-way test. Herbert J. Taylor, a Chicago businessman, developed the test during the Great Depression as a moral foundation to revive the near-bankrupt Club Aluminum Company of Chicago. They measured everything they said or did by this 4-way test, even their advertising. In 1932, when the test was implemented, the company owed more than their total assets. 20 years later, they had a net worth of millions. The test worked in difficult times, and it's a good test for you and me in difficult times, as well. Here it is.

Of the things we think, say or do: 1st, is it the TRUTH; 2nd, is it FAIR to all concerned; 3rd, will it build GOODWILL and better FRIENDSHIPS; and 4th, will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned. We must tell the truth, but we must also make sure that our words are fair and beneficial to all concerned.

So what can we do? here are some actions that will help us; **Think First**. Using the acronym.... THINK, T-H-I-N-K.....try to ask these 5 questions before we speak:

Is it True? Remember this rule about gossip: "The more interesting it is, the more likely it is to be false." "T" is it true!

Is it Helpful? Will our words help bring about a solution, a resolution to the problem? "H" is it Helpful.

Is it Inspiring? Will our words build up or will they tear down? "I" are our Words inspiring?

Is it Necessary? Do we have to say anything at all? "N" is the comment really Necessary?

Is it Kind? Are our words based on a heart that truly cares for others? Is our heart filled with Kindness? "K" Is it Kind.

THINK.... "T" Is it True? - "H" Is it Helpful? - "I" Is it Inspiring? - "N" Is it Necessary? -"K" Is it Kind?

T-H-I-N-K..... before you speak.

Abraham Lincoln said, "It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt."

President Calvin Coolidge said, "I have never been hurt by anything I did not say."

I read about a woman who had a very serious throat condition. The doctor told her that her vocal cords needed total rest she was forbidden to talk for Six months! With a husband and 6 children, this seemed impossible, but she did as the doctor instructed. When she needed the kids she blew a whistle. Whenever she needed to communicate she wrote it out on pads of paper. After six months, her voice returned. When asked what it was like to communicate only in writing, she said this: **"You'd be surprised how many notes I crumpled up and threw into the trash before I gave them to anyone.** Seeing my words before anyone heard them had an effect that I do not think I can ever forget." While we might not be able to stop speaking for six months, we can learn to talk just a little

The Scriptures constantly remind us to encourage one another with our words. Someone once said we shouldn't complain about our partner's faults because if it weren't for those faults.... they could have married someone so much better! ☺

If we want to be a dispenser of life words we need to be right with God. Paul tells us how to be right with God: *"If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."* Romans 10:9-10:

Beloved Choose life....Speak life.

Is it True? - Is it Helpful? - Is it Inspiring? - Is it Necessary? - Is it Kind?

It is time to Think... It is time To speak Life!! Amen and Amen.