

Taming the Tongue

James 3:1-12

Jas 3:1 Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. Jas 3:2 We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. Jas 3:3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Jas 3:4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Jas 3:5 Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. Jas 3:6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. Jas 3:7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, Jas 3:8 but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. Jas 3:9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Jas 3:10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. Jas 3:11 Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? Jas 3:12 My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. _

In the early part of the 20 century

- there were 2 figures in economic that sparked a debate that still rages on today
- one was the brit called John maynard Keynes,
- the other a hungarien called Fredrick Hayek.
- Basically Keynes believed that the economy Is one living beast, all connected AND the government can be used to control it, Debt, stimulus
- Hayek believed that Gov can only cause trouble, free econ, smaller gov
- The main problem Hayek had was that Keynes was and amazing speaker
- He was 6-6 funny, extreamly intelegent , "could never dim his lights"
- His power to speak basically wiped out Hayeks arguments
- Today we have big government, GDP, national debt, stimulus, interest rate
- Largely because of the power Keynes had to use words to win people over
- If it were reversed... Hayek was the better speaker... world be different
- The ability to use ones tongue has the power to alter the course of history
- Either good or bad

James in his book of only 5 chapters

- Devotes most of this chapter to taming the toungue

- Which in one sense seems like a pretty insignificant topic..
- Can't he just make his point in a few lines? speak nice to people?
- Well this topic is bigger and more important that it might first appear.
- Because words have real power

V3-5

- Something small can influence something much larger
- James uses 3 analogies to illustrate this point
- A bit in a horse's mouth.....
- A rudder on a ship.....
- A spark starting a great fire.....

Horses

- They have been the back bone of human transport and agriculture for 1000's years
- A horse can weight from 400kg – 1000kg
- They are intelligent and powerful animals
- BUT a little bit of metal in their mouth can control the animal

The queen mary 2

- 350m long, weights 150,000 tons, can house nearly 4000 people
- And by the small rudder, comparatively small, the whole ship can be turned

And we in Australia know all to well

- It takes only a small spark in dry grass to turn a whole forest to ash

All of these stories are of the power of something small to change something large

- And how there is a potential for great destruction
- I heard this story the other day about a man that had recently passed
- Back in the 70's he bought a boat from a guy in manly, but he lived up in Pittwater
- The day he when to pick it up there was big swell out to see
- Even the harbor was really choppy
- He wanted to drive it out of the heads and up the coast
- They convinced him it was a bad idea, to get a trailer load it at the spit
- As he was driving it to the spit the motor conked out, he was adrift
- With the waves lapping the boat towards the rocks under the bridge
- He eventually has to jump out, get helped to shore
- and watches as his new boat slowly smashes itself to pieces on the rocks
- that was the first boat he owned for a total of 3 hours.. before it sunk
- made the manly daily tho... so silver lining

- something small, like losing power, or the rudder can lead to destruction

James says that in this life there is little more powerful than a word

- Wars have been started over careless words, marriages destroyed, lives lost
- The words we say, how we say them, when we say them have great power
- Here is the point... if in life there is one skill to learn
- It is how to tame the tongue,
- how to control our words and not let them control us
- We need to be careful with our words,
 - o considerate with our conversations
- Yet the tongue is not a beast that is easily tamed

V7-8

- At times the wrong words will fly out of our mouths
- Its going to happen one way or another
- I am an extrovert and when I speak, often im hearing it for the first time with everyone else
- Often I speak as im thinking, not thinking then speaking
- And I don't know about you but every so often I say something that comes out
 - o Harsh or rude or bluntly, unintentionally
 - o And as I am saying it im immediately regretting it, in real time
 - o "do u like this coat?" "hmmm makes u look frumpy....."
- If you speak you will say the wrong thing.
- And for a lot of us it will happen regularly
- Particularly for the extroverts amongst us.

But the thing is what we do next

- When we say the wrong thing, hurt some one, say something harsh or unloving
- ...all we can do is own up to it and apologise for it
- Part of taming the tongue is to own up to making mistakes...
- The church has to be a place where we are open and honest about offending some one
- And that we might be quick to apologise when we say something careless
- Quick to admit wrong doing

But as James is writing this passage he is particularly thinking about leadership

- People who are teachers or leaders over others
- V1
- As he writes this passage he is particularly thinking about people in authority over others..
- And if you think of it in this light the imagery has a new meaning

- V2 if ur Perfect with speech you can keep the whole body in check “body of Christ”
- As a man steers a horse with a bite and a ship with a rudder
- So does a leader steer their people with their tongue.
- All his warnings about the tongue are aimed particularly at those who take on roles of leadership

James doesn't offer much advice in this passage

- He doesn't give us a list of what to do or how to do it, when it comes to leading
- But he does say this V11
- Salt water when drunk in large amount is poison.. it will kill you.
- From one spring you cant have both good water and bad water
- Meaning you cant be saying nice positive good things one minutes
- Then say unkind mean spirited things the next.
- But particularly in Leadership you should be consistent in what you say.
- If there is a problem name it openly, kindly and in love
- Saying one thing one moment and the opposite thing the next lacks integrity
- Leaders who lack integrity, have followers who lack integrity.

The other point james is making is:..... what is bad will always corrupt what is good

- If you have fresh water and pour in salt water, it becomes salt water,
- Like if you have a glass of coke and stir in a spoon of sewerage.
- The coke is ruined, it is tainted
- But if you get a spoon of coke, put in into a glass of sewerage.. its still sewerage.

What is bad can corrupt what is good, and once its gone bad its very hard to make good again.

- So it is with our words and what we say