

TAMING THE TONGUE James 3:1-12

1. The biter bit v.1

Spare a thought for all of us who teach others what to do and how they should behave! We're specially responsible to make our lifestyle match our words.

2. We all go wrong v.2

Sam, my butcher, accused Christians of thinking they are better than anyone else. Shouldn't we be the ones who are most ready to admit that we are sinners? In an article called 'The Gospel of Falling Down', the writer commented on the fact that we live in a culture of success – a society not of class divisions but of successes and failures. Jesus spent his time making friends with failures and those who were not counted successes in the world's terms. But is the church looking for 'success' according to the world's definition? (eg numbers, impressive programme). Are we willing as individuals and as a church to admit to failure or mistaken action?

3. My tongue is my problem v.2

James goes back to a favourite topic. More often than not, it's what I say that is the cause of doing wrong things. He gives us seven pictures to help us understand power of words and importance of dealing with our tongues.

First - my tongue controls my whole life:

1) The horse's bit v.3

A small thing like a bit controls a strong, headstrong animal – spurs it on or holds it back. Controlling my tongue is the key to controlling my actions.

NB What I say includes what I say to myself. We talk non-stop inside ourselves. We stir up our own feelings by our inner dialogue. Control needed there, because it affects what we say and do to others..

2) The ship's rudder v.4

A similar picture – a small thing controls a large ship – James adds: 'Driven by strong winds' How do we control our tongues when we are buffeted by

circumstances? In all his troubles, Job did not sin in what he said. **Job 2:10**

I need a safe pair of hands to control the horse and to pilot the ship. We need to give God's Holy Spirit the reins and the rudder

Three pictures to warn us of the tongue's effects:

(i) The forest fire - UNSTOPPABLE in its effects v.5-6

Started by a picnic fire , a discarded match or a spark, or deliberately started.
NB Words can spread like a fire to good effect.

William Wilberforce – 200 years since slave trade abolished. MP asked by a woman to use his power to end slave trade. Lord Grenville argued in the Lords, Wilberforce in the Commons. Thomas Buxton carried it one stage further – arguing for emancipation of slaves. Small spark spread to good effect.

Bad effect – In *Coronation Street*, Haley wrongly accused Becky but no one believed her when she tried to stop the rumours she had begun.

(ii) Wild animals UNPREDICTABLE v. 7

Is James optimistic in thinking they can be tamed? Too often apparently tame wild animals suddenly revert to type and attack their trainer or owner. Just as I think I have my tongue under control, it breaks out. Counting to ten or promising to go for a week without saying anything just won't work! Psalmist tried it – **Psalm 39: 1-3** The longer we hold our tongue, the worse the outburst can be when it comes!

When we think we've got our tongue under control we're most at risk.

(iii) Spring/Well INCONSISTENT v. 10-11

Well water should be fresh and drinkable at all times. but if something bitter gets into the well (put there by an enemy?) it will completely ruin the fresh, sweet water. The bitterness will win. There's no depending on the tongue. Praise and cursing mix – lovely prayers to God but I still badmouth another person, made in God's image. **1 John 4:20-21**

The Heart of the matter – 2 IMPOSSIBLES

1. Fruit tree bearing the wrong fruit v.12

2. A natural spring not true to its source v.12

What I **say** is the product of the person I **am** inside. (Some of us are good at putting on a nice front, but eventually our true character will out)

Jesus gave the warning: Matt. 12: 33-37; Luke 6:44-45. I need the cleansing of Christ to deal with the enemy within. I need the Holy Spirit to control me and to remake me. Don't believe 5-step methods, know-how books or instant change - It takes a life-time of my perseverance and prayer and the work of God's Spirit within me. Take the advice of **Proverbs 4:23-24**