

Coram Deo
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi
Deo Volente
Sermon Preach at Stouffville United
By the Rev. Capt. Dr. John S. Niles MSM CD

“Bite Your Tongue”

May 26, 2024

James 3:1-18

Have you ever said anything you later regretted? If you have lived very long at all, that only answer would have to be yes. As we think about saying the wrong things let me share with you a couple of things *not* to say to a police officer.

- 1). Sorry, officer, I didn't realize my radar detector wasn't plugged in!
- 2). Hey, you must've been doing about 150 km to keep us with me. Good job!
- 3). You're not gonna check the trunk, are you?
- 4). Gee officer! That's terrific. The officer who stopped me 2 miles back gave me a warning, too!

Someone once said, "We should remember that the tongue is in a wet place and can slip easily." God certainly knew what he was doing when he put our tongues in a cage behind our teeth, walled in by our mouths.

The story is told of Franklin Roosevelt, who often endured long receiving lines at the White House. He complained that no one really paid any attention to what was said. One day, during a reception, he decided to try an experiment. To each person who passed down the line and shook his hand, he murmured, "I murdered my grandmother this morning." The guests responded with phrases like, "Marvelous! Keep up the good work. We are proud of you. God bless you, sir." It was not till the end of the line, while greeting the ambassador from Bolivia, that his words were actually heard. Without pause, the ambassador leaned over and whispered, "I'm sure she had it coming."

I

We need to be careful how we use our words - *by considering the cost*. Most people seriously underestimate the power of the tongue. It has the power to *control* our lives. James gives us the examples of horses and ships. Look at verses 3-4:

3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. 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. James is telling us that something small can steer something large. Compared to the size of a horse, bit is relatively small. Likewise, compared to the size of a ship, a rudder is relatively small. But both steer and direct something much larger.

In much the same way our tongues direct our lives. They control the direction in which we are traveling. And so, in a very real way, they control our lives. That's power! Our words have a tremendous impact both on ourselves and on others. They can encourage or discourage, heal, or hurt. Someone coined the saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Whoever said that could never have been more wrong. Broken bones heal much quicker than the wounds left by an out-of-control tongue. I know people to this day, and there may those sitting in this room this morning, who are still suffering from the aftermath of a tongue lashing. Whoever said, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" didn't know what they were talking about

Bones heal, but wounds from words often last a lifetime and can redirect a life for the worse. That is because the neuroplasticity of the brain does not register past or present. So, something that happened 20 years ago that was unresolved and then remembered today, the brain and body experiences through the chemical release that it happened now, not just in the past. The words of others have had a powerful impact upon our lives. Karen Carpenter died unexpectedly of heart failure at age 32 brought on by years of self-abuse from the eating disorder Anorexia Nervosa. Later CBS released a program called The Karen Carpenter Story. USA Today, commenting on an that release asked, "But what brought on Karen's fatal obsession with weight control? It seems a reviewer once called her "Richard's chubby sister." Could it be true that a single comment could impact someone's life? [OBJ]

Some people can tell you that the comments of a teacher, or friend, or significant individual changed the very course of their lives. The tongue has the power to control and direct our lives.

Another thing about the tongue — it has the power to corrupt our lives. Look at verses 5a-6:

Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 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. 9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. 11 Can both fresh water and saltwater flow from the same spring? 12 My brothers, can a fig tree bear olive, or a grapevine bear fig? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

The tongue reveals what is in our hearts. Doesn't it bother you that we can be praising God right now and in less than an hour we can be cursing the driver who just cut in front of us? It should. We should listen carefully to ourselves and then we should determine to do something about what we hear. [OBJ]

II

James is saying we need to be careful how we are using our words -considering the cost and secondly, seeking wisdom by **considering its benefits**. Throughout the first 12 verses of James 3, we hear him workout the cost/benefit analysis. ⁹ *With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness.* ¹⁰ *Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be....* ¹³ *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.* ¹⁴ *But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.* ¹⁵ *Such "wisdom" does not come down from*

heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

Four worms were placed into four separate JARS. The first worm was put into a container of alcohol. The second worm was put into a container of cigarette smoke. The third worm was put into a container of chocolate syrup. The fourth worm was put into a container of good clean soil.

At the conclusion of his lesson, the minister reported the following results: The first worm in alcohol—dead. The second worm in cigarette smoke—dead. Third worm in chocolate syrup—dead. Fourth worm in good clean soil—alive.

So the minister asked the congregation, “What can you learn from this demonstration?” A little old lady in the back quickly raised her hand and said, “As long as you drink, smoke, and eat chocolate, you won’t have worms!”

That wasn’t it. And nor was James just saying bite your tongue. He was saying be a blessing to yourself and others, not a curse.

III

James is saying we need to be sensible in how we are using our words -considering the cost and secondly, seeking wisdom by considering its benefits and thirdly, **observing the fruit.** ¹⁷ *But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.* ¹⁸ *Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.*

A newly appointed minister was contacted by the local funeral director to hold a graveside committal service at a small country cemetery in on the outskirts of town. There was to be no funeral, just the committal, because sadly, the deceased had no family or friends left. The minister started out early to the cemetery but lost his way on the long back roads. After backtracking many miles, he finally arrived, a half-hour late. The hearse was nowhere in sight, and the workmen were relaxing under a near-by tree, eating their lunch. The minister went to the open grave and found that the vault lid was already in place. He took out his book and read the service of committal.

As he returned to his car, one of the workmen paused between bites and said, "Think we should have told him that’s a septic tank?”

James said, remember we all stumble, we all make mistakes, but the wisdom from heaven is considerate, peace-loving, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

In other words, if you don’t like what you are reaping, you better change what you have been sowing. You think about that. Amen

