"FAITH WITH BOOTS ON"

BIG IDEA . . . Part 8: Taming Our Powerful Tongue (James 3:1-12)

INTRO: James has left us bruised and bleeding, yet blessed. In last paragraph, he spoke about faith and works. Now, he addresses faith and WORDS. *Can you name the muscle in our body that receives more exercise but has less control than any other?* Medically, it is a two-ounce slab of muscle, mucous membrane, and nerves that enables us to chew, taste, swallow, and articulate words. We know this versatile lump as the tongue. This is the third time he has brought up this issue (1:19, 26; 2:12). He says more about our tongue and speech than any NT writer – something in each chapter. *James warns his audience that taming the tongue is essential in our spiritual development.* WORDS MATTER!

ILLUS: Stats on average American . . . *We must learn the skill of taming their tongue to mature as a believer.*

Dr. James tells us to stick out our tongue, which is often a good indicator of our condition. *I want us to realize that a problem of the tongue reveals a problem of the heart in need of immediate correction.* In this very convicting passage, James describes the powerful influence of our tongue in four ways:

I. OUR TONGUE HAS POWER TO *DECLARE* (vv. 1-2)

A. (v. 1) Our tongue is an *awesome influence*. James warns them not to assume this important role too quickly. Teachers are responsible to rightly divide the Scriptures. They are in the word business and *will be judged more strictly* (Matt. 12:34-37; Lk. 12:2-3).

B. (v. 2) Our tongue is an *accurate indicator* of maturity. Though we are all sinners and stumble, the mature believer manages his mouth. My speech could be the most accurate indicator of my maturity in Christ. Most important words . . .

ILLUS: What if we'd recorded all you said today? Would your words give evidence that you are a Christian?

II. OUR TONGUE HAS THE POWER TO *DIRECT* (vv. 3-4) – Two illustrations of power to direct and to change lives. Our tongue is like:

A. (v. 3) *A powerful horse* is directed by a *tiny bit* – A few ounces of metal directs a powerful horse. It's small but so controlling. A 100 lb. jockey directs a 2500 lb. horse! That's why David said in Psa. 39:1, "I will keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth."

B. (v. 4) *A massive ship* is directed by a *small rudder* – Also small, but able to guide a huge ship even in strong winds. Our tongue is the *steering* wheel of our life. Tongue is so small but so powerful in its ability to direct where we go (5a).

ILLUS: Pastor pronounces marriage and Judge announces sentence – few words with great impact! Man joined monastery . . .

III. OUR TONGUE HAS THE POWER TO *DESTROY* (vv. 5-8) – Two illustrations show power of tongue to destroy. Tongue is like a:

A. (v. 5b-6) *A small spark* sets ablaze a destructive forest fire

ILLUS: Linda's home destroyed by electrical spark . . . Tongue (words) *sets the whole course of life on fire and is itself set on fire by hell* (6). Too, many "verbal arsonists" around. Words set off deadly "chain reactions" *(whole course)* that can destroy (Prov. 18:21; 26:28). Husband-work-wife-kids . . .

ILLUS: 1871 Chicago fire began with one cow . . .

B. (vv. 7-8) *A strong animal* has destructive power – We've learned to tame animals that devour (whales, cobras, lions, etc.), but can't tame our own tongue as we often "verbally assassinate" people. It is *full of deadly* poison verbal cyanide. It's so hard to control that tiny animal "encaged" behind our teeth! Paul warns in Gal. 5:15 . . .

IV. OUR TONGUE HAS THE POWER TO *DISPLAY* (vv. 9-12) –

A. (vv. 9-10) Our tongue's words should not be a *contradiction* – Often, our words are inconsistent. With same tongue, we bless God and blast men. We sing praises and witness, then lie and gossip about others. James declares, my brothers, this should not be! (10c).

ILLUS: Little girl hugged Dad and stuck out tongue at her brother!

B. (vv. 11-12) Our tongue's words should be an *indication* of source – Let's be consistent like nature. Fig produces figs, grapevine gives grapes, spring produces either salt or fresh water, not both. Results will be consistent with the source. Problem is the root, the source. What's on the inside is real issue! Our tongue indicates the source of control in our lives. *A tongue problem is a heart problem! WORDS DISPLAY* our true character. What comes out of our mouths is what's in our hearts (Matt. 12:33-37). Bad words reveal a bad heart. Listen to Jesus (Matt. 15:10-11, 18-19).

*IS THERE HOPE? Do 1:26 and 3:8 conflict? With man, but not with God. We must decide who is going to be the *rider* and *pilot* (v. 4b). A pilot is available in the Holy Spirit. The only way to get control of your tongue is to let Him have control of your heart. He can tame our tongue.

ILLUS: Before cutting out cancerous tongue, hear his final words, "Praise be the name of our LJC forever and ever." What would yours be?

SUMMATION: A tongue problem is a heart problem which is solved when we give God control. Then we can use our tongues to praise God and to bless others. May David's prayer be ours, "Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psa. 141:3).

POEM: Guard well your tongue – It stretches far; For what you say tells what you are! Bless someone today with a call or text.