

## Sermon: James 3:1-18. "The Tongue"

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Sermon text and audio available for download at [www.waitara.anglican.asn.au](http://www.waitara.anglican.asn.au)

- **III – Tongue twisters...**

(Picture – tongue)

The human tongue. 0.4% of our total human body weight. We use it to help us eat and digest food, we need it for taste, it's a natural teeth cleaner, and we need it for talking... for example, saying things like this... (Challengers please!)

- Red leather, yellow leather. (repeat!)
- You've no need to light a night-light  
On a light night like tonight,  
For a night-light's light's a slight light,  
And tonight's a night that's light.  
When a night's light, like tonight's light,  
It is really not quite right  
To light night-lights with their slight lights  
On a light night like tonight.
- Six sick slick slim sycamore saplings.
- The sixth sick sheik's sixth sheep's sick.
- Toy boat. Toy boat. Toy boat.

James spends nearly a whole chapter talking about the tongue. Why?

### Power

Because it's powerful. Because the tongue, he says, is a small part that makes great boasts. The tongue has every right to boast – It's a small part that can do amazing things!

- Verse 3: James says that the tongue is like the bit in a horse's mouth. The "bit" is that tiny piece of metal that goes in a horse's mouth so the rider can control the animal. That little "bit" controls the whole animal.
- Verse 4: Then James says the tongue is like the rudder of a ship. This tiny part has the power to control the direction of the whole ship.

The tongue is like that. It controls. It gives direction. The tiny human tongue that weighs less than 0.4% of our body weight, has a huge impact on our life and on the lives of the people around us. Words of encouragement can help someone through a difficult time. Words of anger can start a war. Words of love can give hope. Words of gossip can ruin relationships.

The tongue is powerful. It is a small part that is able to do incredible things. It can do amazing good in people's lives.

- **Destruction**

But the tongue can also destroy us completely. Verse 5 –

*"Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 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."*

James is really giving us a warning here. The tongue can be dangerous! Corrupting. Evil.

- This is a humble mosquito: This little bug that carries things like yellow fever, dengue fever, and malaria, causes millions of human deaths a year.

But the tiny human tongue, James says, is a fire of destruction – a fire of hell! The tongue corrupts. Why is James telling us this? He really wants us to appreciate how dangerous and evil the human tongue can be. Why? So we THINK SERIOUSLY about how we use it every day. Our tongue, the words we speak, can do so much damage. The tongue is capable of so much evil. But more than that, the tongue cannot be tamed:

- **Control**

Verse 8 – *“no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.”*

It all seems hopeless doesn't it?! You almost feel like taking out your tongue because it's so dangerous! But we need to understand this – that no matter how hard we try, no matter how much we try to control our tongue, we still say evil things! We lie, we gossip, we insult people, we are rude, we are angry, we are self centred. And what's worse than all this, as Christians, is that because we cannot control our tongue, we are inconsistent in our faith.

- **Consistency**

Verse 9 – *“With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.”*

It's true isn't it? With that same mouth we praise God... and we curse men. We sing songs and pray to God almighty... and then we insult and lie and hurt people and gossip.

And then James lays down the challenge for us: Verse 10 –

- *“Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. **My brothers, this should not be.**”*

This should not be. We shouldn't curse. We shouldn't hate. We shouldn't destroy people with our words. We shouldn't be praising God one moment and talking badly about people the next. Verse 11:

- <sup>11</sup> *Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?”*

How can fresh water and salt water come from the same spring? It can't! How can praise and cursing come from the same mouth? It shouldn't! This should not be! If our source of life and hope and joy is Jesus, then what comes out of our mouth should reflect Jesus.

So there's the impossible challenge. What you say should reflect what you believe. It should reflect who you follow. It should reflect Jesus. BUT, the tongue is a fire. No man can tame it. It's full of deadly poison.

- **So what do we do?!?!**

James gives us so much practical advice on how to live our life – how to have an active faith that puts into practice what we believe. But he also keeps saying that it's really, really hard to do that! In fact, it seems impossible!

We're all sinful human beings. We all make mistakes. We let people down. We let God down. We show favouritism. We don't love our neighbour, we lack faith, we're tempted by our own evil desires, and we cannot tame our own tongue!

And so finally James answers the question: How do sinful people, like you and me, live a life that pleases God? Verse 13 – He asks us:

- *“<sup>13</sup> Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.”*

Our deeds and our words need to come from wisdom. How do we live a life that is pleasing to God? We need to listen to **God's** wisdom instead of the **world's** wisdom.

James says there are two types of wisdom, earthly and heavenly. Earthly wisdom is unspiritual and of the devil and it leaves us with two things: envy and selfish ambition. Have you ever noticed that? Earthly wisdom brings out envy and selfish ambition.

But God's wisdom, heavenly wisdom, is pure and peace loving, considerate, submissive, merciful, and sincere. Heavenly wisdom is what we need to listen to and take into our life if we want to live a life that pleases God.

This is the message of James. A life that listens to the world's wisdom will lead to a life that reflect the world's desires. Like envy and selfish ambition. But a life that listens to God's wisdom is a life that shows peace and mercy and sincerity. You see, what comes out of our life, in our words and our actions, depends on the wisdom that we allow to go **into** our lives. The wisdom of the world, or wisdom from God.

Wisdom is our starting point each day. If we start every day with envy and selfish ambition, that's what will come out of our lives, and out of our mouths. But if we start each day with God's wisdom – then peace and mercy and sincerity will come out of our lives, and out of our mouths. Verse 18:

*“Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness”*

What harvest is coming out of your life? What fruit are you producing? The wisdom you listen to determines the fruit you will produce, in what you do, and in what you say.

The tongue is powerful in directing our life. The tongue can be a destructive force. No man can control the tongue. With one word we praise God, with another we curse men. What is the answer?

Say “No” to the wisdom of the world. And say “Yes” to wisdom from God. **Take into your life the wisdom of God, the Word of God**, that is peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. What does that look like? It looks like Jesus! Take Jesus, who IS God's wisdom and God's word, and let Jesus rule in your life – in your mind and in your heart. And what will come out of your life, with him as ruler, will not be envy and selfish ambition, but a harvest of righteousness.

Pray – Colossians 3:15-17