

8-6-23

Sermon: Man the Rudder!

Scripture: James 3:1-18, CTW Reading 514

Hymns- 511, 512, 513

Theme: The tongue is a double-edged sword. Arguments and wars have been started by words of misunderstanding. This week, in James 3 we read about being held responsible for what we teach and the words we say. Here James teaches us that true wisdom has many characteristics.

I. James is telling us that the tongue and the kind of wisdom we have share a common bond.

“Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.”

A. James warns all of us including himself that we who teach will be held to a higher standard. Keep in mind here that James is not just talking about classroom teachers, he is talking about the many settings where we find ourselves to be in a position to teach somebody something.

Many may think that is not fair but, God thinks it is, and here James reminds us that His wisdom is different than ours.

How many of us have watched churches divide and people leave because of a division started by an argument? Jesus was teaching about the Law in **Matthew chapter 5:17-20**. Listen to verse 19 from that passage:

19) Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

There are many people in the world who are great at telling people what to do. Yet when you look at the lives they lead, they are not the example their teaching would present them to be, and we found out last week about our call to be living examples.

Jesus taught that it is more important to **follow** God's Law than it is to just simply **explain** it. Placing God's Law into practice is more difficult than telling others how to do it.

Once you have placed God's Law into practice, it is much easier to explain to others how to do it and the rewards are greater.

Next James says that "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."

Here the word perfect can be replaced with the word mature. I do not mean mature in a chronological way either. I mean mature in a spiritual sense of the word.

Jesus had already showed us that most men are of immature faith and all men stumble:

John 8:7 states "When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

B. We have been created in God's likeness, but we have all been born into sin. We cannot defeat the sin in our lives. Yes, we can tame it occasionally and resist it but we cannot totally eradicate it without Jesus Christ and then many still stumble in our everyday lives.

Paul teaches us in **Romans 3:23** "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

John wrote in **1 John 1:8** If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

The question is, where does all this sin come from and why can't we just get rid of it?

It comes from deep inside us. We all have at some point in time been driven by selfish motives and sometimes we still are. This translates and reveals itself by the words we use.

That is why James said "If anyone is never at fault in what he says, then he is a perfect man..." good luck finding that person!

II. James then goes on to tackle the main culprit...our tongues.

"When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. 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."

A. The words that come out of our mouths, or sometimes more importantly the words that don't come out of our mouths, are what will shape how others view us. I am not the greatest people pleaser and often I am told I am too blunt. However, there is no question of where I stand when it comes to my faith in Jesus Christ.

Exercising sound Christian principles tempers the language we use and guides our thoughts and motives. Gossiping, lying, boasting, cheating and ruthlessness are not examples of sound principles but of earthly values.

And earthly values are, for the most part, evil. When we model our Lord and Savior, we exemplify his model of excellence for our lives.

James goes on: "Likewise the tongue is a very small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. 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.”

B. James tells us that the tongue, while being a very small part of the body, is a source of great wickedness.

Every year we see in the news about great forest fires raging. Especially this year with the fires in Canada. They’re all started with a spark. Likewise, the tongue, while it only gives voice to our thoughts, sets the whole body on fire.

The tongue is a source of evil that is not only a part of our body, but sometimes the words we say control our body. James says it is a world of evil, hard to control:

Verse 7 and 8: “All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, 8) but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.”

But no man can tame the tongue. How dramatic is that? We can tame a lion to let a man stick his head in it’s mouth, we can tame an elephant to walk on a ball, we can train dogs to sniff out just about anything, yet no man can tame the tongue.

It is a restless evil and restless, full of deadly poison. Our words cannot only edify and **build** a person up but they can **rip** a person up.

And take this to heart...The hurt that can be caused by a word can cause damage to a person’s soul. I remember reading in psychology class in college a good many years ago that while it takes a person hearing “I love you” about forty thousand times to believe it, it only takes one time of a person carelessly hurting someone to scar them forever...

Think about a time in your life when someone said hurtful words to you...you may eventually forgive them, but odds are you will never forget.

Verses 9-12: 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 comes 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 olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

C. I have watched people whom I thought were Godly an righteous in church go out and when I see them in public, they are mad and wanting revenge. The love of Christ that was so freely flowing from their lips on Sunday was nowhere to be found come Monday at work. From the same lips came praise of God and such filth that I was left wondering what they really were like.

While only God knows a man's soul, it is the words that come out of our mouths and the actions they cause, that show the world who and what we are.

Do you want to leave a clear message of who you are, or do you want to be like a puddle of muddy water? And remember from last week to ask yourself this question...do my actions (in this case words), help lead others to God?

III. Finally, James addresses the subject of wisdom.

Verses 13-14: 13) 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. 14) But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

A. When we have control over our tongue and our thoughts, we gain wisdom that comes from humility. Christ was the living example of humility. He did not have any bitter feelings or selfish ambition in his heart at all. His wisdom came from his Father in heaven.

We see it all the time, we watch the news and there is somebody somewhere who thinks they are being wise but they are acting foolishly. Our tongue shows what wisdom we have in our hearts. If we are harboring any ill feelings at all, they will be brought to light by our tongues in the heat of a moment.

James says we must admit to God our Father and to Jesus Christ our sinful thoughts and pray for his guiding, merciful love to conquer it:

Verses 15 and 16: 15) Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. 16) For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

B. James tells us plainly what our selfish thoughts are and where they come from. Satan is alive and at work in this world. He gives us bitterness, envy and selfish ambition. The fruit of that is disorder, lying, cheating, adultery and every kind of evil practice. Evil sometimes even disguises itself by looking like it is good.

We must temper ourselves to be the kind of person that does not escalate conflicts. We must not be gossips but speakers of the truths of God. We must exemplify those characteristics which Christ so openly practiced. You may ask what those characteristics are? James gives a few of them in verses 17 and 18:

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 raise a harvest of righteousness.

The characteristics that show our true Christianity are purity, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, merciful (remember Micah 6:8), and good fruit, impartial and sincere. That sounds like quite a list and I believe that it would be impossible for you and I to

live that way everyday of our lives. Thank God we have Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in us to help us.

C. All things are possible with God. Those characteristics James listed are shown first in our words, then they translate into action in our lives. They become the guiding force behind our Christianity.

I have heard it said that the window to a person's soul is their eyes. I tell you that according to the truth of God, the true window to a person's soul is the words that roll off their tongue.

It is our tongues that show our hearts and reveal our ambitions.

It is the tongue that leads us to hell or heaven.

It is the tongue which we must constantly guard, and if we do so, then the wisdom of Jesus Christ will flow through us and affect every area of our lives!

True wisdom begins by guarding our tongues. Our tongues will decide if we are peacemakers or war wagers, and we know that God loves peacemakers...

Remember **Matthew 5:9** "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God", Amen? Let us Pray...