

## Session 4

September 25, 2022

### FAITH ON DISPLAY IN YOUR CONVERSATIONS

James 3:1-5a, 9-10, 13-18

Most of us will remember the Sunday School song:

*O be careful little tongue, what you say,  
O be careful little tongue, what you say,  
For the Father up above is looking down in love,  
So be careful little tongue, what you say.*

But while we might remember singing the song, how often do we remember to obey its words? Let's face it: few of our faculties have the potential to wreak more havoc in our relationships than our speech. And few passages of Scripture say more about that potential than James 3. Using both examples and illustrations, James encourages us to remember that simple little tune and the truth of its simple little message.

**What we say can be powerful (vv. 1-6).** While James tends to warn about the abuses of our speech, he does acknowledge the benefits of it as well. Teaching is a noble vocation and teaching the things of God in a church setting is even more so (see Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:28). But noble vocations carry both more responsibility and more accountability. For this reason, James warns believers to tread carefully. Since teachers are taken at their word, they have the ability to powerfully influence others. Thus, teachers are held to a stricter judgment by God (v. 1). Verse 2 is a 1st century version of the quip, "No one is perfect!" All believers (even the most gifted) are in danger of verbal blunders. Three graphic illustrations follow. First, there is the tiny bit in a horse's mouth that has the power to turn a big horse's body (v. 3). Next, there is the tiny rudder on a boat that is able to turn a large vessel (v. 4). Finally, there is a tiny flame that is able to eventually consume an entire forest (v. 5). The point? The human tongue is a tiny organ in man's body. But oh, what power it can wield! For reflection: *Read verse 6. What do you think James means by each of the phrases?*

**What we say can be poisonous (vv. 7-12).** Here, it's not the *size* of the tongue in relation to the body, but the *wildness* of the tongue in relation to one's civility that is emphasized. Even the wildest of animals can be tamed (I remember reading about a lady who managed to tame a pair of bats. She walked around with them clinging to her sweater. *Yikes!!*). Yet James declares that the human tongue can never be entirely controlled. First, more than just blurting out stupid things, we say *evil*, or even *dangerous* things. Second, we say *hypocritical* things, praising God one moment and cursing fellow believers the next. The paradox of spewing such poison is obvious, being illustrated by the word pictures of water and fruit (vv.11-12) that follow James' rebuke (v. 10). For reflection: *In Matthew 12:34, Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." What truths does this statement add to our discussion?*

**What we say can be peaceful (vv. 13-18).** At first glance, these verses seem out of place with what precedes it. But James continues here with the theme of hypocrisy. Wisdom was already mentioned in 1:5, and the role of teaching in 3:1 is also related. His point is that there is a difference between those who *pretend* to be wise and those who truly are. The pretenders are

driven by *selfish ambition* (v. 16) and filled with *every kind of evil*, while the genuinely gifted are filled with *mercy* and *good fruits*. And how do believers tell them apart? By their actions and their speech. For reflection: *What do you see as the connection between teaching, wisdom, and speech? What role does each play in the church?*