Read Scripture Text

P R A Y E R

Introduction

“Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never hurt me.”

I would imagine all of us has said that to someone at some time or another.

But it isn’t true is it? Broken bones heal and we forget about them. But often the pain inflicted by someone’s careless words stays with us a long, long time. Chances are you can still remember the most hurtful words anyone ever spoke to you. I know I can.

Think of the person who told you that you were ugly or stupid.

Think of the person who told you that you were incompetent or that you never do anything right.

Think of the person who told you that you would never amount to anything.

Think of the person who told you that you had no talent.
ILLUSTRATION

I had someone say something very cruel to me when I was about eighteen years old that I have never forgotten. And when I go back to Indiana to hold a revival in my home Church this coming November, I will think of those words when I see the man who said them to me.

Oh I have long forgiven him for what he said. But yet I still bare the scars of his hurtful words.

YOU CAN’T TAKE THEM BACK

Once words have been unleashed from the tongue they can never be retrieved.

Someone can tell you to “forget what they just told you.” But you can’t forget, can you?

A judge may instruct a court reporter to strike something that was just said from the court record and instruct the jury to forget what they just heard, but they can’t forget can they?

Someone can say something hurtful to you and later apologize and say, “I take back what I said earlier.” But that doesn’t erase the hurt of their words, does it?

You see, the time to weigh our words is before we say them not after we say them.

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WORDS ARE POWERFUL

Soft words sung in a lullaby can lull a baby to sleep.

Hateful words can incite a mob to riot.

Excited words can fire up a football team before they take the field.

Courageous words can inspire soldiers to go into battle.

Encouraging words can lift someone’s spirits.

Eloquent words can give rise to a bold dream.

Review of What James Says About The Tongue

I would imagine by now you have noticed JAMES says much about the tongue.

Remember in Chapter one, verse 19 James told us we should be “quick to listen ………SLOW TO SPEAK………..and slow to become angry.”

In Chapter one, verse 26 James said, “If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his TONGUE, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.”

And in Chapter two, verse 12 James tells us to “Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom.”

And now here in the first twelve verses of James chapter three
James comes back to this issue of THE POWER OF THE TONGUE again in greater detail than before.

In order to impress upon us the importance of controlling our tongue, James gives us SIX WORD PICTURES of the tongue: the bit in a horse's mouth, the rudder on a ship, a fire, a poisonous animal, a fountain, and a fig tree.

Using these six word pictures, JAMES reveals THREE TRUTHS about the POWER OF OUR TONGUE.

First of all, we have:

**1. Our Tongue Has The Power to Direct**

Let's look at VERSES 1-4 again.

1. James begins this discourse on the tongue by addressing a serious problem that existed in the Church at that time, namely that they had too many unqualified teachers.

2. Being a teacher in the Lord's Church is one of the most honorable positions one can hold. That is true whether you teach a Sunday School Class, Junior Church, a Wednesday night youth group, Vacation Bible School, or stand behind this pulpit to preach.

3. But along with that honor comes a tremendous responsibility and accountability.

   Teachers, look at what James says in VERSE 1 again: “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.”
4. Teachers, that verse ought to strike reverential fear in our hearts. It ought to remind us, that as teachers in the Lord’s Church, we are in a position of great influence and our words have THE POWER TO DIRECT the lives of others. Therefore we must make absolutely sure that what we teach is GOD’S WORD and not our opinion!

5. But James is quick to remind us in VERSE 2 that all of us, regardless of whether we are a teacher or not, must realize our tongue has THE POWER TO DIRECT the lives of others.

6. To illustrate the tongue’s power to direct James uses two illustrations. One is: A BIT IN A HORSES MOUTH and the other is A RUDDER ON A SHIP.

(A) The Bit In A Horses’ Mouth verse 3

ILLUSTRATION: Our daughter, Brooke, who was here a few weeks ago, has been had competed in Equestrian events since she was a young girl. So over the last twenty plus years, we have had a number of horses at our house.

Right now, while Brooke is finishing up her schooling at the University of South Carolina, we are boarding her horse, WICKET, at our house.

Wicket is a 1,200 lb. , 17+ hands high Oldenburg Dutch Warmblood. Now 17+ hands high means her back is about 6 feet high and when she holds her head up straight she is close to nine feet tall. Folks, we’re talking about a giant horse here.

And yet when Brooke puts this small bit in Wicket’s mouth and pulls on the reins, she can make Wicket turn right or left or go around in circles or cantor or trot or jump over obstacles or come to a stop. This small bit has THE POWER TO DIRECT that large animal.
The second example James uses to illustrate the tongue’s power to direct is ……

(B) The Rudder On A Ship verse 4

ILLUSTRATION: This is a RUDDER. Its not off a big ship, its off our paddle boat in the pond beside our house. But it still makes the point.

This small rudder has the POWER TO DIRECT that paddle boat. DEPENDING on which way this rudder is turned the boat will go STRAIGHT, turn LEFT, or turn RIGHT.

Though the RUDDER on a SHIP is much larger than this, it is comparatively small to the size of the ship. And yet the RUDDER has the POWER TO DIRECT the SHIP.

Just like the BIT in the horses’ mouth and the RUDDER on a ship, our TONGUE is not very big. And yet it has the POWER TO DIRECT the lives of others. And it even has the power to direct our own lives.

Think of the things you say to yourself. If you are always telling yourself things like, “I’m stupid!” “I’m ugly” “I can’t do this” “I can’t do that” “I’m no good to anybody” ……..those words will DIRECT the course of your life down a negative path.

But if you say things like: “I can do all things through Christ who gives me the strength!” “I am willing to try.” “I am willing to learn!” “I refuse to quit!” “I will NOT give up!” ………………those empowering words will set you on a positive course in life!

THE TONGUE HAS THE POWER TO DIRECT!
JAMES now reminds us our TONGUE has the POWER to do something else………………

II. Our Tongue Has The Power To Destroy

ILLUSTRATION: They are called WMD’s………WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION. Back when the War in Iraq first began, U.S. Intelligence reported that Saddam Hussein had WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION hidden somewhere in Iraq. According to these intelligence reports, the WEAPONS had the capability of causing widespread destruction of LIFE and PROPERTY.

JAMES is warning us that OUR TONGUE has the POWER to become a WEAPON OF MASS DESTRUCTION.

1. James now gives us two more examples to illustrate THE TONGUE’S POWER TO DESTROY.

The first example is ……..

(A) A FIRE READ vs. 5,6 again

The tongue is the most destructive force in the human body.

In Romans 3:13-15 the apostle Paul lists five different organs of the body that are the most common avenues of sin: the throat, the tongue, the lips, the mouth, and the feet. Notice four of those five things relate to our speech.


In a split second, one lightning bolt ignited a fire in the Poccosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge near near Ponzer, on the Beaufort/Hyde County line.
Soon the fire spread throughout the Refuge destroying everything in its path. Smoke from the FIRE could be seen as far away as Raleigh and Greensboro. At the time it was the largest active wildfire in the United States.

By the time the fire was finally brought under control over two and half months later in mid-August, over 40,000 acres of forest had been destroyed.

Just like a FOREST FIRE, our words have the power to cause widespread destruction.

ILLUSTRATION: In 1925 Adolph Hitler released Volume I of his book, Mein Kampf (My Struggle) and a year later, he released Volume II. In his writings, Hitler revealed his political ideology and his strong anti-Semitic hatred of the Jewish people.

History tells us Hitler and his NAZI regime were responsible for the deaths of over 6 MILLION JEWS in the Holocaust. That figures out to 125 deaths for each hateful word Hitler wrote in Mein Kampf.

ILLUSTRATION: Many of you can probably remember a very talented singer back in the 60’s named KAREN CARPENTER. She along with her brother, RICHARD, gave us such timeless hits as “Close To You”, “We’ve Only Just Begun”, and “Rainy Days and Mondays.”

The world was shocked when Karen Carpenter died at the young age of 32, right in the prime of her career. Following her death, it was revealed that Karen suffered from the eating disorder anorexia nervosa. The USA TODAY later reported her eating disorder started years earlier when an interviewer once referred to Karen Carpenter as “RICHARD CARPENTER’S CHUBBY SISTER.” In a sense, that reporter’s words ignited THE FIRE that eventually claimed Karen Carpenter’s life.
The other example JAMES gives us of the tongue’s POWER TO DESTROY is:

**(B) A WILD ANIMAL** READ Verses 7,8 again.

**ILLUSTRATION:** You notice James uses the term “deadly poison” in verse 8. When we think of deadly poison naturally we think of venomous snakes.

My son-in-law, Todd, sent me an e-mail the other day of a fourteen year old boy who had been bitten on the palm of his left hand by a rattle snake while hiking in Oregon. Because he was so far from the base camp, it was over 4 hours after he was bitten before he could be air-lifted to a hospital. In that four hours, the poison from the snake bite continued to work its way through his bloodstream virtually destroying all the muscle and tissue of his left arm. Since some of you have a weak stomach, I will spare you the graphic details of what that young man’s arm looked like after it was nearly destroyed by that poison.

**Like a FOREST FIRE, like the VENOM OF A POISONOUS SNAKE, our WORDS have the POWER TO DESTROY the lives of others.**

**PROVERBS 12:18** Reckless words pierce like a sword……

Reckless words are words spoken in haste, words spoken in anger, words spoken in frustration, words spoken in ignorance, words spoken with no forethought of the hurt and damage they will do.

Our words have the POWER to DESTROY someone’s reputation, their good name and their honor.

Our words have the POWER to DESTROY someone’s hopes, their dreams and their ambitions.

Our words have the POWER to DESTROY someone’s friendships, their marriage, or their career.
Before you and I open our mouths to speak, may we carefully weigh the destructive power of our words.

Our Tongue Has The Power to Direct.  
Our Tongue Has The Power to Destroy.

And finally, James tells us………

III. Our Tongue Has The Power To Delight

READ: VERSES 9-12

Once again James gives us two examples to illustrate the tongue’s POWER TO DELIGHT.

The first of these is………

(A) A SPRING OF WATER vs. 11

ILLUSTRATION: When I was a student at Johnson Bible College, some of my buddies and me would take off after classes were over on Saturday morning and drive up to the Smoky Mountain National Park to hike some of the trails. After we would hike for awhile, we would stop to get a drink of ice cold mountain spring water.

Man that water was so good and refreshing! That drink from the spring revived us so we could continue on our hike.

When God created our tongues He intended for us to use them to REFRESH the spirits of others just like a drink from an ice cold mountain stream.
The other example James gives is of ...........

(B) A TREE vs. 12

James talks about Olive Trees and Fig Trees. Both of these trees are very important to the Jewish economy.

Not only do they provide delicious fruit and lots of timber, they also provide shade to shield the Jewish people from the scorching sun.

If you want to see the tongue’s POWER TO DELIGHT just look at the example of JESUS.

Jesus said, “Man does not live by bread alone, but by what? But by every WORD that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.”

JESUS spoke “LIFE GIVING” words. WORDS that refreshed others like a drink from an ice cold mountain stream. WORDS that provided shade for others from the scorching heat of life’s trials and troubles.

JESUS spoke..............

WORDS of comfort!
WORDS of encouragement!
WORDS of hope!
WORDS of peace!
WORDS of love!
WORDS of forgiveness!
WORDS of compassion.

HE spoke words that BREATHED LIFE into people!

Every day you and I have the wonderful opportunity to “breathe life” into people through the words we speak.
C O N C L U S I O N

The late evangelist, JONATHAN EDWARDS, resolved that in his life he wanted to always use his words to bless others.

What a worthwhile goal that would be for all of us.

Every day use your words to BUILD OTHERS UP rather than tear others down.

Every day use your words to SPOTLIGHT the good in others rather than dwelling on their faults and shortcomings.

Every day use your words to ENCOURAGE rather than to discourage.

Every day use your words to POINT out the strengths in others rather than their weaknesses.

Every day use your words to BREATHE LIFE into people rather than using your words to destroy or kill.

Every day use your words to POINT PEOPLE TO CHRIST rather drive people away from Christ.

Don’t ever forget the power in your tongue!