



Title: A Weapon of Mass Destruction

Date: October 22, 2023

Scripture Text: James 3:1-12

Series: The Behavior of a Believer

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE

We are continuing the series The Behavior of a Believer, a study of the book of James. Today's message looks at what could be called the most destructive weapon known to man: the tongue! It can encourage someone to achieve great things or tear someone down and ruin them. It can wax eloquently or vex harshly. James instructs his readers to consider the power of the tongue and what it takes to tame it.

I. Power for Direction ([James 3:1-4](#))

James is not prohibiting being a teacher of God's word, but warning those who do teach to understand what is expected. The teacher of the word of God wields authority and influence. But with the authority and influence comes accountability and responsibility. Jesus warned that "*everyone who has been given much, much will be required*" ([Luke 12:48b](#)). Those who have been given the 'gift' of teaching bear a responsibility for how they exercise that gift. One who undertakes to lead others in the faith must be careful that his own life reflects what he is teaching. His greater knowledge brings with it a greater responsibility to live according to that knowledge.

- James gives two illustrations describing the influence of the tongue. What are they?
 - How does a rudder and bit relate to the tongue?
- Describe the influence a preacher or teacher has on others.
- What is an example of a teacher's positive influence on you?
- How can you be an encourager to your preacher & teachers?

II. Power for Destruction ([James 3:5-8](#))

James describes the destructive potential that the tongue can have. Such a small part of the body can destroy just as fire consumes and destroys. Jesus said, "*It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man.*" ([Matt. 15:11](#)). Likewise, James says "*And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body*". We should not underestimate the influence we have with our words, not only the effect they can have on others, but their effect on us as well.

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- How do fire and poison describe the effects of the tongue?
- Describe a time when you were hurt by the words of another. How did it affect you?
- Regardless if we mean to or not, we can be hurtful with our words. Describe a time when your words were hurtful, even if you didn't mean for them to be.

It has been said that words are like feathers in a pillow or toothpaste in the tube, once they are out, it is very difficult to get them back in.

III. Power for Contradiction (James 3:9-12)

Many times, our words are a reflection of our heart and can shine a light on our hypocrisy. We may praise God one moment, then turn and complain or gossip the next. James states that out of the same mouth comes praises for God and curses of others. To truly praise God is to live in His likeness, showing His love to others.

- What does the term *hypocrite* mean?
- How does James' description in [vss. 9-12](#) reflect the hypocrite?
- How can our contradictory words effect a lost person concerning Christianity?
- How can we guard ourselves against 'speaking out both sides of our mouth', a.k.a. hypocrisy?

Not only is it impossible for sweet and bitter water to come out of one and the same fountain, but it is also true that if the two get mixed, it is the bitter which will affect the sweet, not the other way round. Put blessing and cursing together, and cursing will win out every time. Bad habits corrupt good manners, and wicked talk has the same effect.

Bede (672 – 735)

The effective proof of a sound mind and perfect thought is to have nothing faulty on our tongue and to keep our mouths closed when necessary. For the most useful talent is to be able to speak wisdom when talking about how to live well. Foolish talk should be foreign to the saints.

Cyril of Alexandria (376 – 444)