The Untamed Tongue

Int.

1. Aim: To show the danger of an untamed tongue

2. James 3:1-12 V. 7-8 “For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: 8. But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.”

3. We have a barometer to measure atmospheric pressure, a thermometer to measure temperature, a speedometer to measure velocity, but the oldest measuring instrument is the tongue; it reveals the depths of one’s soul and measures one’s character.

4. The power of speech is distinctly human.
   a. It is a fundamental mark of the superiority of man over the lower animal world.
   b. The quality of one’s speech, therefore, indicates the width of the chasm which separates him from the brute creation.

5. The tongue, therefore, is extremely important for the following reasons:
   (1) Everyone has a tongue.
   (2) It is used probably more than any other member of our body.
   (3) Its sins harm not only the sinner but others also.
   (4) It tells what is really in one’s heart (Matt. 12:34).
   (5) It can determine whether we go to heaven or hell. - Matthew 12:37
   (6) God’s Word emphasizes it so much that it must be important.
      (a) Two of the Ten Commandments refer to sins of the tongue (Ex. 20:7, 16).
      (b) Of the seven things that God hates, three have to do with the tongue (Pro. 6:16-19).
      (c) Christ’s warned about the tongue (Matt. 12:34-37).

6. In this lesson we will examine three basic points from James 3:1-12
   (1) The description of the tongue,
   (2) The character of the tongue,
   (3) The power of the tongue.
Discussion

I. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE TONGUE

A. The tongue can be described as one of the most beautiful, pure, uplifting, and helpful of all members, on the other hand, it can also be described as a destructive and damnable force.

1. Prov. 10:20 asv “The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver”

2. Prov. 25:11 ESV “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.”

B. First, it is described as a fire

1. James 3:6 (ESV) “And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.”

2. Prov. 16:27 “An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire.”

3. Prov. 26:20-22 “Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. 21 As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire: so is a contentious man to kindle strife. 22 The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.”

4. It is like a fire in the pain it inflicts, the destruction which attends it, and the effects which follow it.

a. The fire that results from the tongue is comparable only to that which arises in hell or Gehenna.

b. Gehenna originally was the name of the valley just outside of Jerusalem. There, the children of Israel practiced the idolatrous rites of Molech in sacrificing their own offspring to the fire god, Molech.
c. In Josiah’s reform, he destroyed the altars, broke down the high places and to make the valley unfit for such practices he turned it into a garbage dump.

d. Garbage and sometimes bodies were burned there.

e. The place served as a suitable symbol of the future punishment of the wicked.

5. An evil tongue defiles the whole body and a defiled body is fit only for the refuse dump.

6. The fire that comes from our tongues, upon improper use, originates in hell and will lead us there if we do not extinguish it.

C. Second, the tongue is untamable (Jas. 3:7-8).

1. James 3:7-8 “For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: 8 But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.”

2. The English word tamed means: “to reduce from a wild to a domestic state, to bring under control: harness”

3. Everything has been brought under the bondage of man (Gen. 1:27).

4. Not only does man have dominion over everything, but he is “continually taming” the beasts, etc.

5. However, it is a sad thing for man who is able to tame the most ferocious of the beasts that he cannot tame his own tongue.

6. The meaning is that when birds and beasts are tamed they are no longer dangerous; one does not keep a tamed beast chained.
7. However, the tongue can never be tamed. It may be restrained for years, but in a moment it can become a dangerous thing.

8. Peter uses the word "refrain" in his statement about the tongue
   a. “For "He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit." 1 Pet. 3:10
   b. “Refrain” is derived from the Latin re meaning "back" and frenum meaning “to bridle”; hence, "bridling back the tongue."
   c. "Refrain," therefore, means to restrain a thing or a person from something.

9. The tongue can never be tamed to the extent that all restraint can be removed. We must always be vigilant in its use.

D. Third, it is an unruly evil - Jas. 3:8 “It is an unruly evil”
   1. It is like a wild animal in a cage, restless and resisting as far as possible all restraint.
   2. It is an evil thing—an evil thing when uncontrolled—capable of the greatest possible injury.
   3. The tongue is a restless evil, continually resisting any restraint which may be exercised upon it.

E. Fourth, the tongue is a poison - Jas. 3:8 “full of deadly poison”
   1. A fire is an open force, but poison is subtle in nature.
   2. James's purpose is not to describe the effects of the tongue on the individual guilty of its abuses, but upon those who are victims of it.
   3. Those who use their tongues in an inappropriate way are like snakes, as it were, ready to inject their poison. Gossip, slander, and backbiting, are all poisons.
   4. Gossip painting - Norman Rockwell - March 6, 1948 “Saturday Evening Post”
II. THE CHARACTER OF THE TONGUE

A. First, the tongue betrays the condition of the heart - Matt. 12:34 “for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”
1. Accent betrays one’s geographical origin.
2. It betrays the Northerner in the South and the Southerner in the North.
3. It betrayed Peter because of his Galilean accent - Matt. 26:73 - NKJV “And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, “Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you.”
4. In the same fashion one’s speech betrays the condition of the heart.
5. Frequently, the physician examines the tongue of a patient to diagnose the diseases of the body, and by examination of the tongue the Lord can diagnose the diseases of the spirit.
   a. Swearing discloses a profane heart.
   b. Impure stories reveal a filthy heart.
   c. Murmurings come from a thankless heart.
   d. Criticism unveils a jealous heart.
   e. Slander reveals a hateful heart.
6. The tongue registers just like a heart indicator.
   a. When a person always manages to tell a dirty joke his “heart indicator” is on evil.
   b. When a person makes some indecent remark, his tongue reveals the condition of his heart.
B. Second, it is also the tongue’s character to both bless and curse.

1. The tongue can act as a blessing - Jas. 3:9 “Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.”
   a. To bless means “to speak well of.”
   b. This is the noblest and highest use of the tongue.

2. None of us would think of cursing God, but many of us do so by cursing men.
   a. Man is in the image of God, made after his likeness - Jas. 3:9; Gen. 1:27
   b. Therefore, he who despises man, the handiwork of God, despises God himself
      1 John 4:20-21; Matt. 25:45

3. The etymology of the word “curse” indicates that it is an address to God in the form of a prayer that he will bring evil upon men; it is a petition to God to destroy men made in his image.

4. Some both bless God and curse men with their tongue.
   a. His illustrations in verses 11-12 show the absurdity of this.
   b. “Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?
   c. Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs?

5. Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.”
III. THE POWER OF THE TONGUE

A. First, if one can control the tongue he should be able to control the whole body (Jas. 3:2). “For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.”

1. This does not mean that it is more important to do this than to exercise restraint in any other area.
2. “The whole body” means all the sins of which man is capable.
3. If one can control the most unruly part, he will have attained such mastery over himself that other temptations will be easily repelled.

B. Second, the power of the tongue is illustrated in three different ways by James (illustration of a thermostat and thermometer).

1. A horse, though very large, is controlled by a tiny bridle (Jas. 3:3).
2. A ship, though subject to the winds and the seas, is easily controlled by a rudder (Jas.3:4).
   a. The application is that though small, each is very effective, thus showing that a thing may be little yet very powerful.
   b. The tongue is small in comparison to the whole body, but just as the bit and rudder can exercise control the tongue can also.
3. The third illustration is that a little fire can do a lot.
   a. In the two preceding illustrations there was controlled effect.
   b. Here, the effect of the little fire and the resulting damage is uncontrolled.
   c. A giant factory, a mighty forest, an entire city may go up in flames from the strike of one little match.
d. It is legend that the great fire of Chicago started when a cow, being milked, kicked over a lantern, and the flames brought destruction to hundreds of blocks of homes and vast areas of the city.

e. Likewise, the tongue can start a furious flame that will consume and destroy individuals, families, and whole congregations.

**CONCLUSION**

1. The Untamed Tongue:
   a. Can destroy a person's reputation
   b. Can destroy the life and well being of others
   c. Can cause you to lose your soul

2. If we will love life and see good days we will refrain our tongues from evil (1 Pet. 3:10-11). ASV “For, He that would love life, And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips that they speak no guile: 11 And let him turn away from evil, and do good; Let him seek peace, and pursue it.”

3. We may not be able to tame the tongue but the Bible teaches us that we must learn to bridle our tongue. Jas 1:26 “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.”

4. Let us not be guilty of sinning with our tongue. May we use it wisely

---

**Sources Consulted**

FHU Lectures 2012 - “The Untamed Tongue” by David Lipe P. 430

Websters Dictionary