

The Great Problem: The Tongue

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[0:00] The letter that James wrote, chapter 3, we'll read the first 12 verses together. Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

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. 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.

Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 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. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue.

[1:10] It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing.

My brothers, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives or a grapevine bear figs?

Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. When have you last come to grips with the great problem of your tongue?

Maybe you don't have to think back too far, even in this past week when you spoke a word in haste, and no sooner was it off the tip of your tongue than you regretted it and wished you could have called it back.

Christians sometimes brush over sins of the tongue as if they were no big thing. That certainly is not the sentiment in heaven.

[2:16] It's not what our Lord Jesus taught us, and it's not what James says here. Rather, we find out that our words are very important to God.

And James has a lot to say about the tongue. He gives three sections, at least places in this letter, over to addressing this about the tongue.

Chapter 3, this section of 1 to 12, is the largest section in which he speaks of the tongue. He's already put us on notice back in chapter 1 in verse 26, when he said, If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is not worth a little bit, could do better.

No, it's worthless. The tongue and tongue control is a part of the religion that God our Father accepts this morning.

And so it's an important mark of true religion. That's what chapter 1 verse 26 said. And then we come into the last half of chapter 2, and what did we see?

[3:30] We see that the kind of faith that saves produces holy living. It produces deeds and actions of holiness. And then at once in chapter 3, we are taught all about the tongue and controlling our tongue.

And so we see that faith, the kind that saves, will always produce a control of this member that we call the tongue.

In fact, only faith is powerful enough to enable us to keep a tight rein on our tongue. So a bridled tongue is not only a mark of true religion, it's also a mark of saving faith, according to James.

Now let's look at the situation then. The context in which this sermon on the tongue takes place. We see it in verses 1 and 2. The whole discussion on the tongue is introduced, and it's introduced with a warning and a reason to heed it.

Verse 1, Not many of you should be teachers, my brothers, should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. There's a warning here. [4:53] A negative command. And James is speaking primarily right here, I believe, about the office of teacher in the church. Pastor teachers.

Now he's not against such teachers. He is one. And he identifies himself as such in this verse. We who teach, he says. And when a teacher in the church rightly fulfills his office, he will set the perfect law that gives freedom before us.

He will point us to the Lord Jesus Christ, won't he? He will teach us that wisdom that is from above, that enables us to persevere under all sorts of trials with a joyful spirit.

Yes, the office of teacher is very important to the church and its well-being and to every individual within it. But evidently, there was no shortage of men who were all too eager to stand up and to teach the assemblies.

Men who did not belong in that office. Indeed, the scriptures tell us quite early in the early church that many false teachers had gone out into the world.

[6:12] And James, the same author of our letter, wrote a letter back in Acts chapter 15 and sent it with Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch in which he says, We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said.

And what were they saying? Verse 1 of Acts 15 says, They were teaching that Gentiles had to be circumcised in order to be saved.

Some were teaching out of selfish ambition and vain conceit. Some want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.

1 Timothy 1.7 Some were more motivated by their own personal honor and self-promotion rather than the promotion of God and the edification of the church.

Perhaps some were teaching erroneously about the relationship between faith and works, which James has just hammered home so repeatedly because evidently others were teaching otherwise.

[7:22] But if you just make a claim to faith, you're obviously saved. Whatever the case, too many had an itch to teach and were rushing into the office when they shouldn't have.

Now, he's already said to us in chapter 1 and verse 19, My dear brothers, take note of this.

Everyone should be quick to listen and slow to speak.

And now he warns, Stop becoming many teachers. So that's the warning. And the reason follows on its heels because you know that we who teach will be judged more severely.

There's the reason for this warning. As I read the letter of James, I'm struck by a man who believes that a day is coming when he will give an account to God.

And that day of judgment affects the way he lives this day on earth. Five or six times in this letter, James is referring to judgment.

[8:33] He's already spoken in chapter 2, verse 12. Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom.

Remember that? He's a man with an eye on the future. Day of judgment. And he says it affects the way we speak and act. And now he says, This is why we shouldn't be many teachers.

Because we who teach have an accounting to give. And that accounting will be great for us.

Greater for us. Will be judged more strictly.

Now, every one of us must give an account of ourselves to God. That's the teaching of Romans 14, 12 and a host of other passages. But teachers have a greater account to give in that day.

They have more to answer for. What did you do with my word that I put in your hands to teach? Did you study it?

[9:32] Did you give all heed to understand it and to show yourself a workman rightly dividing and understanding the word of truth? Did you practice what you preached?

You that teaches another teachest thou thyself? Romans 2 You knew more. Did you obey more? You heard more.

Did you do what you heard? Did you adorn the doctrine of God our Savior with a holy life? Did your life illustrate your sermons? You see, incompetent teachers can do much harm.

Didn't Jesus speak about the blind leading the blind? Here they were claiming to be the teachers in Israel. And Jesus says, you're blind teachers.

And you're leading other blind. And where do the blind end up when they're following the blind?

They both fall into the ditch. The ditch of hell. This is not a small thing.

[10:37] The damage done by teachers is greater than others. Those teaching legalism. That you must be circumcised in order to be saved.

You must do something yourself in order to make yourself right with God. Those teaching easy believism. Oh, just make any claim to faith and you're in. Yes, there were these teachers.

And by their teaching, they made, they crossed land and sea to make a disciple. And when they made him, they made him twofold more a creature of hell than themselves. That's what Jesus said about these who should not have been teaching the way they were teaching.

And the blood of sinners will be on the hand of those who have not taught the whole counsel of God. But what they taught was the counsel of God. Paul says, I am free from the blood of all men because I have preached the whole counsel of God.

So not many of you should presume to be teachers because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. And he continues with the reason not many should teach.

[11:46] Verse 2, we all stumble in many ways. We all do. Hearers as well as teachers. We all stumble. And if anyone is never at fault in what he says, he's a perfect man able to keep his whole body in check.

What we see here in verse 2 is that we all have many sins to give an account for before God. And that account extends to the things that we say.

Our very words. It's our Lord Jesus who says in Matthew 12, 36 and 37, But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.

For by your words you will be acquitted and by your words you will be condemned. Now that's not just true of teachers, it's true of all of us that we have to give an account for every word.

And if an account must be given for every careless word, what of every untrue word? What of every unkind and angry word?

[13:03] Every slanderous word? Every gossiping word? Every cursing, blaspheming, and dirty word? Every boastful word?

Every complaining and arguing word? Every cutting and tearing down word? We all must give an account of our words. But do you see his point? The teacher has an even greater account to give because he is a word man.

You see, the tongue is the chief tool of the teacher's trade. Here's a mason and he works with his trowel. And here's a carpenter and he works with his hammer.

And here's the teacher. And he works with his tongue. He speaks many words. And the wise man says in Proverbs 10, 17, when words are many, sin is not absent.

And so a teacher by very virtue of his ministry opens himself up to many temptations to sin. Indeed, a greater judgment awaits him.

[14:17] Now the teacher's danger will become all the more apparent as James goes on in this chapter to teach us about the tongue. And as James teaches us, what he says about the tongue applies not only to the teacher.

Yes, it starts there, but it also applies to all of you. And what we have in James 1 or James 3, 1 to 12 is a withering indictment on the tongue.

We've all got a tongue problem, James says. Our mouths are our own undoing. It is a dangerous thing to open your mouth at any time.

It is impossible to open your mouth for long without sinning. So be warned and be not many teachers.

And with that, we're introduced to the subject of the tongue. Now let's look this morning as time permits to three lessons on the tongue.

[15:28] The first lesson is this. If you can control your tongue, you can control your whole body. If you can control that one member, the tongue, you can control the whole body.

The last part of verse 2. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man able to keep his whole body in check.

Now James is going to show us in what follows that the tongue is the most uncontrollable part of our body. And his point is this. Conquer it and you can conquer every other part of your body.

Control it and you can control your eyes, your hands, your feet, the whole body. If you can outrun Usain Bolt in the 100 meter dash, you can outrun any other man.

If you can control the tongue, you can control all the other parts of the body. The tongue then becomes a key indicator in your self-control.

[16 : 32] And the battle for holiness is a battle for the tongue, James is telling us. Control it and you control the whole body. Now he illustrates this point in several ways.

He talks about the bit and horses, rudders and ships, a spark and forest fires.

And his point is this. If you can control the little thing, then you can control the whole big thing. The horse.

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

I looked it up. Horses can weigh over a thousand pounds. And there you are, a little girl. And you want to ride this big muscular creature. It's a lot bigger than you and stronger than you.

[17 : 34] But, if you control the bit in the horse's mouth, the Bible says you can not only turn his head, you can turn the whole beast around.

The whole animal by controlling the bit, the little piece of metal in his mouth. Controlling the small, powerful bit.

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 it to go.

Now we just read in Acts 27, didn't we, about a ship. And it was a large ship. It carried 276 passengers. None of you have a ship, a boat that big.

But you know now we build them so big that they're called skyscrapers on water. Cruise ships that are over three football fields long. Fifteen stories high.

[18 : 42] Weighing over 200 million pounds. And they're able to carry the whole population of the town of Bremen. Around 5,000 people.

But the rudder that steers this huge ship is so small compared to the size of the boat itself.

And if you control the rudder, you can turn the huge ship wherever you, the pilot, want it to go. Even though it's under strong winds to blow it off course, you can steer it.

You know, huge airplanes also have rudders. And that large aircraft is steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants it to go.

And when he's lost all of his engines and he wants to steer it down quickly, he can steer it right between city on the left and city on the right and set it right down on the Hudson River because he who controls the rudder controls the whole big airplane.

[19 : 50] Bits and rudders are little things, but they exercise a powerful influence completely out of proportion to their little size. control them and you control the whole big thing.

Enter the tongue. He set the stage now. Likewise, verse 5, likewise, in the same way as the bit and the rudder. The tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts.

Your tongue is about four inches long, that's all. It's a little thing as far as your body goes. But don't let its size fool you. Its powerful influence goes way beyond its size.

It's little, but its output is massive. What it can accomplish is huge. And so we begin to think about the output of the tongue.

And before our thoughts are allowed to soar into all the wonderful accomplishments that we can boast about our tongue, James jerks us down to reality with the actual production of our tongues, not merely its potential.

[21 : 06] And its actual performance apart from grace is set before us in a scathing indictment on the tongue. His perspective is to look at the tongue apart from grace.

And apart from grace there is nothing good to say about it. You'll look in vain in James description for something to praise in the tongue.

And immediately he adds a third example of little things with powerful influence that go well beyond its size. A small spark, he says. Verse 5, consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. We've seen a great animal and a small bit, we've seen a great ship and a small rudder, now a great forest and a small spark. You know a spark is really a little thing, isn't it?

You flip the switch on your gas grill and just a little spark hits that stream of gas and then it ignites. I suppose it's not even an inch, is it?

[22 : 18] It's a small thing. But consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. We've seen it in the fires out west.

Did you know the fire that took the most lives in our country happened in Wisconsin? October the 8th, 1871, the Pistoigo fire in Pistoigo, Wisconsin, consumed nearly one and a half million acres of forest.

That's an area about twice the size of the state of Rhode Island. It could have burned the state twice. Approximately 2,000 people lost their lives. Twelve communities gone.

We don't know a whole lot about it because it happened to take place on the same day that a fire swept through Chicago, the great Chicago fire.

But take all these fires, these massive fires, trace them back and you trace them back to a little spark that ignited them, whatever the source.

[23:27] And suddenly, as we're thinking about this imagery, small rudders, large ship, small bit, large horse, now small spark, large fire, we realize that James has controlled his discussion of the tongue.

And it dawns on us that he's directed the discussion to the destructive side of what our little tongue is capable of doing. It is a fire that destroys everything in its path.

Oh, yes, it is a bit. It is a bit that directs the horse over the cliff carrying its rider to his death. Yes, it is a rudder and it steers the Titanic into that iceberg and takes it to the bottom of the Atlantic.

It is a rudder on a Boeing 767, but it slams the plane into the twin towers since 9-11. The tongue is a fire.

Yes, your tongue is a bit, a rudder, a fire that destroys. And James confronts us with its grim reality. Our tongue's power for evil, that though it is small, its output of wickedness is great.

[24:46] James wants you to know that you have a first stage forest fire with you all the time in your mouth. All day, every day.

That's the first lesson. If you can control the tongue, you can control the whole body. But the second lesson is that the tongue is a spreading fire of destruction.

Verse 6, the tongue also is a fire. Having given us the illustration of the little spark, James now says, that's your tongue, believer. The tongue also is a fire, my dear brothers.

Now, I want to look at verse 6 and break it down phrase by phrase because we see what a destructive fire the tongue is. The tongue is a fire, he says, right off the bed.

And it's not the kind of fire that cooks a meal or warms a house. No, it's a fire that consumes everything in its path, leaving behind miles of scorched earth.

[25:51] Yes, it's small, but look at the close friends that it separates. Look at the marriages that it wrecks. Look at the families that it divides, the churches that it splits, the reputations it destroys, the pain it inflicts, the hearts it breaks, the wars it starts, the multitudes that it leads to hell.

What is so evil as to do all this and more? James says, your tongue, my tongue, it is a fire that consumes and destroys.

Wherever the tongue makes its appearance, destruction follows as ashes follow fire. The tongue is a fire. The next phrase, he says, it's a world of evil among the parts of the body.

Here you've got all the parts of the body laid out on a table and there's the tongue and not on a table in the man. Here's the tongue amidst all the parts of the body. What is it? It's a world of evil.

Think of all the evil in the world. The world is humanity set against God and his Christ. Humanity that refuses to bow to Jesus as Lord, but rebels and pursues its own evil plans.

[27:09] That's the world and the world has its own little representative right in your mouth. The tongue is a world of evil. It's the world embodied in your tongue.

It's worldliness internalized. The tongue is polluted by the world. It is a polluting worldliness that we carry in our mouths.

World concentrated boiled down into my little four inch slab of flesh. And it systematically pursues evil just like the world does.

It is a world of evil among the members of the whole body. And James is now taking us further when he says, yes, here is that polluted world among all the rest of the members of the body.

So he goes on to tell us it corrupts the whole person. It is corrupt and it corrupts the other members. Indeed, the whole person. It's like a bad apple.

[28:13] What is the bad apple's influence upon all the other apples in the barrel? It corrupts them. It spoils them. It defiles them. So does the tongue among the other members of the body.

It corrupts the whole person. How many times, folks, has your tongue led you into sin, brought your feet along into sin, brought your eyes along into sin, your hands along, your whole being along,

such that Ecclesiastes 5.2 says don't let your mouth lead you into sin because it will. It is a corruptible thing. It is a defiled and defiling thing, and it defiles the whole person, just as a bit affects the whole body of the horse, so your tongue affects the whole person. And this corruption spreads through the whole person, for he goes on to say, it sets the whole course of his life on fire. It is fire, and it sets the whole course of his life on fire. Now, there's something about fire that you can't compartmentalize fire. Fire in one room doesn't hit a wall and just stop, and keeps right on going into the next room, in the next room, from the downstairs to the upstairs, from the upstairs to the downstairs until the whole house is consumed with fire.

[29 : 43] That is your tongue. It sets the whole course of your life on fire. There are no firewalls in your life. fire. You can't compartmentalize fire in your members.

You can't contain it and keep it just in your mouth. You tell a lie to someone over here, and pretty soon you find yourself needing to tell a lie to someone over here to cover that lie, and then you must lie to someone over here, and pretty soon your whole life is a lie, you're living a lie, because your tongue is a fire that sets the whole course of your life on fire.

Men like to think that they can lie about their private life and still tell the truth in their public service. They're only fooling themselves. Fire spreads.

It spreads to every area of your life, your work, your school, your church, your friends, your neighbors, your family, your sports, your vacations.

Every area of the life is set on fire. And for all your life, the whole round, as the word means, the whole course of your life, from the cradle to the grave, you never outgrow the fire in your mouth.

[31 : 10] From your first defiant no to mom, to your last complaint in your dying breath, nothing escapes the fire of the tongue.

It spreads through the whole of life, all your life. And now this concluding word, and is itself set on fire by hell.

No wonder it burns so widely. No wonder it burns so constantly, so wickedly, so destructively. It has the undying flames of hell as its source.

It's fueled by hell. Now the tongue is attached to your esophagus, but James says its roots go much deeper, all the way down to hell.

As one commentator says, there is a pipeline to hell from your tongue. That's helpful for me. I can see that. There's my tongue.

[32 : 13] And it's not just floating there in my mouth. It's got a pipe that's supporting it. And that pipe runs all the way down to hell.

What's James telling us? He's telling us the devil is the one who fans your tongue with the bellows. He's working to keep the fires burning in your mouth. He feeds it.

He plants that word in your mind and you open your mouth and speak it, little realizing where it has its origin. And so the beloved apostle of our Lord Peter was ready to go to the cross for Jesus.

He says, no, Lord, never, Lord, this will never happen to you. And Jesus turns and says, get behind me, not Peter, get behind me, Satan. There is the smell of brimstone on what came out of your mouth.

that is not merely something that you can, that's the devil behind that, Peter. Your tongue is being fueled by hell.

[33 : 20] And here's Job and he's lost his whole family and all of his wealth in a bigger recession than we're ever having. And he's lost all that he has, even his own health.

And his wife is saying, curse God and die. And we say, I've heard those words before. We read at the beginning of Job and we see that Satan came before God and said, sure, Job worships you. You've blessed him, but take away all the good things and he will surely curse you to your face. And now those words are put in the mouth of Job, Mrs.

Job, and she says those words. They were fueled, lit on fire by hell. Now we're at the middle cross and the Son of God's bleeding and suffering to take away our sins.

Yes, the sins of our mouth. And everyone around him, the soldiers, the high priests, the other thieves, the Jews, are insulting him.

[34 : 32] if you are the Son of God. And we say, where have we heard those words before? And we go back to the wilderness temptation, Matthew 4, where Jesus was tempted by the devil.

And three times the serpent hisses, if you are the Son of God, turn the stones to bread, jump from the temple, bow down in worship.

You see, these men gathered around the cross insulting, their tongues were set on fire from hell. How many times do we let words come out of our mouths and we don't realize the source of our words?

It's set on fire of hell. And we wonder why we get into so much trouble with our tongue, why it causes so much destruction around us, in our families, in our relationships.

James says it's because it's set on fire by hell. World War II saw the use of a nasty device called a flamethrower, implement that can shoot 130 feet stream of fire.

[35 : 52] Sometimes that flamethrower was carried by a soldier and there was a container on his back to feed that flamethrower.

Other times it was mounted on a tank and it drew from the supplies carried by the tank. And James is just saying, my dear brothers, your tongue is the nozzle of a flamethrower that has a pipeline to hell.

That's why it is a dangerous thing ever to open your mouth. Now, it's not a real flattering picture of the tongue, is it?

But we must not tone it down. This is God's assessment as he looks at the tongue of man. This is what your tongue is left to yourself. This is what your tongue is without the infusion of divine grace. tongue. So, what have we seen? If you can control the tongue, you can control your whole body. But you say, that's the problem.

[37 : 02] We can't control our tongue, much less the whole body with all of its members and passions and appetites. For our tongue is like a forest fire raging out of control, destroying everything in its sight.

Well, that brings us to the third lesson that James would teach us. And it is this, that it is impossible, it is impossible for man to control the tongue.

Now, he does this in a very interesting way. He tells us some of the things that man can control.

You kids, you'll like this because you control some of these things.

He says in verse seven, all kinds of animals, birds and reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man. Remember at creation, after God created all the animals and then created man, he gave man dominion over the whole world and all the animals, the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the beasts in the field.

And he was told to subdue them, to rule over them for his own goodwill and purposes. That's his job. And man has been successful, James says, at taming and subduing for his own purposes all kinds of animals.

[38 : 25] Some of you have ever been to Sea World and you've seen killer whales that are tamed, seals and dolphins trained to do tricks, the creatures of the sea.

Maybe you've been to the zoo and seen a falcon demonstration and just with some orders, the falcon takes off and flies around and retrieves something and comes right back and lands on his own.

How did that happen? Well, he tamed it, he taught it, he subdued it. Carrier pigeons are another example of the birds of the air that have been tamed by mankind and you go to the circus and you see lions doing tricks or dogs doing tricks.

Some of you have a circus in your own living room, your own dogs, you've trained them to do tricks, to roll over, to stand up and beg and to do all sorts of things for you, to go get the paper and your slippers.

You can go out into the fields here of the Amish farms and see horses that have been trained to pull the plow, the implements on the farm. You go over to the east, the far east, and you see these elephants that weigh over 13,000 pounds and there's a little speck on their back called a man and he's given the directions you see and he's picking up tree trunks and carrying them.

[39 : 50] He's been tamed, subdued, brought into obedience to serve man's interests. All sorts of animals have been domesticated into pets. I've seen monkeys, skunks, lizards, rats, cats, birds, even snakes have been tamed, charmed by man.

And it shows that man has this ability, this wisdom, this power over these animals to control them, but not that four-inch muscle in his mouth.

Tigers? Yes. That tongue? No. No man can tame the tongue, verse 8 tells us. Tames all these animals?

But the tongue is like a beast that refuses to be tamed. It is a restless evil full of deadly poison. It's easier to tame a lion than it is your tongue.

You may succeed there, you never will succeed here. Now here is the great impossibility. No man can do it. You can no more tame the tongue than you can create a tongue.

[41:04] Now, it's far beyond the ability and power of men. You can count to ten before you speak, but you cannot tame your tongue. You can bite your tongue, but you can't tame it.

You can wash your child's mouth out with soap, but you can't tame that mouth. It defies all human efforts to control it. Now, that's what God says.

No man can tame the tongue. It is impossible, and the more he tries, the more he'll find that that is true. And James goes on to speak of this tongue in terms of a wild beast.

He says it's a restless evil. Notice, first of all, it is evil. Your tongue is evil, and it's a restless evil.

You've seen restless kids maybe in church.

They're fidgety. Oh, yes, they're sitting, but they're not at ease. They're not at rest. They're wanting to get up and go. It's like the thoroughbred horse. Right. The thoroughbred horse that's been bred and trained to run.

[42:07] What happens at the beginning of the race? Well, they got to corral that beast and get him inside the starting gate, that little cubicle with a wall on each side of him and a gate slammed shut in front of him.

And as soon as his hind is inside, they slam the other gate. And there he is. He's caught, isn't he? But he's not resting. He is one boiling beast just itching for that gate to fly open and he'll shoot out of there like a rabbit out of the brush.

And that's your tongue. It is a restless evil. Think with me about the tongue. Where has God put it? Well, he's put it there behind two gates.

There's the teeth surrounding the tongue and then there's the two lips locking it in. But never think that your tongue is tamed just because it's lying there.

It's itching to get out and to wag some new evil. The tongue is a restless evil. There's never a time in your life when you can say, you know, I once had a problem with my tongue.

[43:22] But I don't ever have to worry again about ever saying something. that I would later regret. You may think you have tamed it like the lion tamer who snapped his whip so many times and seen that lion sit up on that stool.

But oh, Mr. Lion Tamer, don't, when you enter into his cage, don't you turn your back on that beast. You never know when he'll turn on you.

And Mr. Christian, yes, you've had so many victories over your tongue, but don't you ever turn your back on it. Never start to think of it as if it's tamed, period.

It is a restless evil. And just let the right circumstances come along. Just let the person who knows how to touch all the right buttons come along.

Let the heated argument begin, and that tongue will break out in some new sin. The tongue is a restless evil.

[44:38] No man can tame it. And lastly, he says, it is full of deadly poison. Again, James' words are important, every one of them.

He doesn't say, you know, you've got a slight trace of poison in your mouth. it is full. It's full up. The cup's full of poison.

There's enough poison in your tongue, my dear brothers, to rupture any relationship, the dearest relationship in men, to commit any sin of the mouth.

That poison is there. The tongue is full of deadly poison. We think of poisonous snakes. It's probably what James was thinking of when he's talking of this beast that can't be tamed and that's full of deadly poison.

250 different kinds of snakes that can kill a man with one bite. That's poison. No, that's deadly poison.

[45:42] And that's what James is talking about. Psalm 140 and verse 3, long before James arrived on the scenes, the psalmist knew something about poisonous snakes. And says that the poison of vipers is on their lips.

Speaking of the ungodly. And so Paul, when he comes to Romans chapter 3, and he would describe all of humanity, Jew and Gentile alike, and demonstrate that they've all gone astray, that there is none righteous, no, not one.

None good, no, not one. None seeking after God, no, not one. What does he say about them? Romans 3, and verse 13, and 14.

Their throats are open graves. What's in a grave? Corruption. Didn't James say something about our tongues corrupting the whole person?

Their throats are open graves. Their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing in bitterness.

[46:46] Paul, what are you saying? Are you saying that our depravity is seen every time we open our mouths, that our words give us away? Yes, that is what I'm saying, that all mankind shows themselves to be sinners by what comes out of their mouths.

Men have toxic tongues full of deadly poison and poison kills, more dangerous than any snake in the rainforest, more dangerous than any chemical under your sink, is the poison that you carry around between your teeth.

What is the poison that fills the tongue? It's the poison of sin. Paul says sin isn't just something you do out here.

Sin is a power. It's a principle that's on the inside. In Romans 7, verse 23, he says, I see another law, another principle at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work in my members.

Where is this law, this principle of sin working, Paul? Well, it's working within my members, the parts of my body. And James before him says, our tongues are full of this poison.

[48:13] That part of our body is filled with indwelling sin, the flesh. And Paul goes on to tell us then that the problem is not just that the poison of sin fills our tongues, but that the deadly poison is inside of all of the members of our body.

that's why we all stumble in so many ways in what we say. It's why not many of us should be teachers. Now, snakes can be defanged to remove the deadly poison, but not so the tongue. No man can tame it. No man can get the poison out of it. It dwells in him. And very briefly, in conclusion, notice the predicament that James puts us all in.

I can't tame the tongue. It's impossible. It's a fire that's burning out of my control, and it's lit on fire by hell.

I can't tame the tongue, and yet I must tame the tongue. because if I don't keep a tight rein on my tongue, James tells me that my religion is worthless.

[49:42] I can't, yet I must. I can't, but I must. I'm in this predicament. Are you there? That's what James is wanting to do with us this morning.

He's wanting to put us in between these two great realities. I can't tame it, but I must tame it. It's what caused Isaiah to cry out, woe is me.

I am undone, I'm ruined, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty, the Holy, Holy, Holy God.

I can't tame my tongue, but I must tame my tongue. You see, James' conviction is this, until we are humbled by our inability to tame the tongue, we will not run to the remedy as we ought.

That's why James is in no hurry to run to the remedy. He's lingering. He's holding us here, and we can't return to this. We can't go on. We're going to be staying here.

[51:01] But it is good for us to see the I can't and the I must. If we will ever begin to approximate the appreciation that should be ours for the remedy that this God, who we sin against with our tongues, has made for us in Jesus Christ.

And James will get there in chapter 4. He will tell us the remedy that this God gives grace to the humble. You know what grace is?

Grace is power to live as God wants you to. Grace is power to grab hold of the reins of that beast and to say you will go here and not there.

Grace is power to grab the rudder and say, though the winds are seeking to blow me off the course of holiness, we're going here in God's path. Grace is power to grab hold of your tongue and to cap that pipeline to hell and to fill your tongue so that it is not an instrument of death, but a life-giving instrument to other needy people.

Yes, there is a remedy. The things that are impossible to man are possible to God. And we'll see that as we go further in the letter of James.

[52 : 31] God's spoken to us. Wonder of wonders he wants to hear from these lips. Let's talk to him. Holy Father, we all stumble in many ways, if only with our tongues alone.

forgive us and help us, almighty Savior. Let the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight.

Oh, Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.