

JAMES RESHUFFLED
The Tongue
May 27, 2018

You've gotta love Facebook.
With the magic of Facebook we all become experts in marketing.
Did you know that?
And you know what we're marketing? . . . *ourselves!*

Now when I wake up in the morning and first look at myself in the mirror . . .

This is what I see!
But, Oh My! That's not what I'll show to the world!
A little online touch up, and voila!

This is the me I'll post on Facebook.

We get angry at the spin doctors on cable news,
But -- we're *all* spin doctors.
 We re-interpret our actions and our motives so fast
 (to make ourselves appear more noble than we really are,
 even to ourselves)
 That it's as if the truth the mirror revealed never even existed.

But we didn't need Facebook to learn how to do this.
Hiding what is less presentable dates back to the garden of Eden!

And as we return to the book of James this morning,
 James reminds us that it is *incredibly* easy to be so full of ourselves
 we quickly forget what we look like.

And so he tells us – Please take another look.
And let me tell you what *I* see.

Warning! you may not like what you see –
 But please don't walk away and forget.

James loves his church.
He loves the people in his church.
He is devoting his life to building them up in the most holy faith,
 but there is a danger afoot.

And it's not the threat from the government interference
because of their anti-church agenda.
It's not the threat of running out of money.
It's not the threat of a bad music day, or a boring sermon day.
It's not even the threat of not knowing how to get people to come to church on time. ☺
It's the threat of a LOOSE TONGUE!

And so here we go, to take a sober look James' mirror this morning.

James 1:26 NLT;

^{1:26} If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue,
you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless.

Worthless?

But Lord – Don't you see all the *good* I do around here?
How could a careless word erase all that good?

Here's the best I can describe God's logic.

Let's say you're the batter up in a game of baseball.

Wow! You hit if far into center field, and start running for all your worth.

Only when you get to first base,

you're running so fast you don't actually touch first base, but kind of fly over it.

But you touch *second* and *third* and slide into home plate

a split second before the Catcher catches the ball.

The crowd goes wild . . .

And then they do the video replay.

How much is your homerun worth?

We say, Lord, look at all I *do* for you!

Look at all I give or sacrifice or how heartily I praise you!

you name whatever is your second, third and home plate,

and the Lord says, "But you missed first base."

With your tongue you disrespected one of my children.

You violated the ONE ROYAL LAW.

Your run doesn't count.

All the good stuff we do for God, nullified by a careless tongue?

That's what Jesus said: **Matt 12:36-37**

“But I tell you that every careless word that people speak,
they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment.
For by your words you will be justified,
and by your words you will be condemned.”

And, by the way, being a pastor doesn't let one off the hook.
In fact, it's just the *opposite*.

James 3:1

Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers,
because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.
Anybody want my job?

It doesn't matter how eloquently or powerfully a pastor can proclaim God's word,
if I miss first base – controlling my tongue – James says -- WORTHLESS!

Then James drives this home again, **James 3:2**

If you could find someone whose speech was perfectly true,
you'd have a perfect person, in perfect control of life.

James is saying that the control we have over our tongue and it's truthfulness
is THE best indicator of our spiritual maturity.

By the way, did you notice James refined the meaning of a loose tongue here.
When we think of a loose tongue, what comes to mind is the bombastic person spouting off.
But what James indicates here is not the style of our speech,
but the truthfulness of the content . . .

Just so we don't confuse control of the tongue with just being a mild-mannered person.

Being very mild mannered doesn't mean there isn't
all kinds of duplicity in what a person says.

Listen to **Proverbs 26:**

24 Enemies disguise themselves with their lips,
but in their hearts they harbor deceit.

25 Though their speech is charming, do not believe them,
for seven abominations fill their hearts.

26 Their malice may be concealed by deception,
but their wickedness will be exposed in the assembly.

27 Whoever digs a pit will fall into it;
if someone rolls a stone, it will roll back on them.

28 A lying tongue hates those it hurts,
and a flattering mouth works ruin.

This describes the person whose words aren't an honest reflection
of who they are, no matter how gentle they sound.
It's so easy to use their words to manage the perception of others
and manipulate outcomes.

So don't go pointing your finger at those who are more bombastic in their style,
They may be far more truthful than their soft-spoken counterpart.

Not one of us is off the hook here.

But if we're not yet convinced we need to go back to school on controlling our tongue,
James builds his case even further.

James 3:6-8 The Message

A word out of your mouth may seem of no account,
but it can accomplish nearly anything—or destroy it!
It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire.
A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that.
By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos,
throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke
and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell.

Warren Buffet: “It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it.”

- How many years did it take to grow a beautiful forest, home of many animals.
A tiny spark sets off a fire, and it's all destroyed.
- A relationship that has taken years to build, is dissolved in an instant,
by a moment's venting that felt so exhilarating in the moment,
until there was the price to pay.
- A relationship of trust shattered by a lying tongue.
- The work of God (or a ministry) that has been carefully and lovingly built,
suffers irreparable damage by a slanderous tongue.

Don't forget James is talking to church people – (*his* church people),
not the crazy people on the news.

He's talking to his *church* people.

We can destroy much good with a careless comment –
and all the good we are working so hard together to accomplish,
goes up in flames.

The speed with which a loose tongue can destroy much good is terrifying.

Are we still good? Everyone still with me?

Cause James isn't done with us yet.

A loose tongue can take many forms,
but there was one form that James was particularly concerned with
that was going on in his church.

James 4:11

Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another.
Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them
speaks against the law and judges it.
When you judge the law, you are not keeping it,
but sitting in judgment on it.
There is only one Lawgiver and Judge,
the one who is able to save and destroy.
But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

Slander/speaks against or “against speech”, judging other,
or we just call it– gossip – makes us law breakers

So what does this look like?

Gossip – talk about someone's personal business
that's not your business to talk about.

It doesn't matter if what you're saying is true or false.

What matters is that it would hurt the other person
to find out that the information was shared or
to find out they were the topic of people's critical evaluation.

Whether it's a full-blown commentary you're offering
or just a snide remark made under your breath, damage is done.

I love this definition of slander –

Slander is grown up gossip with legal consequences.

It short -- anything that violates another person's privacy

Or secretly damages their reputation can start a forest fire from hell.

We protest, “I'm *just* giving my opinion!” “I'm just telling the truth!”

God asks, “Did you diminish another person with your words spoken behind their back?”

If yes, you're a law-breaker.

So why don't we just knock it off?

Cause it's incredibly hard.

Slander/against-speaks/gossip is almost irresistible.

Proverbs 18:8

The words of a gossip are like choice morsels;
they go down to the inmost parts.

If you have knowledge about someone that no one else has,
that gives you power.

Knowledge is power, and that power is social currency.
Besides, bringing down another helps us to feel better about ourselves.
It justified us or highlights our superior insight.

But it's not only irresistible, it's highly contagious,
and must be quarantined

Proverbs 20:19

A gossip betrays a confidence;
so avoid anyone who talks too much.

Once you identify a gossip. Keep your distance.

The last thing you want to do is to be identified as a gossip!

Proverbs 25:9-10 NLT

When arguing with your neighbor,
don't betray another person's secret.
Others may accuse you of gossip,
and you will never regain your good reputation.

Forget how you've damaged the reputation of the person you've gossiped about.
God will vindicate them in due time.
You're the one who won't lose your bad reputation.

But if you're the gossip, your reputation among your peers isn't your greatest worry.

Psalm 101:5 *Whoever slanders his neighbor secretly I will destroy.*

This should put the holy fear of God into us all!

But, you ask, aren't there some bad reports about people
that you just can't sweep under the carpet and ignore?
Absolutely!
So what are we supposed to do?

It's actually quite simple –

Let's say you've observed or heard that a bad report about someone.
You have two choices.

You go to!

One you go directly to that person to express your concern.

You don't tell 3 other people first, telling them, "But don't tell anyone!"

Who of course tell 3 people, telling them, "But don't tell anyone!"

How many people know by now? (13)

If you don't feel you can go to the person --
perhaps the situation is just too volatile
or you're too emotionally involved to think clearly.

You go up!

You go up to the person in spiritual authority over them or you.

You go up to someone you have invited to speak spiritually into your life,
someone you *know* will give you honest, godly counsel.

You go up to the one in spiritual authority to deal appropriate
with the person in question.

You go to or you go up!

But the one thing that you don't do . . .

You don't go sideways and pass it along.

If you go sideways you're spreading a virus that has power to destroy,
and don't think you'll escape unscathed.

And – listen to James once more – as you go to OR go up,
you are to have one highest purpose – one intent:

James 5:19-20

My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth
and someone should bring that person back, remember this:
Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way
will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

God, give us the right heart.

Your intent of going to or up is to rescue the other person if possibly
from the folly of their own behavior
or to protect others from their folly.

I love how God works.

I was working on this sermon,
and John Butters, who had no idea what I was working on,
comes across this video and feels compelled to send it to me.
I knew immediately that God was adding his strong exclamation mark
to this message!

VIDEO – THE TONGUE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VGfQ6he9Wx8&start_radio=1&list=RDVGfQ6he9Wx8

Family there is a time to be still, to hold our tongue.
We have great work to do.
Let's protect it by what we don't say.

But there is also a time to release our tongue in the praise of God.
The song we rehearsed earlier tells us exactly how we are to use our tongues!

I would like us all now to be the choir, singing to an audience of one.

BENEDICTION

Psalm 19:14

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.