

The Tongue

by Steve Mays

The tongue has the power to build up or destroy others, and it is connected to the heart, making it impossible to control without the help of the Holy Spirit.

Duration: 34:09

Scripture: James 3:1

Topics: "Tongue"

Description

In this sermon, Pastor Steve Mays emphasizes the tremendous power of our words. He highlights how our words can either destroy or give direction to people's lives. He uses the analogy of a ship's rudder to illustrate the importance of guiding our words wisely. Pastor Mays also emphasizes the need for self-discipline and the potential impact our words can have on others. He encourages listeners to use their tongues as instruments of blessing and to be witnesses for the glory of God.

Transcript

It's the 2010 Summer of Sermons with Steve Mays. You are to be a witness. You are to have the power of the Living God in your heart.

And you are to rise up and be a blessing in this generation. So you need to learn that your tongue can become a tremendous, powerful instrument. Today, Pastor Steve Mays talks about the power of our words.

And I don't think there's a better time for God to get a hold of our tongues than right now. We are to be witnesses for the glory of God. It's been said that a sharp tongue is the only edged tool that grows keener with constant use.

Well, sad to say too many of us are sharpening our tongues with gossip and slander and abuse. We're quick to tear others down rather than build them up. Why is that? Surely we have the power to control our tongues.

Or do we? Pastor Steve helps us get to the bottom of this propensity to mistreat others with our words. It's good insight taken from Steve's popular series called Practical Christianity. Learn more about the Practical Christianity series at lightoftheword.org. But now here's Pastor Steve with his lesson called The Tongue.

Let's listen. So we turn in our Bibles to James chapter 3. And we want to draw your attention to verses 3 all the way through verse 6 this morning. James chapter 3. Join me just in a moment of prayer.

Father, we thank you for your goodness and your grace in our lives. And we ask that you would give us great wisdom and a great heart for your kingdom. Lord, give us ears to hear and, God, a heart to understand.

And, Lord, would you get a hold of our tongue. And we will thank you that, Lord, as we see that that tongue is connected to our heart, how we need to have you touch the heart. In Jesus' name, amen.

The story is told of a young man who had just started his new job in the produce department. His very first customer was a woman asking him for a half head of lettuce. As politely as he could, the young man said, We only sell whole heads of lettuce at the store.

The lady started getting upset and becoming very persistent. The poor young man knew he was in over his head and did what any young lad would do. He went running for upper management.

I'll be right back, said the young manager. The young man shuffled off to find the manager in the back of the store, not realizing the woman was right behind him. He finally finds the manager and says, I got this crazy old woman out in the produce who wants to buy a half head of lettuce.

Seeing the look of anxiety flood his manager's face, the lad realized the crazy old woman was standing right behind him. He turned as quick as a whip and said, And this kind lady wants to buy the other half of lettuce. Story goes on.

Later that day, the manager complimented him on how he handled and quit thinking. Tell me, young man, where is your home? Well, said the young man, I'm from Toronto, home of the beautiful hockey players and ugly women. The manager's face fell again in anxiety, and this time his blood pressure rose.

I will have you know, young man, my wife is from Toronto. Quick as a whip, the young man turned around and said, What hockey team did you say she played on? Boy, these tongues can get in a lot of trouble. And I want to talk to you today, really, I believe, about one of the most practical things in your whole life.

James, we know, deals with practicality. He was the half brother of our Lord Jesus Christ. So it means that he lived in the home for 30 years with Christ.

Was able to see him ethically and morally live for the kingdom of God. And no doubt we know that he did not come to Christ until after the resurrection. But the day that he came to Christ, he made a real commitment.

And because of that teaching in his home, he became one of the pillars of the early church. And I don't think that you can become a pillar in a church or a pillar in your home or in business until you really understand the importance of your words and ethics and morals in your life. If you're going to play double-mindedness or double standards or begin to kind of fool around all the time, you're going to hurt people and you won't even know it.

You're going to say things that are going to cut deep into your spouse's life. You're going to say things that are going to tear your children apart. Things like, you're really stupid, you know.

Things that you can never get back. And you're going to do things that are going to undermine your authority in your life. Jesus said in Matthew 12, 36, But I say unto you that every idle word that a man shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment.

For by your word thou shalt be justified, and by thy word thou shalt be condemned. And then later on in Matthew, Do not ye understand that whatsoever enters into the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out of the body? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceeds evil thoughts.

And there it is. Your tongue is connected to your heart. So there's no way that you can say, I'm going to be quiet and hold my tongue.

It's impossible. The only hope that you have is for the work of God's Spirit to get a hold of your heart. And Spurgeon went on to say, There's only two things that can grab your heart.

The world or the power of the Holy Spirit. And we know that Peter, when the world got a hold of him, warmed himself by the fire of the enemy. And the result of that was he was cursing, denying, and walking away from Christ.

When the baptism of the Holy Spirit came and Pentecost fell, Peter was preaching and standing, and he said, You men of Judah and Galilee, you hearken to me this day. This man whom you crucified, who died, has risen from the dead. In other words, from one moment cursing to the next moment preaching.

From one moment around the world's camp, another moment around the Spirit of the living God. So the only thing that can get a hold of my heart is God's Word. And when God begins to change my heart, my words begin to change.

When God takes the bitterness out of my heart, the sarcasticness begins to go. When God begins to teach me forgiveness, then all of the judgmental and critical attitudes begin to flee. So if you're trying to be nice and cool and together and not make a mistake, it's not going to happen.

The Bible says that if you're bitter, it's going to spew out. And it's going to defile many people. And so you see it in the home today, in this generation.

You find homes where husbands are complaining, and wives are complaining, and children are talking back. You see it in church. People are discouraged and not encouraging.

You see it at work. You work yourself silly, and no one wants to say you've done a good job. And I think it's really unbiblical.

I believe very simply that God declares that we need to be careful. He says in James 3, verse 3, Behold, we put bits in the horse's mouth, that they may obey us, and we turn about their whole body. Behold also, the ships, which though they be so great, are driven of fierce winds, yet they can be turned by a rudder.

And then, verse 6, The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. So the tongue among our members, that it files the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature, and it sets the fires of hell. I want to share three things this morning that I think can really help you, encourage you, and build you up.

But I want to challenge you. If you go home and say, I'm going to try this, it won't work. The only way this is going to work is you're going to have to yield your heart to the work of the Holy Spirit, and you're going to

have to go to the cross.

Because when God can change you, then God can change the world around you. When God can give you vision, then you can see those children the way you should see them. And when you can see what you're doing in the kingdom at work, then you can see the field that God's given to you.

So you don't want to gossip, because you're going to destroy what God's trying to do. You are to be a witness. You are to have the power of the living God in your heart.

And you are to rise up and be a blessing in this generation. Yes, you have to be honest. And yes, you have to sit down and discipline.

But you do not have to destroy people. And your words and my words destroy people's lives. It's like, for instance, if you came to me and said, Stephen, I just told my son to shut up.

Now, in a moment of anger, it slipped. Or maybe you said to your daughter, you know, you're really stupid. She will never forget that the rest of her life.

And so you come and talk to me. And you say, what should I do? And I say, well, there's a very, very, very wise, wise man named Pastor Rob. And I want you to go see him.

But he's on top of this high, high mountain, 7,000 feet up. He has a backpack, and he's just sitting there, and he's a godly man. Well, how do we get there? You need to climb there.

And when you get there, you need to say, what do I do with my mouth? And so you labor two, three days. You get there, and you realize that, you know, here's Pastor Rob. And he says, what can I do? He says, well, Pastor Steve sent me up here.

I told my kid to shut up and told my other one that they were stupid and told my wife that she was gaining a little bit of weight. What can I do? Pastor Rob, just with wisdom and a beard and long hair and a backpack up there, said, I want you to go back down. I want you to buy a pillow.

Full of feathers and come back up. You mean I've got to go all the way back? All the way back down? Climb all the way back up? All the way back up? And so you do it because you're desperate. You look at him.

You're sweating and beat up, and he's just happy. And you say, well, what do I do now? He says, let's open it up. And you spread those feathers all over the mountain.

It catches the current, and it just blows them hundreds and hundreds of miles. And you look at Pastor Rob, and you say, well, now what should I do? And wise, wise Pastor Rob, go pick them all up. And you look at him, and you want to beat him up, and you say, it's impossible.

It's impossible to get back those words. It's impossible to get back that moment. It's impossible to get that thought out of your wife's heart.

It's impossible to get that thought out of that kid that thinks he's stupid because the one who brought him into the world is upset. So the only hope that I have is that God put a guard at my mouth, and Lord, touch my heart and give me compassion for people. Lord, you speak to them.

And so I see three things. Number one, a tremendous power in verses 1-5. A tremendous power.

And then in verses 6-8, I see a terrible peril. Terrible peril in verses 6-8. And then I want to end in verse 11.

A thrilling possibility. And this is kind of cool. But first of all, a tremendous, tremendous power.

Notice he says three things in verses 1-5. In verse 1 and 2, very simply, word to help. A word to help.

He's talking about, my brethren, be not many masters, knowing that ye shall receive the greater condemnation. Now, teachers don't read that. But he's speaking about me.

And what he's saying is that this pulpit cannot be a place for insecurity or a platform to try to build your life or a place that you want to be loved. This pulpit needs to be a place that you stand before God and you share the Word of God and you build up lives. If you're in a children's ministry, you have those children, one word is all it takes.

It says of Martin Luther that he read one verse, the just shall live by faith. Brought in the Reformation. If you're a parent, one word can set the destiny of that kid.

You know, you've really made a tremendous change. Or if you're at work, one word can really take a hold of somebody's heart. You're doing a good job.

And I think it's important that we realize that our words can either devastate or they can absolutely encourage other people. So in verse 1 and 2, a word to help. But I also find in verse 3 a bit to lead.

A bit to lead. And what I mean by that is we put bits in horses' mouths. And we can take that 1,200 pound animal and we can lead him to the right or lead him to the left.

Or we can hold him back. Or we can let him go. So we can control the power.

We can dominate, in a sense, for the glory of God. And what that tells me, again, in my own personal life, is that this little tongue, two ounces, can either destroy people or it can really give direction. It can really come to a person and say, you know, I really see your life changing.

And it can give you direction. Or you can give encouragement. Or you can say, you know, you need to be involved in ministry.

God's blessed in your life. And just that one moment can take a person and change them. In other words, the bit oftentimes will lead to a wonderful thing in your life.

And then I read again, just one word, kind of interesting. He goes on to say concerning verse 4, a rudder to guide. So here it is.

Very simple. A word to instruct. And then secondly, a bit to lead.

And then third, a rudder to guide. Behold also the ships, which though they be great, are driven by fierce winds. But that rudder is connected to that steering column.

And in the old days, it was a rope or it was chains. Today it's hydraulics. Doesn't make a difference.

But when you turn, that rudder turns. And that little tiny rudder turns this massive ship. So in this pulpit, you can turn a church.

In your witness, you can turn a nation. In your home, you can turn a wife. But you have to do it God's way.

So you need to learn that your tongue can become a tremendous, powerful instrument. You can say to your wife, you know, I'm praying for you. Just that would tell her, well, if you're praying for me, I'm going to pray for you.

Well, good. Now you're both talking to God. And God's going to deal with both of your lives.

So you say to your son, you know, you're going to do good. Let's pray over that test. You think so, Dad? I know so.

And there you encourage. Or you look at somebody in the ministry, you know, you've done good. And what happens is we don't do that.

Well, this isn't done and that isn't done. This isn't done. And we pick everything apart.

We work ourselves silly trying to please people. And then we find people that all they do is find what we don't do. You say, well, that's constructive.

That's destructive. That's not constructive. Constructive is, hey, you're doing a great job, but let me show you how to do it better.

That's okay. But here I find that a word can help and a bit can lead and a rudder can really guide. And it says here in Proverbs 12, 25, Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop, but a good word maketh it glad.

So you come in church and you're kind of bummed out. So someone puts their arm around you. How are you doing? Just a good word.

All of a sudden, you know, I'm not in this thing by myself. Or when I see somebody going out and they're hobbling out with a little wheelchair, I go out and put my arms around them. I know what they're going through.

Let me pray for you. Just a good word will get them through that day. Just get them through that day.

That's what Jesus did. He said, be of good cheer. He didn't say, you know, you wicked, nasty, stubborn, stupid people.

He said, be of good cheer. They locked themselves inside of the room after His death. Jesus didn't come in, open the door.

What's wrong with you guys? He just popped in. Be of good cheer. He sees two disciples walking down the street on their way back to Emmaus.

They are so upset. He drops in, hey, how's it going? What do you mean, how's it going? Don't you know what's going on? No, tell me. He didn't condemn them, hurt them, abuse them.

They were already abused and destroyed. Your family, your friends, your church, everybody you know is going through it. Amen? Who is going to stand in the gap? Who is going to say, you know, God, you know I have problems.

You know things aren't going well. But you know, I don't want to live this way no more. Because if my words can change my home, I'm going to do it.

If one word can change a nation, I want to speak it. God, wherever you send me, I'm going to speak the word. So, tremendous power.

Then, number two. Terrible perils in v. 6-8. He says here, even so the tongue is a little member.

And it boasts great things. Listen to that. Your little two ounces of meat can boast.

Behold how great matter a little fire is kindled. Let me give you three things in v. 6-8. Under terrible perils.

Number one, words can devastate. Words can devastate. In v. 1-5, words can build.

Let me give you the other side, where we live. Words can devastate. Words can devastate in v. 5. In other words, it just takes one word.

A little fire got out of control in Chicago, and the whole thing was up in smoke. It just takes one word. You walk up, and you walk in, and you say, you know, I just hate this house.

What do you mean you hate this house? How dare you? How can you hate what God's given? It'd be better to say, God, I hate you, because you gave me this house. But to say, I hate this house. Okay, let me buy you another house.

Well, I hate this house. You see, what you're really saying is, I don't like this relationship. Because if I enjoyed our relationship, all I need is a sugar shack.

I don't need material things. But when you lose the perspective of who you are, then things become important, and you're never going to fill them. If you drink of this well, you're going to thirst again.

So my words can be destructive. I can come to Rob and say, I can't believe it. I'm so tired.

I'm devastated. I can say, when are you going to get it together? Listen to that. What do you mean, when are you going to get it together? Like I got it together? And secondly, how does anybody have it together if it isn't a process? Wouldn't it be better to say, Rob, you have really changed.

But there's a couple of areas that would really help me more. So I can get the very same thing done. But I don't have to destroy who he is.

So words can be destructive. It says in Proverbs 16, 27, An ungodly man dicketh up evil, and in his lips there is a burning fire. And then in Proverbs 21, verse 23, Whosoever keeps his mouth quiet, and his tongue keeps himself from a lot of trouble.

Everyone thinks you're great until you open your mouth and you prove you're not. So learn to be quiet. So number one, words can destroy.

Verse 5. Also, words can defile. In verse 6. And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body.

One word can bring iniquity. One thought can bring a fantasizing. One moment of your life can lead you down a path that you can't go.

In other words, this gal is looking at you and you know she shouldn't because she's cute and you're not. And she's looking at you and you know exactly what she wants. What is the word you are to say? No.

Well, I just can't say that. Then you say to her, Do you know Jesus Christ? She'll be gone. She's been sent by the enemy to cause you to commit adultery.

But if you don't say the word no, then you're going to be defiled. If your kids are in trouble and all of a sudden they come home and you begin to say, You know, when I was a kid, I never did this. Well, they know that's not true.

Of course, I didn't know what to say to my kids. I was on drugs and got shot and ran around with nothing on. And you know, how do you tell your kids? Listen, you know, no drugs, just behave yourself.

Well, Dad, you did it. I did it, yes, but I was on LSD. I was crazy.

But I'm telling you, I know what I'm talking about. Well, Dad, now I had a choice. I could try to convince them or I could just take them and pray with them and share with them out of God's Word.

Very important. One word can point to Satan. One word can point to somebody.

One word can listen to gossip. Or one word can point people back to the cross. One word can say, I have the answers.

One word can say, you know, God has an answer. And then the third word is kind of interesting. Not only do words destroy and words defile, but words poison.

Verse 7, this is so good. And every kind of beast, of the birds and serpents, things in the sea are tamed. But the tongue can no man tame.

Now, I'm not writing this. The Holy Spirit is. But the conjunction, no one can tame the tongue.

It is an unruly evil full of deadly poison. So, what's our hope? Stephen, if I can't get a hold of my tongue, it just kind of slips. I kind of cuss.

I kind of get into this. I kind of tear people apart. I'm kind of gifted with, you know, being a perfectionist.

I see all the problems. I walk into a restaurant. They don't do it right.

They don't serve right. Well, maybe God's giving you the gift of administration, but keep your mouth quiet. Eat your eggs and just behave yourself.

And ask God, Lord, what do I do with these thoughts? But to tear it apart, it's crazy. One word. I met a guy the other day.

I don't know how to say this, but I met a guy, counseled a guy. You know, he had long hair, and maybe I was jealous. And, you know, his office was a mess.

And I didn't say nothing. But he brought it up three times. I want to apologize for the mess in my office.

And then he brought up, you know, his hair. And then he brought up problems he's having. I said, you know something? Why don't you just cut your hair? He said, well, why should I do that? I said, if you're concerned about your image, then change it.

And if you're concerned about your office being a mess and you know people want it clean, fix it. So we had a wonderful lunch. He called me the next day.

Hey, I got my hair cut. Cleaned my office. You know, first time I ever met the guy.

Words are powerful. Words can change or words can destroy. I could have said to him, you know, you're a slob.

And you don't deserve what you have. But I said, you know, God wants to give you more. God wants to give you people to help you.

But how can you give information when you can't find the information on your desk? Good point. So he got inspired. I didn't know he was going to do it.

He called me and just freaked me out. Oh, wow, man. I'm not going to say nothing no more.

But words can change and do these things. And it's great. Or they can poison.

Did you hear Pastor Steve? He's wearing a wig. This afternoon. Hey, did you hear he got a wig? It's on the side.

He's really bald all over. Hey, you know, I knew it. I knew it.

I knew that he was carnal and about looks and everything else. And I know that, you know, he's all caught up in carnality. We're not going to that church no more.

What happened? One word. You poison people. You can't do that.

And then the cure. A thrilling possibility. It says in v. 11, God can make you whole.

This is so exciting. And v. 11, does a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? The answer is what? No. And I want to take you back in your mind to one Bible passage when Israel were murmuring because the water was bitter.

And remember there in Exodus 15 that Moses cries out to God. And God, check it out, God showed Him, help me out, a tree. And so they cut the tree and they put the tree in the water and the water went from bitter to what? Sweet.

Huh. If my fountain is bitter, then I'm not in fellowship. And if the source of my life is critical, then I'm not yielding to the Holy Spirit because I'm to be partakers of that divine nature.

And James is saying, listen, time out. Do not tell me about your character. I want to see your conduct.

Do not tell me about your belief. I want to see your behavior. Do not tell me about your doctrine.

I want to see your duty. In other words, James is talking about put your faith where it really needs to go. And when God gets a hold of your mouth, God can pull a whole world through your life.

And so you have to go God's way. You can't gossip. You have to do Matthew 18.

And you have to stand up and speak the truth. And wonderful things happen. And God uses this tongue to help people because inside, in your heart, there's a living torrent of water.

The bitterness is gone. And secondly, I notice in verse 12, can the fig tree, in other words, I need to come to the tree. The tree.

You remember Peter said it so well in 2-4. Who His own bore our sins and His own body on the tree that we being dead to sin should live into righteousness. And so if you're having a problem, if I'm having a problem with my mouth, if I find myself hurting, destroying, offending people, can't have friends, I'm just negative all the time.

This is happening. This is happening. They can't drive.

The car is dirty. The house is dirty. I'm ugly.

This is happening. What happened to the baptism of the Holy Spirit that we're to be a witness? We're not. We are a wrecking crew going into the world, telling people that we have Christ, but when they listen to us, they don't want Jesus because if this is what Jesus is going to do, they don't want it.

They live there already. I live there. All I ever hear is complaints.

So God has to give me encouragement. My heart needs to stay focused on the living water and I need to come to the tree because I need to be forgiven. And if my heart's forgiven and my heart's full of His Spirit, when I walk in that house, I'll say, hey, what a great day.

It might have been a terrible day, but it's a great day now. I'm home. And so that's the choice I have.

And I don't think there's a better time for God to get a hold of our tongues than right now. We are to be witnesses for the glory of God. And I believe every divorce, every split in the church, every national war we go into is because of this two ounces of meat that's connected to the heart.

And we blame him and we blame her and we blame them, but the honest truth that we know is I've allowed my heart to become a trash can. And it needs to have the sensitivity of the Holy Spirit. Out of the abundance of a heart, a man speaks.

And when I am saying things I shouldn't or criticizing when I know I shouldn't or my language begins to change, I hear it. And that is God's Spirit telling me, I've got problems here. So I have to go back to the cross, back to the living water, and I have to stand up and be sweet.

God gave you a gift, your tongue. If you want a better marriage, better children, better ministry, better city, then be an instrument of God. Pastor Steve Mays with good counsel taken from his helpful lessons on practical Christian living.

The Tongue is the title of today's study and it's originally part of a series that's been a tremendous blessing to many of our listeners. The set is called Practical Christianity. Steve paints a portrait of a mature Christian by examining God's word he reveals that our everyday actions ought to show the world just what a Christian is.

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