

THURSDAY 01 September 2022 "Controlled Tongue" (James 3:7-12)

Hello, my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

I wonder how many of you have pets and how long you've worked at taming or training those animals? Perhaps we could apply the question even to children: *how long and hard have we adults worked to train and even tame the behavior and mouths of our children or grandchildren?*

Welcome back to our time with the apostle James as he is writing the first letter going out from the apostles to the early Christians about 20 years after Jesus has left Jerusalem returning to heaven. James was a brother to Jesus, growing up in the same home, and yet James rejected the notion that Jesus was anything other than a normal older brother. It seemed preposterous to James that Jesus might somehow be God in the flesh, even when James began hearing of miracles and Jesus' powerful messages.

We don't know if James ever actually saw Jesus perform a miracle, but we do know that when James saw Jesus alive AFTER His crucifixion and death, everything changed in James's mind and heart, and he became a passionate follower of Jesus!

James is writing to his fellow Jewish Jesus followers all over the Roman Empire who understand all too well the painful reality of wicked, malicious, slanderous, even hateful tongues. Many of those who will read James' letter fled Jerusalem due to persecution and most have not received warm welcomes as refugees in the towns to which they ran. *Even their fellow Jews now hate them as traitors since they proclaim Jesus as their Messiah!*

James is writing about the power and potential of the tongue and how we as followers of Jesus Christ should have much more control over our tongues than the average person. Why? *Because the Holy Spirit of God lives within us, and we should desire that our lives would be God honoring and a living expression of eternal thanks to Jesus for giving His life so we could have eternal life as forgiven sons and daughters of Almighty God!*

James picks up his stylus, so let's watch and listen: **"All kinds of animals...have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue! It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison!"** (James 3:7,8) Well that sure is true, isn't it? Are you amazed at how many different kinds of animals can be trained by human beings to do a wide array of things? *And yet, are you also amazed at how very few of us have learned to tame our tongues consistently?* Isn't it amazing that given the right set of circumstances, the right unexpected problem, suddenly our tongues go out of control, and we might even be amazed by the words that come spewing out of our own mouths!! Why is that my friends?

James continues: ***"With the tongue we praise our Lord Jesus and God the Father, and with that same tongue we curse human beings who have been made in God's image. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursings. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and saltwater flow out from the same spring? Can a fig tree bear olives or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water."*** (James 3:9-12)

I live in a place where there are several freshwater springs which bubble up from down deep in the earth, and these springs form beautiful rivers. The water is crystal clear and a constant 72 degrees, day and night, month after month. A huge volume of water pours up from these springs. It is impossible for the water to suddenly turn salty or change temperature because it flows up through the earth aquifer filtration system pure and ready to nourish all that depend on pure, sweet, fresh water.

James makes a strong true statement doesn't he about the consistency of that which God has created. *Yet why is there NOT consistency with our tongues?* How is it possible that out of the same mouth, within just a few moments, can come sweet, encouraging, God honoring words, and then suddenly, out of the very same mouth can come hateful, hurtful or deceitful words? Of course, it's because those words don't originate with our teeth or our gums or our tongue or even our voice box. *The words originate in our heart and our mind, don't they? Our tongue is simply an obedient tool for our mind and heart, isn't that true?* Same with our hands which can caress a little child or an elderly widow, or within seconds can turn violent and strike a person in anger, causing great harm.

So, what's the solution to our dangerous tongues, my friends? It's the same solution to our dangerous hands and fists and feet and eyes and every other moveable part of our body. *The truth is the key is our heart and our mind.* That is why Paul wrote these words to the Christians a few years after James wrote: ***"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*** (Rom. 12:2) It's a matter of our minds and what our minds think and want and pursue, and then what our minds tell our bodies to DO! That's the problem, isn't it?

Paul continues... ***"Those people who live according to their sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Holy Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit of God desires. The mind controlled by our sinful nature is death, but the mind controlled by the Holy Spirit is life and peace. The mind controlled by our sinful nature is hostile to God, it does not submit to God's law..."*** (Romans 8:5-9)

Oh, my those are very clear words aren't they, my friends? *Our sinful, evil, selfish, human nature continually tries to lead us to think, speak and behave in ways that are offensive to God and actually help the efforts of Satan in our world to bring more pain and destruction and demolition into every aspect of the human experience, in every family and every city.* Now think about that a moment and look closely to see what evidence do you find that this is a very significant true statement?

But when we recognize our inescapable sin bondage and our desperate need for rescue and we repent of our sin, trusting in God to break us free from our sin shackles and forgive us of our sins and place His Holy Spirit within us to cleanse our minds and help us to see our world through the eyes of Jesus and think like Jesus thinks... then my friends, everything changes for us! *Our tongues will ALWAYS speak what our minds think, and our hearts feel, and that's why our words reflect the true condition of our minds and hearts and reveal the truth about who we really are down deep inside, regardless of whatever religious or spiritual claims we might make.*

That my friends is why the answer to taming the tongue is not tongue piercings or wiring your jaw closed or even cutting your tongue out of your mouth! **The secret, God's great answer, is the transformation of the heart and the mind, by the power of God!** When those parts of you and me, my mind and my heart, are under the full control of the Holy Spirit of God, and we are choosing to live our lives fully for the glory of God, *then our tongues will be wonderful springs of encouragement and hope and help to everyone around us.*

That's why King David, when overwhelmed with his sinfulness, cried out **"Create in me a clean heart O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not take your Holy Spirit from me or cast me from your presence. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing Spirit to sustain me."** (Ps. 51:10-12) Yes, my friends, *only God can clean up my heart and yours. Only God can give me His Holy Spirit to be the strong, steadfast spirit I need to withstand the temptations of evil all around me.* Only God can restore in me the great joy of the assurance I have of being forgiven and loved by God the Father; rescued from my sin bondage by Jesus' death and resurrection; and empowered by God's Holy Spirit.

Only with God's Spirit vibrantly guiding my life will I live with a willing spirit to sustain my faithful walk with Jesus, rejecting any temptation to blaspheme my heavenly Father or my Savior Jesus! In this state of mind and heart my tongue now becomes a very powerful tool for God to use for HIS glory! Listen to these words written by Paul: **"Let not any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."** (Eph. 4:29) Wow what a dramatic difference that would make in my world! And what about yours, my friends?

So, let's pause right here with James and think honestly and deeply about the trail of words, the reputation your tongue and mine has built for ourselves in our lifetimes! Let's have an honest chat with God about that right now. And let's listen... what does the Holy Spirit of God want to say to you and me about our tongues?

Today's Scripture is James 3:7-12.