

THE POWER OF THE TONGUE

Today we focus our thoughts on the importance of our words.

Why are our words so important?

The answer is so simple: because they have great power.

Around midnight Thursday we lost our power. Normally I wouldn't have noticed except that my mother's airbed had to be remade since her fragile body was on bare metal from her deflated bed. So my wife graciously helped me dress in the dark and go help mom. With the power gone all its rich benefits also were gone. The same power could also shock someone or cause great destruction if not controlled, as it should be.

Our words have to potential of good and evil, as Solomon wrote,

Death and life are in the power of the tongue... (Pr. 18:21)

Words are so important because of their potential for good and for evil.

I. Words have great power.

❖ JAMES SHOWS HOW SMALL THINGS CONTROL VERY LARGE THINGS:

Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they may obey us, we direct their entire body as well.

Behold, the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder, wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. (James 3:3-4)

Horse – A small bit controls a mighty horse.

Ship –A small rudder steers a great ship.

IN THE SAME WAY THE TONGUE, THOUGH SMALL, HAS GREAT POWER.

So also the tongue is a small part of the body,
and yet it boasts of great things.

Behold, how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! (v. 5)

Body – tongue

Forest fire – small fire [that starts it]

1. WORDS HAVE GREAT POWER.

2. WORDS HAVE GREAT POTENTIAL FOR DESTRUCTION.

One of the greatest destructive forces is fire, especially out of control.

❖ **Fire**

Small fire starts a forest fire.

The Tongue is that fire.

v. 6

“And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity;
the tongue is set among our members
as that which defiles the entire body,
and sets on fire the course of our life
and is set on fire by hell.”

Our words can defile us (as Jesus said in Matt. 12).

They can burn us and give us a taste of hell.

When David Livingstone began his missionary work in Africa he planned to protect her from some of the hardships that were inevitable in the initial stages of his establishing a home for her with him. So he left her in a secure place until he had prepared a home for her at Lake Nyassa. But people began to talk unkindly, suggesting that he and she weren't getting along and that Mrs. Livingstone wasn't much help to her husband. Dr. Livingstone was so troubled by these insinuations that he sent for his wife. She came, only to become ill and die.

❖ Evil Poison

“But no one can tame the tongue;
it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.” (v. 8).

UNTAMABLE, RESTLESS, DEADLY, AND UNPREDICTABLE.

“With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.” (v. 9-10)

Why is the tongue so inclined to evil?

Because of its relationship to the heart.

Jesus was rebuking the religious Pharisees, calling them a “brood of vipers,” and He asked a simple question, “How can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.” (Matt. 12:34)

To His face they said nice things, but behind his back, they spoke the evil that was in their hearts. From this Jesus taught that we would all be accountable for every *careless word* that we would speak.

“The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil. And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.”

(Matthew 12:35-37)

WHY ARE WORDS SO HARD TO CONTROL? [BECAUSE THEY COME FROM THE HEART.]

Matt. 15:17-20

“... the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.”

WORDS HAVE GREAT POWER.

WORDS HAVE GREAT POTENTIAL FOR DESTRUCTION.

III. Words have their source either in earthly or godly wisdom.

“NEVER ARGUE WITH A FOOL. ONLOOKERS MAY NOT BE ABLE TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE.”

MARK TWAIN

James writes about two kinds of wisdom: the earthly, natural, devilish wisdom of selfish ambition and bitterness; and the wisdom from above.

“Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.

This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.”

“But (in contrast to the previous wisdom of the world) the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.” (James 3:13-17)

Wisdom when applied to words (as James does) means knowing...

“what to say – and saying it – but equally knowing when not to speak – and saying nothing. Wisdom, or the lack of it, is what lies behind our conversations...”¹

When the **root** is heavenly wisdom the **fruit** is righteousness.

And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (James 3:18)

Death and life are in the power of the tongue,

And those who love it will eat its fruit. (Pr. 18:21)

¹ R. T. Kendall, *Controlling the Tongue*, (Lake Mary: Chrisma House, 2006), p. 3.