

**Text: Genesis 1:26-27; James 3:9-12**

**Title: “In His Image ... Respectfully Speaking”**

**VIDEO BUMPER** – Let’s open our Bibles to James 3. We’re in this series exploring what it means for us as humans to be created in the image of God. When we are conceived we are stamped with the image of God. Being God’s image bearers shapes the way we see ourselves and the way we see others. The fact that God creates all humans in His image explains the reality that God loves all people. There’s not one human being on the face of the earth that is not the object of God’s personal, sacrificial love. If we see others as image bearers of God then we will love them because God loves them.

**ILLUSTRATION** – I was trying to imagine this as Nan and I walked through a busy airport this weekend. What if every person I passed had an identification bubble hovering over their head that said, “Created in God’s image and loved by Him!” The first thing I think about when I see someone is not their gender, the color of their skin, what they are wearing, how they are tattooed or how old they are. The first thing I would think about is they are created in God’s image (just like I am) and loved by Him (just like I am). And this will affect the way I treat others.

Now the tragedy is that because of our sin, the image of God is distorted in humans. It’s still there, but it is fractured. So we don’t see ourselves and others the way we should. We don’t love others who are made in the image of God the way we should. That’s why Christ came into the world, lived, died and rose again. When we trust in Him He *redeems* us from our sins and begins to *remake* us in His image. And as believers who are having the image of God restored in us, we love God by loving others who are made in His image.

Every human is an image-bearer of God and therefore possesses a certain dignity and they are to be respected ... whether they are family or strangers, whether they are believers or non-believers, whether they are Democrats or Republicans, whether they are citizens or immigrants. And the Lord has placed us as believers in a unique role to demonstrate this in our culture by the way we live and by the way we love.

Now the book of James has much to say about the way believers live out their faith, particularly in the way they speak to others. By the way, our summer sermon series will be in the book of James, so we’ll get into this chapter in greater detail when we come to it later. But for now let me just show you the flow of James’ thinking here in James 3. This is a letter written by James to believers who had

been scattered about various regions. He's learned somehow that they are having trouble living out their faith with the way they speak. They're having trouble controlling their tongues ... maybe they are being critical or judgmental of others ... maybe complaining about people or circumstances ... maybe speaking harshly to or about brothers and sisters in Christ. James makes an undeniable observation in v.2.

**James 3:2 - 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.**

So this is a big part of living the life that pleases the Lord. Earlier in the book it says...

**James 1:26 - If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.**

I'm going to show you in a minute how this is all connected to seeing others as being made in the image of God. This section in James 3 revolves around six different images used to illustrate the power and the potential of the tongue that is not under the control of the Spirit of Jesus. And from those images James draws four conclusions about the tongue.

So let's jump in. In James 3:3 the tongue is compared to the bit that is placed in a horse's mouth to control the horse. That little piece of metal lodged in the mouth of the horse allows the rider pull on the reins to direct that huge animal anywhere he wishes. Then in v.4 there's a second image of the rudder of a ship. It's a small device under the water on the back of the ship that controls the direction of a huge ship. So James' first conclusion is...

## **1. THE TONGUE IS SMALL, BUT IT HAS A GREAT IMPACT.**

**James 3:5a - Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts.**

It has enormous power to direct the course of our lives and the lives of others to whom we speak. There's a sense in which we are to control our tongues, but there's also a sense that our tongues control the destiny of our lives and the lives of others. Jesus said...

**Matthew 12:36 - But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.**

Our words, whether spoken or written may seem to be a minor thing, but they have a huge impact. James carries that over into the next image where in the last part of v.5 the tongue is compared to a tiny spark that starts a great forest fire. One person throwing a tiny cigarette out of a car window can start an enormous fire. So James' next conclusion is ...

## **2. THE TONGUE IS FULL OF EVIL THAT CORRUPTS.**

**James 3:6 - 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.**

The tongue is just about two ounces of muscle and tissue, but it has the power to corrupt everything. It can get us into more trouble in every area of life ... at home, at work, at school and at church. Just like a forest fire, it can ruin and corrupt everything it touches. People who would never think about setting fire to their neighbor's house can torch someone with their words!

Where does the tongue get its "fire." It says in v.6 that it is "set on fire by hell." The evil of the tongue comes straight up a pipeline from Hell. I'm talking about gossip, harsh criticism, belittling others and any number of ways we hurt others with our words.

And like a raging forest fire, sometimes it is very hard to get under control. That's the next image that James uses. In v.7 the tongue is compared to wild animals that need taming. And that leads James to the next conclusion:

## **3. THE TONGUE IS WILD AND DESTRUCTIVE.**

**James 3:8 - but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.**

It's like an untamed beast. Words that are out of control can kill a soul, a spirit, a future. It's amazing how many people walk around with wounds that were inflicted by the words of a parent or a teacher or a coach. Wives bear the wounds of a husband's condemning words and husbands bear the same. Obviously our words are not just spoken; they are also written.

And now we come to where all of this intersects with the truth we've been talking about that all humans are created in the image of God. **Read James 3:9-10.**

And here's the fourth conclusion James makes about the tongue:

#### **4. THE TONGUE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BLESS OR CURSE.**

**James 3:9 - With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.**

The tongue is the little hypocrite in our mouths. One minute it can praise God or quote Scripture, and the next minute the same tongue can curse or condemn others.

James is writing to believers who are saved from a Jewish background. Jews were accustomed to ceremonially praising or blessing God three times a day. It was a ritual for them. But in between those times of praise they were guilty of cursing others. To curse someone is to look down on them and condemn them ... to insist they are not worthy of the blessings of God. It means to wish someone harm. And this is unacceptable because that person we are assaulting with our words is a person made in the image of God and loved by Him.

**James 3:10 - Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.**

That's about as forcefully as James could have said this. "This should not be..." Our words are to be used for the glory of God and the good of others. Our words are not to be used to condemn others. When we do we are trampling the image of God in others.

And again, this is not just about what is spoken; it is also about what is written. I'm amazed at the venom that is spewed out of social media by someone who will in one post declare some truth of Scripture and in the next scorch a political opponent with condemning words. You can be right and still be wrong. Right doctrine does not excuse a critical, harsh, unmerciful and unloving spirit. Now this doesn't mean that we lose our prophetic voice in culture. It means that the prophetic words are delivered with respect and love.

To drive this home James uses the last two of the six images to illustrate the power and the potential of the tongue.

**James 3:11 - Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?**

The same fountain cannot produce both fresh water and salt water (or bitter water as it is called in v.12).

**ILLUSTRATION** – You go to the soda fountain to fill your cup with Dr. Pepper. You go back for a refill and you take a sip and find that it came out Pepsi. Yuck! The lips that praise Jesus in church should not curse or speak ill of people after church.

Then there's the last of the six images.

**James 3:12a - My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs?**

Our words are the fruit of our character. Good character, like a good tree, will produce good fruit (good words). If your character is bad it will produce bad fruit (bad words). So this is a spiritual problem. What are we to do?

**FIRST, REPENT.**

In v.10 James says, "My brothers, this must not be." If Jesus is Lord of your life He will be Lord of your lips. Repent. Admit it and quit it.

**SECOND, RENEW.**

Our condemning words don't just start in the mouth; they start in the heart. Jesus said...

**Matthew 15:19 - For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.**

Our harsh or untruthful words are just the symptom of a deeper problem. It's really a heart issue. After we repent, we ask God in the words of David in Psalm 51:10 ... create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me.

**THIRD, RESIST.**

**Ephesians 4:29a - Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths...**

That's a command to be obeyed. We have to set a guard our lips from speaking words that are ungracious, unmerciful or unscriptural. Pray the prayer of Psalm 141:3, which says, "Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips."

#### **FOURTH, RESET.**

**Ephesians 4:29 - Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.**

Instead of unwholesome talk we should speak words of encouragement and kindness over others. Yes, sometimes we may have to correct or rebuke if it is our place to do so. But the motivation should be to benefit them and not just to blow off steam ourselves. Remember, the people to whom you speak or write are created in God's image and are loved by Him.

I come back to what James said in v.2. We all stumble in many ways. We've all sinned with our tongues. And thankfully the Cross of Jesus Christ covers all our sins. We're coming to the Lord's Supper. If it's not sinful words, what is it? Repent, renew, resist and reset through the grace of Christ.