

Wednesdays in the Word
Digging Deeper
July 29, 2020
James 3:1-12
From Fountains to Fig Trees

As James addresses the scattered tribes of Israel, it is understood that the church has been recently under much persecution and small underground churches are forming wherever they are able. In our nation at this time Christian persecution is on the rise. The time will come when we will find ourselves going underground as well but it must not be out of fear. It must be out of a desire to survive and endure till the end in our drive to glorify Christ. Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26, 3:5,10, 12, 21. In honoring God we will say and do many things that will inflame our enemies but backing down from speaking for God will increase our condemnation. James warns Masters or Teachers in verse 1 because of the severe importance of speaking the truth. We are representatives of Jesus Christ. When we teach others we are taking on His mantle to share His gospel. That extends out to any Christian in any church who desires to share the message of the Lord. It is His will that we interact with others through our daily occupations so as to speak for Him. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, Luke 19:12-13. The word, 'occupy' here is "to busy oneself in a trade". While we work through our daily routine we will begin to carry on conversations with others. It is at this time that we need to be highly mindful of every conversation we have. While it is unlikely we will be able to speak about the Lord constantly; and surely that would drive people around us out of their minds; we must still honor Him with everything we speak even when we are not speaking about Him. People are listening to us and watching us. They are critically observing us to see if the faith we speak of is real and backed up with our lives. Now, when our words betray the Lord as they can sometimes do, those around us will be very quick to let us know that we have misrepresented Him. Those who know God least seem to think they have authority to speak for Him. Contrast that to our Savior Who had full control of His words. Mark 1:27, John 5:24-28. His, are the only words we must adhere to. In our nation there is something known as the Miranda warning. It goes like this. "Anything you say may be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to consult an attorney before speaking to the police and to have an attorney present during questioning now or in the future. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed for you before any questioning if you wish." That may sound clearly familiar to some of you. Can we compare the world we are living in to this court of law? It has been asked "If you were accused of being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you?" The world will use our words against us and we do indeed have an Attorney who will defend us. 1 John 2:1. All of this can be understood from verse 2 in our passage for tonight. We have truly offended others in every conceivable way by misappropriated words, incorrect judgments and foolish talk. If we have been careful enough to absolutely control our words it would then stand to reason that we would also be in control of every other area of our life. Can we all admit we're still working on that?

We are given some insightful, real world examples to give us a picture of the power of the tongue. Let us look at verse 3 and consider the very precise connection that a rider makes with a horse. The tiny bit is credited with controlling a huge animal. In an interview with my favorite

family equestrian these observations were made. When the rider puts the bridle, bit and saddle upon a well-trained horse it instantly knows it is time to yield itself to the full control of the rider. By this we can make a comparison to a Christian who yields control of the tongue to the Lord through training and obedience. The rider does not actually need the bridle and bit. By subtle, almost imperceptible movements of the body the rider indicates the movements required of the animal. Though the rider holds the reins there is no disturbance or interference with the mouth of the horse. These subtle nudges of the body will instruct the horse to move ahead, turn or stop. With diligence, many more intricate performances can be similarly infused. The cautious rider will keep a loose hold on the reins so that as the horse's body turns and moves the reins and the bit will simply follow the metered steps of the animal. Our Lord should not have to yank us about to try to control us. We ought to be able to sense the gentle movements of the Holy Spirit and act in a way that proves we have responded well to His training. Simply squeezing the reins can stop a horse. Though the animal does not actually feel the squeezing he senses the desire of the rider. Oh that we could be so sensitive to our Creator. A heavy hand on the reins will cause the horse to have what is known as a 'hard mouth'. It will bite the bit and rebel against every intention of the rider. The coarse movement of the bit in the horse's mouth can cause scars and damage and completely break the training of the animal, even to the point of doing damage to those around it. It is a simple analogy to understand that our tongues ought to be so precisely controlled by God that everything we say is filtered through Him. When we demand to take control of our own tongues we "bite the bit" letting our tongue speak as our evil desires wish and we move immediately into rebellion against God. Another interview with my favorite family Navy Helmsman reveals much about the smallest part of a ship being the most important in it's control. Verse 4 helps us to look at this picture. Naval vessels are huge and yet even they can be swamped by fierce waves during storms. The Helmsman in his endeavor to keep the ship under control and underway must steer at a very precise angle into the oncoming waves. Too little or too much of a turn into the wave will swamp the ship. Exact control at the helm is necessary for the safety of the ship and her crew. The ship itself is made to withstand a full swing of over 30 degrees in either direction while still allowing it to return to its upright state. Such a great vessel would be lost without proper design and accurate control. The storms that come our way in life can be endured if we allow our Master Helmsman to control us but when we grab the wheel we will make false moves that will end in disaster.

In verse 6 we are given a grave description of the tongue when it is not under God's control. How can our tongue defile our whole body? To defile is the Greek word 'spillo-o'. It is to stain or soil. The second half of this verse gives us our answer. The unfiltered outlet of the tongue destroys the natural cycle that our bodies and lives were designed for. We looked last week at how sin invades our thoughts; our thoughts become words; our words become actions. Our bodies are temples for the Holy Spirit. We will quickly descend into defiling the temple when we let our words escape our lips having been driven by the sin inside us 1 Corinthians 6:9-20. Back to our text in James 3. In verse 7 we can understand that the very plan of God was for mankind to be in dominion over the animal kingdom. Genesis 1:27-28. Is it not odd that we have indeed subdued the large beasts of the earth and have built huge sailing vessels that we are also able to control and yet how many of us have no control over our tongue? Verse 8. The remainder of the passage gives us preposterous juxtapositions within the spiritual and the natural world. A

hammer can build a house or tear one down. Our tongue can bless God or curse man who is made in the image of God. From fountains to fig trees we understand the course of nature. We instinctively know when an unnatural condition exists. The perfection of God's creation and its beautiful balance harmonizes with our souls (Psalm 19) and when imbalance rises up we discern it as being out of tune. (Romans 1:18-22) God's creation would have done just fine were it not for the intervention of man. Unable to control our own words, our lives, or the lives of those around us, how can it be that He has left the business of sharing His gospel through our mouths? This Paradox alone ought to give us reason to consider our words and proceed with caution into the responsibility He has given us. 2 Corinthians 4:1,2,6+7. Remember, our tongues are the valves that control the flow of the rivers of Living Water that will bring healing to those we love. John 7:37-39. And the fruit we bare through our lives will glorify Him. Philippians 1:9-11.