

James 3:1-12 | The Power of the Tongue

Study Questions* from 22.02.2026 sermon

Introduction

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” It’s a ditty often told to children. It is memorable. And it is inaccurate. Our words matter.

We’re back to the theme James first raised in 1:26: *“Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves...”*

Teachers

- i. Read James 3:1 What does James say about teachers in the church?
 - Why is this? Because teachers’ words (whether from the pulpit, or in a children’s group, or in any other setting) have the capacity to do particular damage to the church. Teachers either convey the truth, or obscure or even deny it.
- ii. Pause and pray
 - Pray for those in your church who teach. Pray that they would speak truth clearly and lovingly, and never damage those in their care. If you have any kind of teaching role, pray that you would remember James 3:1 in your preparation and prayers.

Tongues

Read James 3:2-5a

- iii. In v2 “perfect” is the same word translated “complete” back in 1:4. Having control of your tongue is a sign of Christian maturity. What else is it a sign that someone is able to do (end of 3:2)?
- iv. How do the two visual aids in v3-4 teach us about the power of our tongues?
Our tongues are powerful, for good or ill. And the problem, James says, is that generally our tongues are a force for the latter...

v. Read James 3:5b-8. What does the tongue tend to do (v6)?

Notice where the “fire” comes from. Tongues are “set on fire by hell”. Our unkind, destructive, malicious, lying words are hellish—they serve the purposes of the devil.

vi. What are we incapable of doing (v8)?

So James is not outlining a seven-step programme to tongue-mastery. He is saying: 'You desperately need to control your tongue, but you can't. It's beyond you.' Until we grasp this uncomfortable truth, we'll never truly seek the help of the one who can help—God.

vii. Pause and pray

- Spend time silently reflecting on times recently when your tongue has been uncontrolled in some way. Don't excuse your words; confess them. And as you reflect on your failings, thank God for his forgiveness.

Revealing

viii. Read James 3:9-12. What two things do we do with our tongues (v 9)?

ix. Reflect on the last few days—how have you both praised God with your words, and been critical about or unkind towards people made in his image?

“*This should not be*” (v 10)—this two-faced speech is something no Christian should settle for. But often we don't even notice it.

x. What are the answers to James' questions in verses 11-12?

xi. What point is he making?

James is, as so often, drawing on Jesus' own words during his time on earth (if you have time, read Matthew 12:33-35). The truth is that the product is always a reflection of the source. What our tongues say reveals what is going on inside us—what our hearts are really like. For most, if not all of us, that is deeply challenging.

Prayer

Spend some time praying about what you've discussed and pray for one another.