

**The World According to Jim**  
**“Tongue Twisted”**  
**James 3:1-12**

**Introduction**

- Some of my favorite tongue twisters. [Slide #1]
  - *Betty Botter bought a bit of butter.  
The butter Betty Botter bought was a bit bitter  
And made her batter bitter.  
But a bit of better butter  
Makes batter better.  
So Betty Botter bought a bit of better butter,  
Making Betty Botter's bitter batter better.*
- Or how about this one. [Slide #2]
  - *Six sick hicks nick six slick bricks with picks and sticks.*
- A couple of shorties but goodies. [Slide #3]
  - *Mrs. Smith's Fish Sauce Shop.*
  - [Slide #4] *Ed had edited it.*
- And this. [Slide #5]
  - *There's no need to light a night light on a light night like tonight,  
for a night light's a slight light on a night like tonight.*
- Why am I punishing myself like this? [Slide #6]
  - *Can you imagine an imaginary menagerie manager  
imagining managing an imaginary menagerie?*
- And maybe my personal favorite. [Slide #7]
  - *Shep Schwab shopped at Scott's Schnapps shop;  
One shot of Scott's Schnapps stopped Schwab's watch.*
- We laugh. And rightly so. Tongue twisters are great. Reality is our tongues are twisted in more ways than one. Our speech is sickly ill. In the World According to Jim “sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me” is one of the biggest lies there is. Our words not only hurt. They maim. Parent’s words crush their children. And they kill. Like daggers, teenager’s words sink deep into the hearts of their parents. If only walls could talk. Husbands bash their wives with words. And vice versa. We gossip. We slander. We lie. We boast. We vomit words onto MySpace and Facebook with no concern for others whatsoever. We breathe threats under our breath. The tongue is twisted. And it is uncontrollable. We all like sheep have gone astray, uncontrollably bleating profanities and insults and lies wherever we go.

- But it’s not just about saying the wrong words. So many times the words we do say are empty and meaningless. “When William Gillette, an actor known for playing Sherlock Holmes, was a young man, he lived in a boardinghouse. He was studying stenography at the time, so he practiced in the evening by writing down every word spoken in conversation by the other boarders. In referring to this experience, Mr. Gillette once told a friend, ‘years later I went over my notebooks and found that in four months of incessant conversation, no one had said anything that made any difference to anybody.’”<sup>1</sup> How true of us as well.

### Transition

- The message of James 3:1-12 is that [Slide #8]...

### Big Idea

- **Religion God cares about is controlling the tongue**
- True faith controls the tongue.<sup>2</sup> James said earlier in 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.* If you really want to be religious in God’s sight, then watch what you say. And if you really think your religious but can’t control your tongue your religion is worthless. God cares about a lot of stuff. But he also cares about the words that come out of your mouth.
- According to an [AP-Ipsos](#) poll conducted in March of 2006, the use of profanity in American culture is increasing. That’s not surprising. Nearly 75 percent of people in this survey said they encounter profanity in public either frequently or occasionally. Two-thirds said they think people swear more often than they did twenty years ago.
- Sixty-four percent said they drop the F-bomb, the F-word—from several times a day (8 percent) to a few times a year (15 percent). Younger people admit to using bad language more often than older people. They also encounter it more frequently and are less offended by it. The poll showed that 62 percent of people age 18–34 acknowledge swearing in conversation at least a few times a week, compared to 39 percent of those 35 and older. Swearing is also more pronounced among men: 54 percent of men swear at least a few times a week, compared to 39 percent of women. The only good thing about the poll is that many of those who regularly swear believe it's wrong for them to do so.<sup>3</sup>

### Transition

[Slide #9] In just a moment we are going to look at...

### Organizational Sentence

- **Four dangers of opening your mouth without God’s help**

### Transition

But before we do that let me just remind you how important our speech is to God.

### Background/Setting

- The Bible has a tremendous amount to say about the words that come out of our mouth. Ephesians 4:29 gives us the ideal. *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your*

<sup>1</sup> Baker and Ellsworth, p. 95 quoting Herb Miller and Douglas V. Moore, *300 Seed Thoughts* (Lubbock, TX: Net Press, 1986), p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, p. 290.

<sup>3</sup> Associated Press, "Poll: Americans See, Hear More Profanity," yahoo.com (3-29-06); submitted by Van Morris, Mount Washington, Kentucky to www.preachingtoday.com.

*mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 1 Peter 3:10 says whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. We are to desire and want to speak words of life to others.*

- But the bible is realistic and true to life. God knows how deadly the tongue can be. Psalm 52:4 *You love every harmful word, O you deceitful tongue!* Proverbs 12:18-19. *Reckless words pierce like a sword.* Proverbs 15:4 *The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.* Proverbs 26:28 *A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin.* The awesome power of the tongue is summed up in Proverbs 18:21. *The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.*
- Knowing the dangers of the tongue the Bible gives wise counsel about limiting our words and holding our tongues. Proverbs 10:19 *When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.*
- Again, our tongues are a problem for us because there is something wrong with our hearts. We have a sin problem. Proverbs 4:23-24 makes this clear. *Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. 24 Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips.* The reason our speech is often so dirty, so uncontrolled, so perverse is because those things well up from a perverse, wicked heart. The quality of our speech reveals the true state of your heart.<sup>4</sup> We need God. We need Christ. We need the cross to cleanse our speech.

### Transition

[Slide #10] With this in mind, look at [verses 1-2](#). *Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. 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.* The [first danger](#) of opening your mouth without God's help? **You'll be judged by what you say.**

### Main Points

- [Verses 1-2](#) aren't just for teachers. If you're a teacher of God's Word, it's sobering to think, but we'll be held to a higher standard; we'll be judged more strictly because of our responsibility in leading God's flock. James's point is that "teachers, because their ministry involves speech, the hardest part of the body to control, expose themselves to greater danger of judgment."<sup>5</sup>
- But the reminder of future judgment for what we say is meant for everyone not just teachers. James says *we who teach will be judged more strictly* implying those who don't teach will still be judged for what they say, albeit less strictly than teachers. Everyone is going to be judged for what they say. Jesus echoes this in Matthew 12:36-37. *But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."* Think about that. Every careless word. It's dangerous to open your mouth without God's help.

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<sup>4</sup> NDBT, p. 344.

<sup>5</sup> Moo, p. 150.

- *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. We would never be able to control the tongue—even if we tried. But, then again, controlling our speech is not about our strength anyway. As J.A. Motyer points out, “It is not that a person strong enough to control the tongue is therefore also strong enough for every other battle. It is much deeper and more important even than that: it is rather that winning this battle is in itself a winning of all battles. Think of a switchboard. Each switch controls the lights in its own section and the person who controls the switch controls those lights. But on the board there is also a master-switch. It does not need any special strength to operate it. There is no way which anyone could say, ‘If you are strong enough to operate that switch then you are strong enough to operate any of them.’ The simple fact is that, if you control the master switch, you control all the lights; you are lord of the switchboard.”<sup>6</sup> What we need is someone to flip the master switch of our speech. We need God’s help.*
- Obviously, the goal of this is reminder is not to breed fear so that we walk around tightlipped afraid to say a word to anyone about anything for fear of future judgment. That’s not the goal. James’s goal by showing us how we all stumble and are at fault for what we say, his warning about future judgment for every careless word, is to drive us to Christ. He knows it’s dangerous for us to open our mouths without his help. He wants us to control our tongue. When our potty mouths are transformed by his grace, that kind of changed life brings Him great glory.

### Transition

[Slide #11] What’s the **second danger** of opening your mouth without God’s help? **Verses 3-6. What you say can wreak havoc on your life.** Listen. *When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. 4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. 5 Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 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.*

- James says that what we say, not only has the potential for future judgment, it has the potential to wreak havoc on our lives here and now. And to make his point James uses the imagery of a bit in a horse’s mouth and a rudder on a ship. In each case, the smaller thing directs the larger thing. The small bit directs the horse. The small rudder directs the ship. **Verse 5. Likewise the tongue.** The tongue is the same way. It’s just like the bit. It’s just like the rudder. Often times the small tongue controls the larger vessel, the man, the woman. In other words, just like the bit determines the direction of the horse, and the rudder determines the direction of the ship so the tongue can determine the destiny of the individual.<sup>7</sup>
- And because our tongues so frequently betray us the destiny they chart for us, the course they set for our lives is havoc. Our lives are like this. [Slide #12] That’s us in the picture. *Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 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 danger in opening your mouth without

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<sup>6</sup> Motyer, p. 120-1.

<sup>7</sup> Moo, p. 153.

God's help is that your fiery words chart for you a very undesirable and unpleasant course in life to follow.

- Some of you have set your world on fire by your words. Dragon breath. You've set your husband or your wife on fire. You've set your child on fire. You've set your coworkers on fire. Pandora's box has been unleashed and your world is burning because of the things you've said. You can't take back your words. Once they're out. They're out.
- The story is told of a lady who gossiped about a neighbor and then discovered what she had said was not true (by the way it's gossiping even if it is true). She confessed her embarrassment to her pastor and then asked how could she make it right again? Without answering her, the pastor took her outside, cut open a feather pillow, and scattered the feathers to the wind. As they stood there and watched them float off into a hundred different directions, the pastor turned and told her to gather them all up again. She got the point. Just as it's impossible to retrieve all of those feathers again, it's impossible to retrieve our words.<sup>8</sup>
- To battle forest blazes fire fighters use fire retardants consisting of ammonium sulfate or ammonium polyphosphate with attapulgite (atta-pull-jite) clay thickener. James is urging every single one of us to put out the raging fires in our mouths. If you're not careful, you'll destroy your life with your tongue. You can't take back words. But you can ask for forgiveness. And you can say you're sorry. You can confess your need for God. You can ask for his help. You can turn to the cross. Each of those is like laying down a layer of fire retardant; dousing the flames that set the *whole course of our life on fire*. Each of those begins to reverse the damage done by our tongues.

### Transition

[Slide #13] Look at [verses 7-8](#) and the [third danger](#) of opening your mouth without God's help. **If not tamed, what you say has the power to destroy.** *All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, 8 but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.*

- As if the image of a fire sparked by hell itself wasn't enough, James points to the imagery of tamed animals to draw out the untamed destructive power of the tongue. Unlike all kinds of animals, the tongue can't be tamed. *No man can tame the tongue.* It is untamed. It is restless. It is evil. It is full of deadly poison. In other words it's destructive. **If not tamed, what you say has the power to destroy.**
- [Slide #14] The picture I think of when I read James here is the picture of a restless, unpredictable venomous snake full of deadly poison. Someone once said, "the tongue is the only instrument that grows sharper with use."<sup>9</sup> Our hearts have fashioned our tongues into deadly weapons that kill and destroy. God help us. We know what you want from us. We know that you say *if anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.* We know the religion you care about is controlling our speech. We ask that you forgive us for every careless, biting word. Cleanse our speech. Wash our mouths. Purify our words. Amen?

### Transition

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<sup>8</sup> Baker and Ellsworth, p. 95.

<sup>9</sup> Baker and Ellsworth, p. 93.

Finally, look at [verses 9-12](#). [[Slide #15](#)] Fourth danger of opening your mouth without God's help. **Without God's help, your speech will be inconsistent.** *With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. 11 Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? 12 My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.*

- [Aesop](#) once told a fable about a man who had lost his way in a wood one bitter winter's night. As he was roaming about, a Satyr came up to him, and finding that he had lost his way, promised to give him lodging for the night, and guide him out of the forest in the morning. As he went along to the Satyr's home, the man raised both his hands to his mouth and kept on blowing at them. "What do you do that for?" said the Satyr. "My hands are numb with cold," said the man, "and my breath warms them."
- After this they arrived at the Satyr's home, and soon the Satyr put a smoking dish of porridge before him. But when the man raised his spoon to his mouth he began blowing upon it. "And what do you do that for?" said the Satyr. "The porridge is too hot, and my breath will cool it." "Out you go," said the Satyr. "I will have nothing to do with a man who can blow hot and cold with the same breath."<sup>10</sup>
- I think that's precisely James's point here. Salt water flowing from a fresh water spring? Inconsistent. A fig tree bearing olives? Inconsistent. On the one hand we praise God with our tongues. And out of the same mouth come filthy curses against men and women made in God's image. Inconsistency. The inconsistency James highlights here is proof positive of the restless evil that the tongue really is.<sup>11</sup> We are double tongued. Forked tongued. Just like that snake. Praise and cursing out of the same mouth. **Without God's help, our speech will be inconsistent.**
- James's point is that this should not be. [Verses 10](#). *My brothers, this should not be.* What James is really getting at in this whole passage on the tongue and speech is that "pure speech is the product of a new heart."<sup>12</sup> Whatever is in your heart will eventually come out of our mouth in the form of words. And if our speech is inconsistent it's because our hearts are inconsistent. Intervention is required.
- The fact that we can't control our twisted tongues and yet God requires it is a signal that something is not right with the human condition. The fact that we have all hurt others and have been hurt by words points to the need for someone to break in and do something about our twisted speech. God has done something. God's perfect, flawless spoken Word became flesh. And the Word died. And the Word was resurrected. And the Word redeemed. The cross of Jesus Christ is our only hope for redeemed speech.
- And if God really has truly redeemed you by the blood of Christ. Then His sanctifying work must extend to your speech. The words that that pour forth off the tip of that bit of skeletal muscle attached to the back of your throat must be purified. If one of the fruits of the Spirit, one of the fruits produced by the Spirit of God working in your life is self-control, then that

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<sup>10</sup> Aesop's Fables

<sup>11</sup> Moo, p. 163.

<sup>12</sup> Moo, p. 167.

applies to the tongue too. With God's help the tongue can be tamed. There's hope for our twisted tongues.

### **Conclusion**

- So what's it going to be? What kind of legacy will your words leave? Will you be remembered for your coarse and vulgar language? For your boasting? That you were always brutally honest? I don't think James would be impressed. Will you be remembered for encouraging others? What will your kids remember about your words? What will your friends say about your speech this year at school? What will you do with the power your words possess?
- [[Video](#)]