

Sermon Notes - "The Impact of Our Words"

May 17, 2020

(James 3:1-10)

The book of James is believed to have been written by James, the half-brother of Jesus. James wrote this letter to Jewish Christians who were dispersed across the Gentile world because of Rome's persecution of Christians. He wrote about living out the Christian faith in practical ways - especially in the way we speak and act.

I titled today's message, "The Impact of Our Words". Have you ever put your foot in your mouth - not literally, but figuratively? You know what I mean - you said something and then wished you could take it back. I've done that a few times... One of the most memorable happened several years ago when I was out of town at a Christian Women's Conference. I was sitting with five other women at the dining table. One of the ladies beside me was about 35-40 years old and looked to be six to eight months pregnant. I said to her, "So, when is your baby due?" She quietly leaned over and said to me, "I'm not pregnant. I have a fibroid tumor in my abdomen." I quickly apologized, but I just wanted to duck my head under the table. I was so embarrassed.

Sometimes we say things without engaging our minds or knowing the full story and we hurt people's feelings. Our words carry a lot of power, and I think that's part of what James is trying to say to us in our lesson today.

Our words can bless or curse, build up or tear down, inspire or discourage others. Some of you remember former Coach Vince Lombardi of The Green Bay Packers and one of his players, Jerry Kramer. When Jerry first started practicing football in his first year with Coach Lombardi, he said the coach was always talking down to him - "Kramer, you're too slow - Kramer, you're too weak - you're stupid, etc." He said that halfway through that first year, he left football practice, came into the locker room, threw his helmet on the floor, and sat down on a bench with his face in his hands. He said that he was contemplating quitting the team; he was tired of Coach hassling him and putting him down. A

few minutes after he sat down and was thinking about quitting, in walks Coach Lombardi. He comes up behind Jerry, slaps him on the back and says, "Kramer, one day you're going to be the best offensive lineman in the NFL league." Jerry Kramer said, "I felt ten-feet tall. I was willing to do anything Coach Lombardi said after that comment."

Words can build up or tear us down, can't they? Some of you may remember a true story told on TV's 20/20 about a year ago about two young people named Conrad Roy, III and Michele Carter. Conrad and Michele were about 20 years old, from different states, and met at a beach in Florida while they and their families were on vacation. They continued their long distance friendship via phone calls, texting, and computer emails. Both were troubled young folks - depression, eating disorders and problems with their parents. Conrad had tried to take his own life a couple of times before, but this time in 2017, he really did commit suicide. But it was the texts and phone calls with Michele that was believed to have pushed him to the edge and she was arrested and tried in the court of law for those texts and phone messages. Instead of encouraging him or helping him to get assistance, she encouraged him to take his life. She was found guilty in the court and served 12-15 months in jail.

Words can have a positive or negative effect on us. They can build us up or tear us down. They can inspire and challenge or destroy others. Think in history of people who used their words to destroy: Joseph Stalin, Adolph Hitler, and Saddam Hussein. Think of others who used their words to inspire and challenge others: like former President John F. Kennedy ("Think not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country"), or Mother Theresa who said, "A kind word can be short and simple and easy to say, but its echoes are truly endless."

Words can have a long-lasting impact, too! I have a friend who said when he was in the fourth grade, he broke his leg playing football. When he was in the eighth grade, he broke his arm playing sandlot baseball. He said, "As a grown man, I don't remember the physical pain of breaking those bones - but if you ask me about the coach who told me that I was

an embarrassment to the football team or about the teacher in middle school who said that I'd never amount to anything in life - then I remember those things as fresh today as I did the day they said it."

Many years ago, my brothers and I were cleaning out our home place after our dad died. I was going through an old trunk sitting at the top of the stairwell and found some old report cards and school pictures and memorabilia that my mother had saved for us kids. I found a note that I had written in fourth grade - it said, "Today my teacher, Ms. Wall, said that I couldn't sing. I sang like a baseball player." I want you to know that I love to sing, but really don't want anyone to hear me that much because I know I can't sing. Ms. Wall's words still reverberate in my head.

James tells us in our lesson today that, "*Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. With the tongue we praise God and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.* My brothers, this should not be." James also reminds us that **when we ridicule and put others down, we are also putting down our Creator God who made us all in His image.** In Luke 6:45, it says, "The good man brings good things out of the good things stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart, his mouth speaks." In other words, whatever is in our heart is going to come out in our speech. If good and positive things are in our heart, they will come out in our conversations with others. But, if our hearts and minds are filled with anger, hatred, bitterness, unforgiveness, prejudice - then that, too, will come out in the words we say. Remember that God is as concerned or more concerned about the condition of our heart than our outside. "For out of the overflow of his heart, his mouth speaks." Thus, our mouth is a mirror of our heart.

I want you to notice something else in our reading of James 3 - **that only the Holy Spirit can tame our tongue.** James gives the examples of a small rudder guiding a large ship and the bits in a horse's mouth controlling the horse. He tells us that all kinds of animals can and have been tamed by men, but only the Holy Spirit can guide us in the proper use of our speech. If someone ridicules or condemns or slanders us, we

naturally want to do the same to them. Only God's Spirit at work in us can tame our tongues and guide our speech and help us to remember that **we are all created in God's image.**

In conclusion, our words can build up or tear down; they can have a long-lasting and widening impact. "Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks." When we put others down and kill with our words, we are hurting our God who created us all in His image. Only God's Spirit can tame our tongues and guide us in our speech. James, in our lesson, tells us that our faith in Christ should show in our words (our speech) and our actions. Our words reveal a lot about our character and our maturity as Christians.

How do we grow in the way we speak and what we say to others?

- 1. Pray and seek the help of the Holy Spirit, 2. Wait and count to five before responding to criticism and sarcasm and put-downs, 3. Count your blessings, 4. If you're filled with negativity and bitterness, write it out in a letter and then tear it up or burn it - learn to let go, 5. Someone once said in handling gossip - use the acronym: THINK: T - Is it True, H - Is it Helpful, I - Is it Inspiring, N - Is it Necessary, K - Is it Kind?*

May God help us to grow in Christ-likeness - May our faith show in our words and our actions. Amen.

*Proverbs 12:8 - "Thoughtless words can wound as deeply as any sword, but words wisely spoken can heal."

*Socrates once said, "It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt."

*Someone once said, "God gave us two ears and one mouth; I think that is because we are to listen twice as much as we speak."