

# NOON BIBLE STUDY: JAMES 3

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THE EPISTLE OF JAMES HAS ITS MAIN FOCUS ON THE EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES ENDEAVORING TO FOLLOW AND REPRESENT JESUS TO THE WORLD. MUCH OF THE LETTER IS PRACTICAL WISDOM ON HOW TO LIVE THIS NEW LIFE. SO MUCH OF THE LETTER "ECHOS" THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS FROM THE GOSPEL ACCOUNTS. CHAPTER 2 HIGHLIGHTED THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE FOR ALL (NO PERSONAL FAVORITISM) AND THE IMPORTANCE OF REALLY LIVING OUR FAITH (FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD). THE FOCUS OF OUR SECTION TODAY IS ON THE POWER OF THE "TONGUE" (OUR WORDS). JUST AS GOD IS KNOWN THROUGH HIS WORD, WE AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD, ARE KNOWN BY OURS.

JAMES 3:1-18

JAMES 3:1 - REGARDING TEACHERS

Q - WHY DOES JAMES SPEAK OF A "GREATER JUDGEMENT" UPON A TEACHER?

ESV STUDY BIBLE: "TEACHERS WERE IMPORTANT IN THE EARLY CHURCH (ACTS 2:42; ROM. 12:7; 1 COR. 12:28; EPH. 4:11), AND THOSE WHO WERE AMBITIOUS SOUGHT TEACHER STATUS FOR THE WRONG REASONS. HOWEVER, WITH GREATER RESPONSIBILITY COMES GREATER EXPECTATIONS BY GOD (LUKE 12:48; HEB. 13:17), AND TEACHERS WILL BE JUDGED WITH GREATER STRICTNESS (LIT., "GREATER JUDGMENT"), SINCE THEY ARE ACCOUNTABLE FOR MORE."

IN THE SYSTEM OF THIS WORLD, BEING THE "LEADER" IS SOMETHING TO ASPIRE TO, THE END GOAL OF MANY PROFESSIONS AND ARENAS. MANY STRIVE FOR AUTHORITY, POWER AND INFLUENCE. THE "SYSTEM" OF THE CHURCH TURNS THIS ON ITS HEAD. WHILE THERE IS A GREAT NEED FOR LEADERS AND TEACHERS IN THE CHURCH, THE LEADERS ARE TO BE SERVANTS. REMEMBER JESUS' WORDS ON THIS:

LUKE 22:25-26 - AND HE SAID TO THEM, "THE KINGS OF THE GENTILES LORD IT OVER THEM; AND THOSE WHO HAVE AUTHORITY OVER THEM ARE CALLED 'BENEFACTORS.' 26 "BUT IT IS NOT THIS WAY WITH YOU, BUT THE ONE WHO IS THE GREATEST AMONG YOU MUST BECOME LIKE THE YOUNGEST, AND THE LEADER LIKE THE SERVANT."

AND SO JAMES BEGINS HIS DISCOURSE ON THE POWER AND IMPORTANCE OF WORDS WITH THIS WARNING. THOSE WHO ARE GOING TO BE TEACHING AND HAVE AUTHORITY OVER OTHERS MUST ENTER THIS RELATIONSHIP WITH GREAT CAUTION. TRUE ABOUT TEACHERS OF THE BIBLE AND THOSE LEADING IN THE CHURCH, (AND ALSO TRUE OF HUSBANDS AND FATHERS). PROCEED WITH CAUTION AND DEPENDANCE OF THE REAL LEADER OF THE CHURCH - RABBI JESUS.

JAMES 3:2-5 - "THE TONGUE: SMALL BUT INFLUENTIAL"

V. 2 - IF YOU WERE TO NOT "STUMBLE" IN WHAT YOU SAID, YOU'D BE A PERFECT (AS IN MATURE AND COMPLETE) PERSON!

"SIN REMAINS OUR UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE AND IT TAKES ALL SORTS OF FORMS. AMONG THEM, AS EVERY SELF-AWARE BELIEVER WILL ADMIT, SINS OF SPEECH ARE PROMINENT - THE HASTY WORD, THE UNTRUTHFUL STATEMENT, THE SLY SUGGESTION, HARMFUL GOSSIP, INNUENDO, IMPURITY." ("THE BIBLE SPEAKS TODAY: THE MESSAGE OF JAMES", J.A. MOTYER, PAGE 119)

V. 3-4 - BITS (SMALL ITEM) IN HORSES (LARGE ANIMAL) MOUTHS, RUDDERS (SMALL ITEM) IN SHIPS (LARGE ITEM) SET THE STAGE FOR JAMES' ARGUMENT ON THE POWER OF THE TONGUE. THE TONGUE, REPRESENTATIVE OF WHAT WE SPEAK IS A RELATIVELY SMALL PART OF OUR OVERALL BODY (COMPARED TO THE HEAD OR AN ARM), BUT IT IS VERY "POWERFUL" AND IMPACTFUL TO OUR LIVES.

### JAMES 3:6 - THE TONGUE IS A FIRE!

PICKING UP ON THE FIRE ANALOGY OF VERSE 5, JAMES EMPHATICALLY SPEAKS OF THE POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS POWER OF THE TONGUE TO DO GREAT HARM. WORDS SPOKEN TO US CAN HAVE DEVASTATING CONSEQUENCES ON OUR LIVES. WORDS WE SPEAK TO AND OVER OUR CHILDREN, WORDS WE SHOUT AT A SPOUSE, WORDS WE SPEAK TO EMPLOYERS, WORDS WE SPEAK TO THE HEAVENS - ALL CAN BE LIFE CHANGING - IN THE NEGATIVE SENSE.

TIM TIBBETTS ONCE SAID IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS CONVERSATION THAT *"IT TAKES YEARS FOR A STRONG TREE TO GROW BUT ONLY A MATTER OF MOMENTS TO CUT IT DOWN"*. JAMES IS SERIOUS HERE AND WANTS US TO TAKE THIS SERIOUSLY AS WELL.

SO WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT THIS? FIRST OFF WE NEED TO ACCEPT THESE TRUTHS AND NOT DISREGARD THE POWER OF THE TONGUE AND OUR WORDS. REALIZING THIS IS THE FIRST STEP IN CHANGE.

### JAMES 3:7-8 - TAMING THE TONGUE

THE TONGUE KIND OF DOES IT'S OWN THING. HERE'S WHAT I MEAN. THE SHIP'S RUDDER AND THE HORSE'S BIT DON'T ACTUALLY HAVE THE CONTROL - BUT THEY DO THE INTENDED WORK OF THE ONE WHO IS CONTROLLING THEM. THE SAME IS TRUE ABOUT AN ANIMAL THAT IS "TAMED". THEY LEARN TO FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS OF THEIR MASTER. JAMES SAYS THAT THE TONGUE *CANNOT* BE TAMED BY ANY PERSON.

SCRIPTURE TELLS US THAT THE THING THAT ACTUALLY "CONTROLS" THE TONGUE IS THE OVERFLOW OF THE HEART:

**MATTHEW 12:33-34 (NLT)** - "A TREE IS IDENTIFIED BY ITS FRUIT. IF A TREE IS GOOD, ITS FRUIT WILL BE GOOD. IF A TREE IS BAD, ITS FRUIT WILL BE BAD. 34 YOU BROOD OF SNAKES! HOW COULD EVIL MEN LIKE YOU SPEAK WHAT IS GOOD AND RIGHT? FOR WHATEVER IS IN YOUR HEART DETERMINES WHAT YOU SAY.

**MATTHEW 12:34 (ESV)** - YOU BROOD OF VIPERS! HOW CAN YOU SPEAK GOOD, WHEN YOU ARE EVIL? FOR OUT OF THE ABUNDANCE OF THE HEART THE MOUTH SPEAKS.

SO IF YOU WANT YOUR WORDS TO CHANGE, YOUR HEART NEEDS TO CHANGE. AND NO PERSON CAN BRING ABOUT GENUINE HEART CHANGE - ONLY GOD CAN WORK THAT. SO WHILE NO PERSON CAN TAME THE TONGUE, GOD CAN (AND DESIRES TO) CHANGE OUR HEARTS WHICH WILL BRING ABOUT HEART CHANGE.

"JAMES DOES NOT SIMPLY SAY THAT THE TONGUE IS UNTAMABLE, BUT THAT IT CANNOT BE SUBDUED BY ANY POWER RESIDENT IN MERE HUMAN NATURE OR POSSESSED BY A MERE HUMAN BEING. BEYOND THIS HE DOES NOT GO, BUT HE MAY FEEL THAT THE HINT IS PLAIN ENOUGH. ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST (ACTS 2) A DIFFERENT FIRE OTHER THAN THE FIRE OF HELL (JAMES 3:6), DESCENDED FROM HEAVEN TO KINDLE NEW POWERS AND GIVE NEW SPEECH TO THE HUMAN TONGUE" (IBID, PG. 124-125)

## JAMES 3:9-12 -

OUCH? THIS IS A CONVICTING TRUTH FROM BROTHER JAMES - BUT A NEEDED ONE. JAMES MAKES HIS MOST DIRECT APPEAL IN THIS SECTION BY SAYING "MY BRETHREN, THESE THINGS OUGHT NOT TO BE THIS WAY." (V. 10B). WE'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO HAVE BOTH BLESSING AND CURSING COMING FROM OUR MOUTHS. IT'S ONE OR THE OTHER.

Q - "CURSING" IS MORE THAN JUST FOUL LANGUAGE. DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS? WHY OR WHY NOT?

EPHESIANS 4:29 - LET NO UNWHOLESOME WORD PROCEED FROM YOUR MOUTH, BUT ONLY SUCH A WORD AS IS GOOD FOR EDIFICATION ACCORDING TO THE NEED OF THE MOMENT, SO THAT IT WILL GIVE GRACE TO THOSE WHO HEAR.

GREAT QUESTIONS FOR US TO ASK BEFORE WE SPEAK IS *"WILL THESE WORDS EDIFY THE PERSON I AM ABOUT TO SPEAK TO?"* *"WILL THESE WORDS CORRUPT THE PERSON I'M ABOUT TO SPEAK TO?"* WHILE WE CAN ALWAYS JUSTIFY HARSH WORDS UNDER THE GUISE OF "I WAS JUST BEING HONEST" - HOW WE SPEAK IS OFTEN AS IMPORTANT AS WHAT WE SPEAK. WE CAN PACKAGE CONFRONTING TRUTH IN A KIND AND HUMBLE TONE. WE CAN SHARE A CONCERN WE HAVE WITH SOMEONE WHILE BEING CARING. THERE ARE MOMENTS WHEN WE SPEAK A REBUKE OR CORRECTION, AND WE ALL NEED TO IMPROVE HOW WE SPEAK IN THOSE MOMENTS - BUT THERE ARE ALSO A LOT OF EVERYDAY OPPORTUNITIES TO BE MINDFUL OF WHAT AND HOW WE SPEAK.

AND REMEMBER, THE REASON "WHY" WE SPEAK WHAT WE SPEAK IS BECAUSE OF WHAT'S HAPPENING IN OUR HEARTS.

ONE FINAL NOTE ON THIS. JAMES IS ALSO POINTING TOWARDS THE HYPOCRISY OF MANY WHO THINK THAT THEY CAN HONOR GOD AND DISHONOR PEOPLE. JAMES NOTES HOW WE "BLESS" OUR LORD (JESUS) AND OUR FATHER (WHO IS IN HEAVEN) AND YET "CURSE" PEOPLE WHO ARE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD (V. 9). MANY OF US WOULD NEVER DARE SPEAK A WORD AGAINST GOD OR USE THE NAME OF JESUS AS A "CURSE" WORD, YET WE DON'T THINK IT A BIG DEAL TO TALK BADLY TO/ABOUT ANOTHER PERSON.

"WE THINK OF JESUS (WHO IS THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD) AND COUNT IT A SHAME IF HIS GLORY IS DESPISED OR HIS NAME USED DISHONORABLY. WE WRITE TO THE PAPERS TO COMPLAIN OF BLASPHEMY ON RADIO OR TELEVISION. BUT THE SAME GLORIOUS IMAGE OF GOD IN OTHER PEOPLE WE HARDLY THINK OF AND RARELY HESITATE TO SPEAK ILL OF" (IBID, PAGE 126)

AND THIS BRINGS US TOWARDS THE CONCLUDING POINT OF CHAPTER 3. OUR HEART, WORDS, AND ACTIONS ARE ALL UNITED TO MAKE US WHO WE *REALLY* ARE.

## JAMES 3:13-18 - CHECKING THE FRUIT OF YOUR TREE

IT COULD BE ARGUED THAT WE COULD SAVE THESE FINAL VERSES FOR AN ADDITIONAL STUDY, LOOKING AT THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF "WISDOM." HOWEVER, I AM INCLINED TO INCLUDE THEM IN THIS CONVERSATION BECAUSE THEY STRONGLY SUPPORT THE CURRENT POINT OF THE FIRST 12 VERSES OF CHAPTER 3.

EVIDENCE OF YOU BEING A WISE PERSON (AN HONORABLE REPUTATION TO DESIRE) IS NOT FOUND IN HOW MUCH YOU KNOW, HOW OLD YOU ARE OR AN ACT YOU PERFORM - IT'S FOUND IN THE WHOLE PACKAGE OF WHO YOU ARE. HERE'S HOW EUGENE PETERSON SUMMARIZES THE END OF JAMES 3:

13-16 DO YOU WANT TO BE COUNTED WISE, TO BUILD A REPUTATION FOR WISDOM? HERE'S WHAT YOU DO: LIVE WELL, LIVE WISELY, LIVE HUMBLLY. IT'S THE WAY YOU LIVE, NOT THE WAY YOU TALK, THAT COUNTS. MEAN-SPIRITED AMBITION ISN'T WISDOM. BOASTING THAT YOU ARE WISE ISN'T WISDOM. TWISTING THE TRUTH TO MAKE YOURSELVES SOUND WISE ISN'T WISDOM. IT'S THE FURTHEST THING FROM WISDOM—IT'S ANIMAL CUNNING, DEVILISH CONNIVING. WHENEVER YOU'RE TRYING TO LOOK BETTER THAN OTHERS OR GET THE BETTER OF OTHERS, THINGS FALL APART AND EVERYONE ENDS UP AT THE OTHERS' THROATS.

17-18 REAL WISDOM, GOD'S WISDOM, BEGINS WITH A HOLY LIFE AND IS CHARACTERIZED BY GETTING ALONG WITH OTHERS. IT IS GENTLE AND REASONABLE, OVERFLOWING WITH MERCY AND BLESSINGS, NOT HOT ONE DAY AND COLD THE NEXT, NOT TWO-FACED. YOU CAN DEVELOP A HEALTHY, ROBUST COMMUNITY THAT LIVES RIGHT WITH GOD AND ENJOY ITS RESULTS ONLY IF YOU DO THE HARD WORK OF GETTING ALONG WITH EACH OTHER, TREATING EACH OTHER WITH DIGNITY AND HONOR. (EUGENE H. PETERSON, JAMES 3:THE MESSAGE)

THAT'S WHAT JAMES WAS CALLING FOR IN THE 1ST CENTURY CHURCH AND IT IS WHAT JESUS IS LOOKING FOR OF THE 21ST CENTURY CHURCH - A PEOPLE THAT THINK LIKE JESUS, ACT LIKE JESUS, SOUND LIKE JESUS, LOVE LIKE JESUS AND DON'T THINK THAT ONE PART OF THAT SENTENCE IS ANY LESS IMPORTANT THAN THE OTHER.

OUR WORDS ARE VERY POWERFUL. THE MAIN CONTEXT OF JAMES' LETTER IS THAT THE NEGATIVE WORDS WE SPEAK WILL AFFECT THE COURSE OF OUR LIFE AND OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE. WORDS HAVE POWER AND HOW AND WHAT WE SPEAK TO AND OVER PEOPLE'S LIVES (AND OUR OWN LIVES) CAN BRING DESTRUCTION AND CHAOS. JAMES SPEAKS ABOUT THIS WITH DIRECTNESS AND SOBRIETY BECAUSE WE NEED TO BE SERIOUS ABOUT THE WORDS WE SPEAK. DON'T JUSTIFY EVIL OR HURTFUL WORDS BY MINIMIZING THEM. SAYING *"I DIDN'T MEAN TO SAY THAT"* ISN'T ACTUALLY TRUE, BECAUSE WE SPEAK WHAT COMES OUT OF OUR HEARTS. WE JUST DIDN'T MEAN FOR SOMEONE ELSE TO HEAR IT! SO JAMES WANTS TO GET OUR ATTENTION TO REALIZE THAT THE WORDS WE SPEAK ARE POWERFUL. INSTEAD OF TRYING HARD NOT TO SAY BAD STUFF, ASK GOD TO WORK IN YOUR HEART TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE AND REALIZE WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THE INSIDE SO WHAT COMES OUT CAN CHANGE. NO MORE BLESSINGS AND CURSINGS - MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS, THESE THINGS OUGHT NOT TO BE THIS WAY.

INSTEAD, LET'S END BY REMEMBERING, IN CONTRAST, THAT IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT THE POSITIVE, TRUTH AND LIFE-GIVING WORDS WE SPEAK ARE POWERFUL. THIS IS TRUE ABOUT THE GOSPEL MESSAGE IN PARTICULAR - A **SPOKEN** MESSAGE THAT GOD HAS INFUSED WITH SAVING POWER (ROMANS 1:16) AND IT IS ALSO TRUE ABOUT WORDS OF LOVE, WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT, WORDS OF TRUTH, WORDS OF INSTRUCTION.

IF GOD WORKS LIFE-CHANGE IN OUR HEART, THE OVERFLOW OF OUR HEARTS WILL BE LIFE CHANGING WORDS. CONSIDER THE LYRICS OF THE SONG ENTITLED "WORDS" BY HAWK NELSON AS OUR CONCLUDING STATEMENT:

*THEY'VE MADE ME FEEL LIKE A PRISONER, THEY'VE MADE ME FEEL SET FREE  
THEY'VE MADE ME FEEL LIKE A CRIMINAL, MADE ME FEEL LIKE A KING  
THEY'VE LIFTED MY HEART, TO PLACES I'D NEVER BEEN  
AND THEY'VE DRAGGED ME DOWN, BACK TO WHERE I BEGAN*

*WORDS CAN BUILD YOU UP, WORDS CAN BREAK YOU DOWN  
START A FIRE IN YOUR HEART OR PUT IT OUT*

*LET MY WORDS BE LIFE, LET MY WORDS BE TRUTH  
I DON'T WANNA SAY A WORD, UNLESS IT POINTS THE WORLD BACK TO YOU*

MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS, THINGS OUGHT TO BE JUST LIKE THAT.