



## **MAKING IT REAL 5 - Taming the Beast**

## **James 3 v 1 to 12**

There cannot be many people who, at one time, haven't said 'I wish I hadn't said that' or 'that just slipped out'. Some of us learn, but most of us have probably repeated the same insensitive comment that we made on an earlier occasion. We have all probably said something that had consequences. Hopefully they haven't resulted in long term disharmony but we probably know a situation where an unwise comment has caused mayhem.

James continues to instruct the early church in how it must conduct its affairs and how believers should behave. He would never write abstractly so we must assume that the issue of uncontrolled tongues had clearly emerged as an issue. In a 1<sup>st</sup> century Greek culture, people were encouraged to speak their minds and express an opinion. Clearly some did not put their brain in gear before their tongues got some exercise.

**As a starter you might like to recall where you have seen some idle talk cause great pain to an individual or community.  
Could it have been avoided?**

James makes the point that something small can have a disproportionate effect (v5). Ships are big in comparison to the rudder that determines their direction. The tongue is capable of praising God but equally capable of cursing people made in God's likeness.

This passage has two levels. There is the clear and obvious need to be cautious in our speech and give careful attention to what comes out of our mouth. There is another strand about teachers, who clearly use the tongue in their work, needing to be careful about what they say. The rudder/ship connection would seem to fit best with the teacher strand as it should be teachers who guide their listeners with godly speech. So, anyone in a leadership role, however minor they think it is, has a responsibility to guide those who listen to them with God-honouring speech. We may not always have the freedom to 'speak our mind' without restraint and there may well be times when it is better to hold our tongue.

**Before you get to the passage it may be good to talk about times where you have regretted saying something  
Also, it would be good to reflect on times when you should have said something and remained silent.**

### **FROM THE PASSAGE**

The responsibility of teaching in the church context is clearly a serious one. James is personally aware of the pressure 'WE who teach' (v1). The early church had a desperate need for competent teachers to pass on this 'new' faith. Although many were inexperienced, the judgement on poor teaching is very real.

- 1. How should teachers guard against false teaching? Don't restrict that just to Sunday preachers but to all those who teach in smaller contexts. (Small group leaders, Sunday school teachers etc...)  
How can those of us who don't teach support our teachers?  
Is criticism of our teachers ever valid?  
Is it ever right to say 'she/he was good this morning'?**

James says something in verse 2 that any one of us could have said. 'We all stumble in many ways'. None of us is perfect we might say. But James says that we all sin in this area of the tongue otherwise we would be 'a perfect man' which, clearly, we're not.

- 2. Do we sometimes use the 'none of us is perfect' line to avoid being sorry for unhelpful speech?  
Do we ever 'speak our mind' when we would have been better to remain silent?**

You may find it helpful to look through the book of Proverbs at all the references to the tongue. The word 'speech' is often used.

In verses 3 to 5 James is looking at the small and large comparison. A small bit is used to control a large animal like the horse. A large ship can change course using a relatively small rudder. But it's not true to say that the tongue controls the body. The meaning is generally taken to be that just as the rider directs the horse and the pilot the rudder, so the Christian leader must always operate under God's authority and the collective responsibility of fellow leaders. Christian leadership does not recognise a 'lone ranger'.

3. How do we support our leaders as they 'guide the ship'?  
When we feel our tongue has been out of control, what should we do to repair any damage we may have done? In James' words, how do we put out the fire that our sparky tongue has started?  
How can we stop it happening again?

James is keen in verses 6 to 12 to point out the effects of an unbridled tongue. This raises some pretty pointed questions

4. Man has tamed all kinds of creatures (v7) But, 'no man can tame the tongue' (v8) Who can?  
How can a tongue used in worship malign another believer at the back of church, on the phone, on social media or in sending a text?

James is very black and white on this issue. Water is either fresh or salty, he says. (v11) Most of us have days where we speak well of people and other days when we lose control of our tongues. This would suggest not only self-discipline is needed but a complete change of heart about how we use our tongues.

## **THINGS TO DO**

Again, James's writing is challenging and encourages us to evaluate what we do.

Why not take time to

1. Review some of the things you have said to people that you regret.
2. Is there a conversation you are currently engaged in that you could move in a better direction?
3. Ask God to help you at times when you are prone to speak before you think.
4. Think of someone you could speak to in order to give them some words of encouragement

## **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

Are your criticisms ever fully justified? – are you always in possession of ALL the facts before you speak? Could you be wrong?