

## 03.06.11 / James 3:2-12

**Passage Insight**

This passage in James is directed to the church, and James is again reminding them that their actions will clearly display the nature of their hearts and will reveal the nature of their faith. This is a common theme in James. We see it ultimately in all five chapters of the book of James. Here James is focusing one particular revealing action – the action of our speech. He makes the point quite clearly that no matter what we profess to believe, the nature of our words will reveal the nature and abundance of our hearts.

Luke 6:45 says, “The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” We can’t hide from it – whatever we say will reveal what is abundant in our hearts – moreover, our words will reveal whether this abundance is good or evil. The book of Genesis gives multiple examples of what happens when God speaks – when God speaks, what results is good. Why? Because the one speaking is good. James says, however, that when we speak, our tongue is “. . . a restless evil, full of deadly poison” (verse 8). If our words reveal the nature of our hearts, then we can glean that apart from God, our hearts are abundant with evil.

There is a temptation to deal with our harsh and broken words by just trying to be nicer, or thinking more positively, or just avoid speaking altogether, but ultimately this approach does nothing good, because the words themselves are not the problem. They are merely a symptom of a deeper issue, a heart abundant with evil, and we are powerless to change anything about our broken and sinful hearts. God must be the one to do that. Verse 8 in today’s passage states that “. . . no human being can tame the tongue.” Despite the fact that the Lord has given us the capacity to tame all the creatures of land and sea, we lack the capacity to tame ourselves, meaning that we are completely helpless to fix our evil heart problem. Again, only God can do that, and that is what He does in Christ.

The sin that separated humanity from the direct presence of the Lord in the Garden of Eden is part of all of humanity, and it still separates us from His direct presence unless we rest fully on the completed work of Christ that has destroyed that sin. 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us that God made Jesus into the very sin that He detests and allowed Him to be destroyed so that we could receive God’s righteousness instead of His wrath. What a remarkable turn of events! We deserved death and wrath because of our sin, because we desired to be like God, but instead of death, He gives us life, and He makes us the very righteousness of God.

When we believe in Jesus, we receive a new heart, a heart that contains God’s own Holy Spirit. Ezekiel 36:26-27 says this:

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

With the Spirit of God as the abundance of our new hearts, there is a radical about-face in the nature of our words, as we see in Acts 2:4, 11, which says, “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance... telling . . . the mighty works of God.” There was no human-based course correction taking place here – these people’s words of life revealed hearts that were no longer abundant with evil, but that were instead abundant with God’s promised Holy Spirit. Simply put, our words reveal the nature and abundance of our hearts.

Here are some examples of words of life that we see in the Scriptures as a result of hearts abundant with God's Holy Spirit:

**WORDS OF WISDOM**

- Colossians 3:16
  - Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

**WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT**

- Hebrews 10:24-25
  - And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works . . . encouraging one another . . .

**WORDS OF HONOR**

- Romans 12:10
  - Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

**WORDS THAT BRING LIFE**

- Proverbs 10:11
  - The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life . . .

**EFFECTIVE WORDS**

- James 5:16
  - The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

**WORDS OF UNITY**

- John 17:22-23
  - The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one, even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one . . .

If we say we believe in Jesus but our tongues still point to an abundance of evil in our hearts, then one of two things is happening. Either we are truly regenerate and saved by Christ but are quenching the Spirit's work with ungodly action or our words are revealing the truth that we are not truly regenerate and are not saved. While we want to be careful to recognize that we can't know the depths of one another's hearts, for only God can know these things, it is wise to let Scripture speak for itself and the Holy Spirit convict and inform as He sees fit. Matthew 12:33 says, "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit . . ." and 1 John 3:8-10 explains this thoroughly as well:

Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God . . .

If we make a "practice of sinning," then no matter what we say about our beliefs, according to Scripture, we are not of God. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 says the following:

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

We see from this that the devil wants to keep people in the dark, but if you can now see that you are making a "practice of sinning" as mentioned in 1 John 3:8-10, then God is shining light onto your sin, graciously revealing it to you, so that you can turn to Him and confess the name of Jesus Christ as we see in Romans 10:9-10, which says this:

... if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

If you believe this in your heart to be true, that Jesus is Lord and that God raised His Son from the dead to save you from your sin, then let that lead you to confess this with your mouth and be saved.

Luke 11:13 says, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" May we ask the Lord for the fullness of His Holy Spirit so that we might tell the mighty works of God and make Him known to the nations.

### **Application Questions / Prayer**

#### **The Tree Is Known By Its Fruit**

- 1) What do you speak about more than anything else?
- 2) From this, what's abundant in your heart?
- 3) Where is

#### **Becoming the Righteousness of God**

- 1) If you've seen a change in your speech over the course of months, years, etc., what has that change looked like?
- 2) How is this attributable to an increased presence of the Holy Spirit in your life?
- 3) What other evidence of the Holy Spirit's work, apart from speech, can you see in your life or the lives of others?

#### **Pray for the Holy Spirit**

- 1) Ask the Father for the of the Holy Spirit , as we see in Luke 11:13.
- 2) What changes can you expect to see in the way you speak with one another?

### **Sources**

- Prayer