

James - Weapon of Mass Destruction

Sign Title: Weapon of Mass Destruction

August 7, 2011

Good morning Faith Church! If you are new, my name is Kurt, and I am one of the pastors. If you have been around here for a while, you know I was on vacation with my family for the last two weeks. We enjoyed a refreshing time seeing old friends in Michigan.

This morning, we continue our study of the book of James. As many of you remember, we divided the book into four parts. Three weeks ago, we completed the second part of the book called *Hearing and Doing*; this is where James taught us there is an inseparable link between our faith and our life. This morning, we begin the third portion of the book called *Speaking and Thinking*. In this part of the book, James shows us there is an inseparable link between our faith and how we think and speak. With that overview, let's dive right in, because this morning, we have a lot of text to cover.

Today we are talking about *talking*. Some of us do it more than others, but all of us do it. If you think about it, talking is an amazing feat. A thought begins in one's mind. The lungs force air across the vocal cords to create complex sound waves. Those waves travel through the air until they enter the ear of a listener. That vibrates their ear drum, which translates through bones in our ear to a portion of our ear that looks like a snail which is called the cochlea. This fluid filled organ has tiny hairs within it. The vibrations of the sound waves on those petite hairs translate into electric impulses which travel down the auditory nerve

to the brain. The concept that began in the speakers mind is transferred to the listeners mind. It is simply amazing.

According to studies, the average man speaks 12,000 words per day, while the average woman speaks 30,000 words. Many wonder why women speak so much more than men; then my wife reminded me she has to say everything at least twice to get me to do it. Perhaps that is the reason for the disparity in those numbers.

This morning, as we begin to talk about talking, James shows us there is a particular danger for those who, like your pastor, fill a teaching position.

Preachers and teachers will be judged with greater strictness.

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. James 3:1–2 (ESV)

What teaching is he talking about? He is talking about the role of the pastor/teacher in the local church. The Bible tells us the Holy Spirit supernaturally empowers every Christian with at least one spiritual gift to build up the church through serving others. One of the gifts he empowers in some Christians is the gift of teaching and preaching.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ... Ephesians 4:11–12 (ESV)

One of the more public of these gifts is the gift of preacher/teacher. Let me define this gift for you.

Teaching - Someone with spiritual understanding of God's Word communicating that truth to Christians in ways they can understand and apply to their lives.

Good teaching and teachers are a source of great spiritual encouragement to the church. Like you, I have favorite preachers I love to listen to. God does me great spiritual good through them. One of the great opportunities we have to be under gifted preachers and teachers is our own local Bible conference. I hope you were able to take advantage of that this week.

Those who teach have tremendous spiritual influence on people. For instance, the church in Jerusalem was birthed through the preaching of Peter when 3,000 turned to Christ after his message. Paul was a powerful preacher/teacher gifted by God and used to spread the gospel to the Gentile world through his preaching/teaching. Where there are good and godly teachers/preachers, there you will find spiritual vitality in the church. Where there are bad teachers, you will find thousands, even hundreds of thousands led astray.

Remember Harold Camping's false teachings about the world ending this spring? God only knows how many thousands he led astray. James reminds us that with the increased power and responsibilities of teaching God's Word comes increased accountability before God.

This is why James says, *not many of you should become teachers*. You will be judged more strictly. Judged by whom? Jesus. He is referring to the judgment of Christ. After death, all Christians will be judged for rewards in eternity (1 Corinthians 3). In that judgment, teachers are held to a higher standard.

Where does this idea come from? As you will remember, the book of James is deeply rooted in the teachings of Jesus. Jesus reminds us of this.

...Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more. Luke 12:48 (ESV)

Teachers have greater knowledge of God's Word; that makes them more responsible for how they live. Teachers are held accountable for what they know, for what they teach and for what they do.

James says nobody should casually assume the role of teaching God's people. It is like performing spiritual brain surgery. There is great damage that can be done if you do brain surgery casually using your mother's garden tools. A lot is at stake.

My hope for the young people of the church is that some of you go into vocational ministry. That would be a great legacy for this church to leave behind. It would be wonderful if Faith Church sent out men and women to serve as missionaries, pastors and teachers. At the same time, you must remember that when you stand before Christ, you will be held to a higher standard of accountability for your life. If you are unprepared to go there, don't get into the ministry.

This is a reality check for many people, because they have an over-glamorized view of ministry or are interested in it for the wrong reasons. The pastorate is hard work, and the glamour of being up front wears off very quickly. Not that you don't love it and do it with joy, just realize the stakes are incredibly high. If you are not ready to assume that responsibility, God's not calling you to it. I love this quote.

There is no special honor in preaching. There is only special pain. The pulpit calls those anointed to it as the sea calls its sailors; and like the sea, it batters

and bruises and does not rest... To preach, to really preach, is to die naked a little at a time and to know each time you do it that you must do it again.¹

Being a preacher/teacher is a high calling that carries strict judgment before God, don't consider it too low or enter it too lightly. That being said, there is an equal but opposite danger. That is expecting too much of pastors; remember, pastors are people too.

In first century culture an over-glamorized view of preachers and teachers was common. It grew out of Jewish respect for the rabbi. Rabbi literally means *my great one*. A Jew's duty to his rabbi was considered higher than his duty to his own parents. In fact, if a rabbi and one's parents were taken captive by an enemy, it was one's responsibility to ransom the rabbi before his or her own family members. The Jews reasoned parents were worthy of honor because they brought you into this world, but the rabbi was worthy of greater honor because he brought you into the next one.

If you ask me, that is too much honor for pastors. Remember, pastors are people too. If you lived in my house and rubbed shoulders with me on a daily basis, you would learn I make lots of mistakes. Yes, I have received speeding tickets. There are times I get frustrated and lose my cool. The last 10 days of vacation in a truck with children poking and irritating each other reminded me just how faulty I am as I tried to discipline from the front seat while driving 70 miles per hour. Remember, your pastors are people too. They aren't perfect.

¹ James, John MacArthur, pg. 150

The reason James provides this warning about teaching is because teachers talk for a living, and as we will see, the easiest way to sin is with your mouth.

If you can control your mouth, you can control your life.

Before we move on, look at the rest of the verse, *If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check*. The tongue is not just an index of the heart, but it can actually serve to guide our heart and life. If we can learn to get our tongues under control, we can get everything else in our life, our thoughts and our actions, under control too. Now James explains to us how easily our tongues can lead us to sin.

The tongue is small but powerful.

If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. James 3:3–5a (ESV)

Words are powerful. We might try to deny it with platitudes like, *Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me*, but that isn't true! Some of the most hurtful things done to me were not physical, they were verbal. People vocalize the venomous thoughts in their minds, and they hurt! Has anyone else here this morning been deeply wounded by words?

To show the tremendous power of words, James illustrates by using a bit to a horse and a rudder to a ship.

The horse's bridle has a piece called the bit. It is a little piece of metal that goes in the horse's mouth and presses their tongue. The bit is very small. The horse is very large. Horses were the semitrailers of the first century.



They were powerful and carried great amounts of weight. James is marveling that such a little piece of metal can control an entire horse.

Bigger than a horse is a ship. First-century ships were not as large as ours, but the principle remains the same. A giant ship is controlled by a comparatively small rudder. The captain moves the rudder to the right, the ship goes to the right. He moves it to the left, the ship goes to the left.



Rudders and bits are small things with great power.

Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, with great power. Compared to our body mass, the tongue is petite, but it can make a world of difference. It can sooth a crying child. It can make people laugh. It can worship God through song. It can say the powerful words, "I love you." Our tongues have incredible potential for affecting the world for good. But that is not the direction James is taking us. He warns that our tongue may be small but it has incredibly destructive power.

The tongue is small but destructive.

...How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. James 3:5b–8 (ESV)

Our words can do an incredible amount of damage. He analogizes this to a small fire, like a match, that starts a forest fire.

The most famous fire in American history was on October 8, 1871, in Chicago when at 8:30 p.m. Mrs. O'Leary's cow kicked over a lantern. It started the great fire of Chicago that burned 17,500 buildings. Oh the damage one little fire can do.



Our words are like that. They light small fires around us. They create conflict and pain that can spread out of control. When we are angry, we say words we hope will burn others then burn out. Guess what? They don't. They burn others, then they are repeated and start a fire in place and time we never intended. The evil of our words, like a fire, spreads and rages out of control.

Death and life are in the power of the tongue... Proverbs 18:21 (ESV)

Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble. Proverbs 21:23 (ESV)

There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts... Proverbs 12:18 (ESV)

Has anyone felt stabbed by someones words in their anger? Words are incredibly powerful, and they can be incredibly destructive. Get it out of your head that what we say doesn't matter because it is just words. Words do matter! Sins of the tongue include:

- **Lying** - saying what isn't true
- **Blasphemy** - insulting God
- **Gossip** - saying something about someone you wouldn't say to their face
- **Boasting** - speaking with pride about yourself

- **Deceit** - not being honest
- **Flattery** - insincere praise
- **Slander** - damaging another's reputation
- **Profanity** - using swear words or inappropriate language
- **Hypocrisy** - pretending to be what you are not

There is hardly a sin that doesn't in some way involve our tongues and our words. That is why James says the tongue corrupts the whole body. Much of the sin in our lives involves this little piece of flesh in our mouth.

The most wild and harmful creatures are tamed by man. Go to the circus and watch a trainer work with lions and tigers. Watch elephants trained to balance on a foot. Even the deadly cobra can be tamed using a little horn. While the most deadly creatures on the planet are brought under control, the one thing a man can not tame is his own tongue. It is a "restless evil, full of deadly poison."

To be honest with you, in marriage counseling, what breaks a marriage is often not the things both spouses did, it is the things that were said in a fit of rage. It is extremely hard, but the tongue must be reined in under control. When it is, everything else in our lives can be brought under control.

In fact, the only way for the tongue to be tamed is by Jesus Christ. One of the things the Holy Spirit brings to our life is self-control. It is the ability to rein in our raging tongue. Apart from the power of the Holy Spirit working in us, we do not have the power to restrain the damage of this raging beast behind the teeth.

The tongue shows our inconsistency.

With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My

brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water. James 3:9–12 (ESV)

James notes the duplicity of our tongues. One moment we praise God and the next we curse people who are made in his image. That is called speaking from both sides of our mouth. Unfortunately, this inconsistency doesn't make sense. It is like a spring giving fresh and salt water at the same time. It is like a fig tree producing olives. This is James' application of faith to life. Be consistent in what we say. It is so easy to drift into sin with our mouth.

On Sunday morning we are singing, *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*. In the foyer, we are exchanging a juicy bit of gossip. We go into our small group and under the guise of a prayer request we share someone's marriage struggles. When we get in the car to leave church, rather than talking with our children about how to apply the sermon, we critique and rate the service. The service was too long; the pastor's shirt had wrinkles; the announcements could have been done better; the pastor stumbled over his closing words. When I shook the pastor's hand, I learned he needed a breath mint. Play that game too long and don't come to me when your kids want nothing to do with the church when they grow up because they didn't see faith change your words. What do you expect?

James says focus on keeping our words consistent. It is easy to be nice one moment and Mr. or Mrs. Grumpy-Pants the next. If we say we love Jesus, focus on keeping our words consistent through the power of the Holy Spirit. If we can keep our words consistent, we can control the rest of our life.

Conclusion

Here is the challenge I have for this week. I want each of us to focus on connecting our faith to our words. It is so easy to slip into verbal sin. The problem is it happens so swiftly, we don't see it. The truth is that others around us perceive it much better than ourselves. This week, find somebody that you can trust to share with you about your verbal sins when they happen in your life. If you are married, that might be your spouse. If you are single, that would be a good Christian friend. Maybe, that is a whole family-wide project.

I think you will be surprised at what they see in you that you don't see in yourself. Is this hard? Yes! Getting control of our tongue is one of the hardest things we can do, but the upside is amazing. If we can control our tongues, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can control anything else in our life.

Are you brave enough to let someone who loves you tell you about the inconsistencies they hear?

Let's pray.



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