

I. Introduction

A. Let's open up to James 3:1.

B. Story: Podcast, funny story: On June 8, 1845, America's 7th President, Andrew Jackson passed away. Days later, as people gathered at his funeral to mourn him, little did they know that this wouldn't be your average funeral. Right before the funeral sermon, one of the members of Jackson's household who was present, began loudly swearing and making a scene. It was so loud and so irreverent that they ended up ushering this family member out of the funeral so that it could commence. That swearing member of Jackson's household that had to be ushered out was Andrew Jackson's pet parrot, Poll. You see, Andrew Jackson is well known for his foul mouth. He certainly was not known for his verbal restraint. And that parrot, it seems, became a living digital recorder and was just honoring his deceased master the only way he knew how, by literally parroting his own words back to him.

1. When I heard this story I had a laugh, but then the smile faded from my face, and I had one of those sobering moments.
2. What if every word I ever spoke was played back for you all at my funeral?
3. What if every word you ever spoke was recorded and played at your funeral?
4. And I'm not talking about swearing. I'm talking about the arrogant, prideful things I've said to paint myself as superior. And the mean, angry, destructive things I've spoken about others.
5. If everything I ever said was read in your hearing, what would the words of this man testify about the character of this man?

C. Our mouths—how we use this gift of language that God has given humankind—is one of the most basic and core aspects of following Jesus. And today, James, Jesus' brother, is going to take us to school on it.

D. James 2 sets up context for James 3. James has just described a "dead faith."

1. There is a high likelihood that James is saying, "I've just told you that there's such a thing as a "dead-faith." Now, let me give you exhibit A: A destructive tongue."
2. I am becoming very convinced that the misuse of the mouth is perhaps one of the clearest evidences of a dead-faith. This passage we're going to study is serious.

II. James 3:1: *Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.*

A. Right out of the gates, James makes a point that is completely foreign to our freedom-of-speech-saturated, western ears: limit your influence.

1. I want you to note WHO he's talking to: "my brothers."
2. There are not many Christians who should seek greater influence. This has given me huge pause.
3. Because those who take on greater influence are also agreeing to stricter judgment.
 - a. Judgment by God? By others? It's hard to know.
 - b. But here's the big takeaway from this warning:

- B. Citizens of Jesus' Kingdom are required to limit the breadth of their influence so that it never outpaces the depth of their character.
1. Your use of words is an indicator of the condition of your soul:
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 3:2)
 2. It has been said that the eyes are the window to the soul... (Shakespeare?)
- C. The mouth is the window to the soul.
- D. James now, in rapid succession, shows us three sobering realities about our tongues:
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)
1. Our mouths have disproportionate power.
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. (James 3:5b-6)
 2. Our mouths are capable of disproportionate destruction.
Story: Few years back, my pride caught up with me. God revealed to me damage I had done because my influence was greater than my character. Conversation with a friend ... I was utterly broken.
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 3:7-8)
 3. Our mouths require disproportionate effort to control. Doesn't James's first instruction make so much sense in light of this? That not many of us should seek places of influence.
- E. And now James brings the house down with the sickening summary of what it is we're doing when we misuse God's gift of speech:
With it [our tongue] 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. (James 3:9-10)
1. Our mouths are capable of shocking hypocrisy (praising God while cursing His imagers).
 - a. I find it troubling in others but especially in myself where we draw our lines of resistance against the way of this world and where we don't.
 - b. And yet, there are some lines drawn in Scripture that ARE completely obvious. Abundantly obvious. For instance: Stop using your mouth to destroy others.
 - c. What if the main way Christians stood up and resisted the broken culture around us is that we refused to keep destroying each other with our freedom of speech?
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 3:11-12)
 - d. James is saying that bitter water DOES NOT flow out of a fresh spring. So here's the scary thing to consider: if my words are generally characterized as bitter and

destructive, then perhaps the spring of my heart that they flow from has not been redeemed and cleaned.

2. A destructive, divisive mouth may be the sign of a dead faith.
 - a. It feels like this passage delivers a lot of bad news about our hearts and our mouths, but I don't want to leave it there. The message of the Gospel is NOT, "You are deeply flawed, your mouth is full of garbage, there is no hope, that is all."
 - b. The Gospel does lovingly show us our brokenness and slavery to sin, but between our sin and the end, there stands a cross, an empty tomb and King Jesus. King Jesus, Who sits at the right hand of the Father, has been given authority over all things.
 - c. And not only this, but those who trust Jesus have the Holy Spirit living IN them. What we are too weak and unable to do, HE will do through us if we surrender to Him every day.
- F. So what is the good news? What is now possible because of what Jesus did and what the Holy Spirit can do? Here's our answer to the plague of our mouths:
 1. Kingdom Citizens must be willing to devote a disproportionate amount of prayer, time, effort, and repentance to keep their mouths submitted to King Jesus.
 - a. This may be a heavy reality, but it is SO VERY HOPEFUL.
 - b. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we ABSOLUTELY can change.
 2. If our mouths are capable of unbelievable destruction, they are also capable of unbelievable blessing.
 - a. Story: Doug Bentley's card
 - b. Our tendency will be to try to buckle down, exert a lot of self-discipline and beat our mouths into submission. In some ways that's necessary, but if that's all it ever is, it only amounts to behavior modification.
 - c. Jesus is much more interested in character-transformation.
 3. Inner change: An hour spent in the presence of Jesus is more powerful than a whole day spent in restraint.
 - a. Would you rather spend all day trying to restrain the beast, or transform the beast?
 - b. Our mouths are a reflection of our hearts. If you want your speech to change from the heart, you must daily be in the presence of Jesus in prayer and worship.
 - c. As Jesus changes YOU, so your mouth will follow.
 - d. But there is also the reality that we are all in process. God, in His grace, has supplied us with tools to honor Him, even while our heart is in process.
 4. Outer change: Patterns and habits that the Holy Spirit can empower so that we image God well.
 - a. Earlier in the book, (James 1:19), James previews chapter 3 by saying we ought to be "quick to hear [or listen], slow to speak, slow to become angry."
 - b. I want to share with you what I'm calling some "Mouth-Hacks" that I believe honor this command:

III. Mouth-Hacks

- A. More questions, less statements. (Marvin, regrets)
- B. When frustrated or angry, stop talking (or typing).

- C. Only express 10% (or less) of the opinions you have.
- D. Follow the five to one ratio: five encouragements for every one correction.
- E. If you're not sure you should say something, you definitely shouldn't say something.
For instance, I considered starting my message with a certain sentence, but I wasn't sure I should say it because it would need quite a bit of explaining and may or may not be completely theologically sound. So I didn't say it. ;-)
- F. Talk to God more than you talk to anyone else.
- G. Listen to God more than you talk to God.
- H. *The point of these is not to make you feel that your thoughts, feelings, and opinions don't matter at all. I think Scripture is very clear that God cares about these things and that we should also care about each other in this way. The point is that we have a responsibility to keep our mouths in check.