



CHRISTIAN CRUSADERS

7401 UNIVERSITY AVE., CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50613

(319) 277-0924

INFO@CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

WWW.CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

The Power of our Tongues

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Pastor Tim Boettger

TEXT: Luke 6:43-45 (ESV)

“For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. 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.

James 3:1-12 (ESV)

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. 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.

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. 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.

Well, I wonder if you have contemplated lately the power of small things in our world and in our lives. There are so many small things that make such a huge difference. I remember when I

was growing up on the farm, and my dad carried a basic pair of pliers in a pouch on the side of his belt. It was a leather pouch, and the pliers were in it. And I can't even comprehend how many times a day he pulled that pliers out, that very small little tool that just rode on his hip. Hundreds of feet, even—I would say miles—of fence have been repaired by that pliers. There are so many livestock gates that have been tied up with wires that were twisted by that pliers. How many nails were pulled out with that pliers just because it was one small tool he carried with him throughout every day on the farm? And then, when I got a little older, he slipped into the handles in the pouch, in the pliers, one of these new screwdrivers that you can pull out and change the ends on so quickly. And between those two tools, so much of our farm ran on those small, seemingly insignificant items. So much was done.

This text today is alluding to something very small in the world that has great influence and great power, and that is our tongues. It's a small muscle in the body. There's no skeletal structure in it. It's made up of eight muscles. It can be twisted in a variety of directions. And yet, James says, even though it's a small part of our body, it makes great boasts and it can even direct the course of our lives. He compares it to a rudder on a ship, on a large ship, and like a small little part on the back, in the lower part of a ship that can direct a massive ocean-going ship anywhere it wants. If you've ever been out at sea in one of these cruises and you've seen these great ocean liners, they're steered by just small rudders that run in the water in the back that put resistance in the water one way. James said our tongue is like that. It gives all kinds of powerful direction. He likens it also to a bit, a small bit, putting an animal's mouth. I don't know if you've ever seen these massive horses, these Clydesdales in the world today, but these horses can be trained and then directed and instructed and controlled by just a small little piece of metal put in their mouth. And you pull one side of it and they'll turn their mouth and turn their whole bodies, and pull another side and it'll turn them that way. And James is saying, just like the power of that bit, our tongue is very powerful.

He continues, saying, "It can be like a spark that lights a whole forest on fire." The tongue is a small part of our body, yet it has great influence in the world. Solomon went so far—Proverbs 18:21—to say that life and death are in the power of the tongue. It's a big statement when you talk about the use of the tongue. And Solomon is saying there's life in there or there's death in there. And I think I know what he's saying, that depending on the words that are spoken to people as their lives are forming and developing, it can have a huge impact. I remember when I was younger and I ran track, and track is an interesting sport with all these different events that happen. And I was a short sprinter until one day the coach came to me and asked if I would run the 400-meter hurdles. And I mean, talk about a crazy run. It's not to me that's not a

short sprint all the way around the track. I don't mind 50, 100 yards, but 400 yards, and you jump obstacles on the way. Anyway, because the person ahead of me couldn't run at the track meet that day, the coach asked me to do it and I said I'd do it. And I started off out of the blocks, and I'm running around the first curve, jumping the hurdles as they come. You go down the back stretch, you're jumping along. And I tell you what, if you haven't ever run that race, you run out of gas pretty quickly, and you see another hurdle coming, and now it's coming around the last curve. And my father was there, and I can still hear him to this day using his mouth, the power of his tongue, to encourage me. "Go, Tim, go! Go, Tim, go!" And his words lifted me up and carried me along. They were life to me. Words can breathe life into people. There's such power there.

And words can also bring death. Some people were told things when they were younger. I sometimes shudder when I listen to a mom or a dad say something about a child like, "Oh, that's just my troublemaker." And they're saying it in jest, but how many of these words settle into the hearts and souls of people? Things that were said to individuals over the years that just shrivel up their soul and cause their sense of identity, their sense of life, to be moving in the wrong direction. This is our tongue. It's so powerful.

And the use of our tongue is so important. God has given us such great power with our tongue to breathe life into people. It can steer entire courses of lives. It can set direction. It can set vision. We use words. We speak them. We hear them. We can write them. We can read them. And even for those that can't hear, we can sign words. And our tongue forms words and utilizes words. All of creation was brought into existence through the spoken word. When God spoke something, there it was. And since we're made in His image, we can create vision and bring about results just by the way we communicate about things. So much power in our tongue. And when you look these days online or listen to some of the vitriol that flies around on social media or even in the news, it's a tragedy. The Bible says we should pay very close attention to how we use our tongues. And when you see even just look in a comment section under a controversial issue online, you see that the use of our tongues and the use of our words is so often mismanaged or done thoughtlessly.

And this isn't really what I would say, a tongue problem. According to our scripture today, the vitriol in our world today isn't a mouth problem. You know, when I was younger, if you said something wrong, there were a few ladies in the community who would suggest that you needed your mouth washed out with soap. And I had that happen to me a couple of times. And it's not a pleasant experience. And it'll get you to change the use of your mouth for a little

while. But it doesn't get to the root of the problem. You see, our words don't come from our mouths. They come from a deeper place in us. Jesus told us that it is out of the abundance of our hearts that our mouth speaks. All the vitriol in our world is not a tongue problem, it's not a mouth problem. The root of our problem is deeper than that in humanity. You know, there are a lot of philosophies about life and about the world. But here at the Christian Crusaders program, we understand that the real truth about life has been revealed to us by our creator himself in his word. And he has told us that ultimately humanity has a heart problem. When we turned away from God and we rebelled against Him, sin entered the world and that sin came into the core of our hearts. And Jesus says this: It's out of the abundance of our heart that our mouth speaks. And the scripture describing what's true of our heart. It says, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray and turned away from the Lord." After God created us and put us here on the Earth, we see in Genesis chapter six, He saw how great the wickedness of humanity had become on the earth not long after he created us. That every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The prophet in the Old Testament told us that the heart is deceitful above all things. "Who can know it? It plays tricks on us and plays tricks on those around us." And we need to be aware that our heart cannot be trusted. And we need to ask God to cleanse our heart and work in our hearts if we're going to clean up our mouths.

King David understood this after he was caught rebelling against God and being involved in selfishness himself, the pursuit of selfish gain. He was convicted by God, and God put his finger on the very things that David had done. And then he wrote Psalm 51. He said, "Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know, when I sit and when I arise, you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down. You're familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, Lord, you know it completely." Comes out of our heart and God sees our hearts. He judges the thoughts and motives of our heart. If you and I want to use our tongues to the greatest ability we can for the best good in the world, we don't focus so much on the words that we're using as we ask God to search our hearts and cleanse us on the inside because it's out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

You see, the vitriol in the world today and the words sometimes that come into our minds and our mouths that we sometimes say and shouldn't say. These things come from deep within us and we need cleanse there. And only God can cleanse us in the deep recesses of our heart. It's interesting, after he scattered his people in an Old Testament time, in the time of Ezekiel, he scattered them because of their blasphemy against him, and the expressions that came out of their mouth revealed their rebellious hearts. He scattered them, but he said to them, "Then," he

said, Ezekiel, Chapter 36, 24 through 26, "I will take you out of the nations. I'm going to regather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I'll sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean. I'll cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

Friends, you and I need this. In a crazy world, our hearts can get hardened and the deceitfulness of our heart can trick us. And the evil around us can confuse us. And only God can step in there and cleanse us deep within by his spirit and the cleansing of his word, and the cleansing of our mouths with soap just won't get the job done. It won't reach far enough in and clean deep enough. You and I need surgery deep within our souls. If we're going to use our mouths for the greatest potential we can in the power of our tongues that create things and steer things and direct lives and shape the world around us, if we're going to use them well, shaping our families, shaping the children in our lives, the grandchildren in our lives, if we're going to use them well, shaping those that we work with and be an encouragement and let that which is building up come out of our mouths, then we need God's touch in our heart to be a different kind of people, a people that are cleansed deep within people from whom God's Spirit can flow freely in and to and from and through, so that our hearts and minds can have His heart and mind because of his spirit working in us.

David said this when he, when he was seeing this, he said, "Oh, search me, O God, and know my heart. Test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. Wash away all my iniquity. Cleanse me from my sin. And I know my transgressions. It's always before me against you. And you only have I sinned. So cleanse me. Cleanse me with hyssop and I will be clean. Wash me and I will be whiter than snow. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

You know, when a person cries out to God because of the work of Jesus and his sacrificial work on the cross, going there on our behalf to pay the penalty for our sins, the Bible says, "Now if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." And as He does that and we participate in the cleansing process, then we can more and more use our tongues for the very thing that God designed them to be used for, to create, to give life, to build up, to encourage and strengthen one another. Give words of hope. Give words of life that he puts in our hearts and on our tongues from his word. Oh, how desperately the world needs this. People who will, who will come before God and go through

the cleansing process that's needed so they can become what Jesus described as a well of living water, where his spirit flows in and through them and is a light to the world around us.

Oh, I don't know about you, but I want more of this in my life. I want to become more of an agent of God's spirit than I am, to have more and more of me out of the way so more and more of him can shine through. I've got a ways to go and I need to keep in my own repentance and stay on the table in the surgery table before God. Maybe that's true for you, too, as you listen to this. God has entrusted to each one of us a very powerful tool in our tongues.

But who can tame the tongue without God's help? But with the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, cleansing us, purifying us deep within, then our mouths can become agents that speak and bring forth life to those around us. Don't you want to be this kind of person? One who gives life? Oh, our world needs more and more people who will come before God, be cleansed, and become agents of the life-giving word and encouragement and hope that comes from Almighty God.

I hope this is an encouragement to you today, friend, with the tongue that God has entrusted to you. Prayerfully consider how you're using it and how you might better use it in the days ahead by allowing God to have access to your heart and cleansing it there. In His great love, He wants to do this for us. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, thank you for this chance to come before you and look into your word as you teach us how powerful our tongues are. And yet, the source of information for our tongues comes from deep within us, in places that only you can reach into and touch and cleanse. We ask that you would do this in us and make us more and more purified agents of yours for the advancement of your kingdom in the world. In everything we say and in everything we do, guide us in this. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.