

# Readings

## Scripture

<sup>1</sup>Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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! <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, <sup>8</sup>but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup>With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. <sup>10</sup>From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. <sup>11</sup>Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? <sup>12</sup>Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

- James 3:1-12 (English Standard Version)

## Reflection

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. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

- Matthew 12:33-37 (English Standard Version)

And he called the people to him and said to them, "Hear and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person." Then the disciples came and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit." But Peter said to him, "Explain the parable to us." And he said, "Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone."

- Matthew 15:10-20 (English Standard Version)

Teachers particularly are vulnerable to failures in speech, not only because their profession demands of them that they speak more than others, and they must do so in public and before a frequently captive audience, but because such a setting provides temptation to virtually every form of evil speech: arrogance and domination over students; anger and pettiness at contradiction or inattention; slander and meanness toward absent opponents; flattery of students for the sake of vainglory.

- Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James* (p. 263)

# Sermon Outline

## A Restless Evil

James 3:1-12

*True Religion*

Brad Anderson

*Our words reveal the fallen condition of the human heart...* (James 3:1-2)

### How does James describe the situation with our tongue?

**A world of unrighteousness capable of profound damage...** (James 3:3-8)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**A world of unrighteousness capable of profound division...** (James 3:9-12)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Reflection Questions (taken in part from the Serendipity Study Bible for Groups)

- What is one of your best known "bloopers"?
- Why is a stricter judgment placed upon teachers (see Luke Timothy Johnson quote)? How does this warning relate to taming the tongue?
- What do the three illustrations here (horse's bit, ship's rudder, fire's spark) each reveal about the tongue's power?
- Judging from the next set of illustrations in James 3:11-12, how is it possible for human beings to both curse others and praise God? What does this say about the tongue? About human nature? About hope for change?
- When do you feel like your tongue is "set on fire by hell"? What have you found helpful in controlling your tongue? In changing the source of its spring (James 3:11)?