

TONGUE TAMER

Scripture Reading: Read James 3

The sights and sounds of a circus can stay with you a lifetime. I still remember the elephants, the clowns, the high wire act, and the smell of popcorn when my dad took me to the circus as a kid. I also remember the lion tamer. I couldn't figure out why a person would want to take a chance and stick their head inside a ferocious beast. Yet, the crowd loved it and cheered wildly. Man had conquered the beast.

There is another beast, however, that we, as Christians, must conquer. It's a beast far more deadly according to James. What is it? It's our tongue. If we can conquer that one, James says in 3:2, we have it made it. The problem, though, is that no one can tame the tongue (3:8). James considers it a beast that is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. It's just a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Using the illustration of a small spark setting a great forest on fire, James likens the tongue to a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person and sets the whole course of one's life on fire. No wonder it can do this, James notes, since the tongue itself is set on fire by hell. With the tongue, we praise God and curse men, who were created by God in his image. We have cursing and blessing coming out of the same mouth. It's a contradiction as inappropriate as a spring bubbling forth with both fresh and salt water, a fig tree bearing olives or a grapevine bearing figs.

Even though no one can tame the tongue, James implies that it must be tamed if we are to live godly lives. Back in chapter 1, he commanded us to be quick to listen and slow to speak. Later on in the same chapter, he offered up this warning: *If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.*

So, how do we do what we're commanded to do but are incapable of doing? How do we tame the untamable? The short answer: we don't! It's a God thing because the tongue issue really is a heart issue. Jesus declared in Matthew 12:34, "*out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.*" What comes out of our mouth when we're squeezed is what has been in our hearts all along. No wonder James commands us to "*purify our hearts*" (James 4:8) by drawing near to God, humbling ourselves before him, crying out in repentance and submitting ourselves to him. He can tame what we can't on our own. Through his grace and Spirit at work within us, we can become tongue tamers and life speakers.

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Read Proverbs 12:18 and 18:21 through the lens of today's devotional. Write out the verses and then list some examples from your own life where you spoke healing words that brought life to a weary soul. Then, list some examples where you did the opposite and spoke reckless words of death that harmed someone. If you haven't already, ask the Lord to forgive you for those death words. Pray that he would overturn those curse words you might have spoken and bring blessing instead. Ask the Lord to get to the heart issues that motivate your tongue so that, by His Spirit, you may learn and be empowered to become a tongue tamer!

Take-a-way: *Lion taming man can do. Tongue taming only God can do. Let him!*