

So years ago, I had my wisdom teeth removed. I had all four of them removed. Two of them were impacted. So you know what that means. So they had to work a little extra hard to get those two out. And they hit a nerve on the right side of one of the teeth that were impacted when they were trying to remove it.

And the nerve was connected to the right side of my tongue. And so having a half-numb tongue meant that I bit my tongue several times a day. Eating, talking, and talking, in general, was just a struggle. It's like I didn't have control over that side of my tongue. And I get that it's connected to the left side of my tongue.

But even talking for a short time was a struggle for me. The doctor told me, don't worry, the feeling will come back in a year or so, and it's been 18 years now, and I still don't have all the feeling back in that side of my tongue. But I've learned to control my tongue in a new way, so I don't bite my tongue when I eat, at least not very often.

And I'm used to the extra work it takes to speak, especially when I'm preaching or any time I have to speak. For a long time, I could just feel it on my tongue. Our tongues are useful. They are useful for tasting and breathing and swallowing, and speaking. And that last one speaking is where our focus is at today in our sermon series.

So we're on this sermon series of James. We've made it to chapter three, and chapter three is much about controlling not just the sounds that come out of your mouth but the words. So almost all of Chapter Three is about controlling our tongue. And then, at the very end, there's this little section on wisdom, not wisdom teeth, but just wisdom.

So it starts out like this. James Chapter Three My brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers because we know that we teachers will be judged more strictly. We all make mistakes often, but those who don't make mistakes with their words have reached full maturity like a bridled horse. They can control themselves entirely. When we bridle horses and put bits in their mouths to lead them wherever we want, we can control their whole bodies.

Now, in this first part of James James's verse, addressing teachers fits perfectly for our back-to-school weekend. Right, Because we can probably all think about influential teachers that you've had, maybe a school teacher, maybe it was a Sunday school teacher, or some sort of church leader or teacher. And we think of these good influences of influential teachers.

Maybe they spoke kindly to you. Maybe they got to know you and encouraged you with their words, and for me and for some of us, maybe we can think of a teacher who did some harm to us by speaking unkind words or things to us. Now, teachers will be judged more harshly. One sentence, if you think about it, one sentence can make someone's life turn down a different path, and it could affect a whole entire room.

Children, of course, are more easily influenced than adults. And so when we think about teachers, we think about children oftentimes because we want our children to have adults in their lives who speak kindness to them, who speak encouraging words and build up our children, while Jesus cares about the children as well. If you remember that time when all these people brought the little children to Jesus, and they wanted Jesus to lay hands on them and pray over them, and the disciples were like, Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa.

Now we're sending these children away. Like, they're probably thinking, like, Jesus has way more important things to do than be bothered by these children. But of course, Jesus said, What? Oh, Jesus said, Let the little children come to me. Do not hinder them. And then he said, For the kingdom of heaven belongs to these children. So our words are important.

You never know what little ears

you are around. Now. In Luke, chapter 17, Jesus has these words to say. It says it would be better for people to be thrown into a lake with a large stone hung around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to trip and fall into sin.

So Jesus cares deeply about how we guide and direct and interact with people in our lives.

Now, is Jesus talking about children when he says these little ones in this passage? Maybe. But the commentary on this really says that it's probably more likely anyone who is a doubter or unbeliever or anyone who doesn't know God's love and grace, and forgiveness. Well, James says this. You know, when he first starts this passage, he is addressing religious teachers and leaders.

They didn't have the public school system as we do now. But he's addressing pastors and leaders and teachers of the church. And they should. These people should be held to a higher standard. Now, this doesn't make pastors and teachers, and leaders of the church better than others, but it is certainly held to a higher standard. The teachers are judged more strictly.

This is true. But James, this message that James is communicating is for everyone to consider. The implication of words. Now, as followers of Jesus, this means that we have a big responsibility because we know that words hold power. They've done all sorts of experiment experiments with words. They've done experiments with plants. All right, house plants. And if you speak kindly to them or play music to them, supposedly they'll grow more.

And one guy did this experiment with water in a beaker or a little dish, and he would even not even speak the words but think good thoughts. And supposedly, you know, when it was put in the freezer, it would freeze and cool patterns if it was even just the good thoughts that were coming your way. Now, there's some question about whether that actually works or not, but there's another example of rice.

And you take cooked rice and put it in two identical jars. And supposedly, if you speak kind words to one jar of rice and you speak mean words to another jar of rice, the one with that you're speaking mean words is supposed will grow more mold. So I read an article about a couple who decided to try this experiment, so they cooked the rice just the same.

They put it in two exact same jars. They sat it on the same counter at the same temperature. Right. And for one whole month, they said things like, I love you, rice, and you're so good to one jar into the other jar. They're like, I hate you, rice, and you're awful dull. And they said that at the end of this experiment, they said it ended up they both had about the same amount of mold.

But they did say that it taught them a lesson. And they said for four for one. They said it was really weird to say, I love you to a jar of rice. But they said it was equally weird to say, I love, I hate you to another jar of rice. But they said this, that they walked away feeling much better when they said the nice things.

Then when they said mean things because humans are not jars of rice. Our words are important, but we can make someone's day or ruin someone's day with our words. And sometimes that someone might be our selves. We can make our day or ruin our day, sometimes with our words. Now words that come out of our mouths affect not only others but ourselves as well.

So this Wesley Study Bible says this. It said words can do two things. First of all, words and speech display our attitudes and commitments. So that's the first thing. And then the second thing that words can do, words can either cultivate relationships. So think about that. Words can either cultivate or destroy key relationships. So here James continues on, He says, Consider ships.

They are so large that strong winds are needed to drive them, but pilots direct their ships wherever they want, with a little rudder in the same way; even though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts wildly.

Think about this A small flame can set a whole forest on fire. The tongue is a small flame of fire, a world of evil at work in us; it contaminates our entire lives. Because of it, the circle of life is set on fire.

The tongue itself is set on fire by the flames of hell. Now, you've probably heard about the fire in Maui. As of yesterday, there were at least 80 lives lost to this fire. There's a whole bunch of people who are still unaccounted for there. It's a tragedy. It's a death. A devastating fire that ripped through that one article said that the residents had little warning because it spread so fast through that town.

It spread fast. It was a little spark that turned into a flame, that turned into a whole town, blazing homes lost, businesses lost, lives lost. And here James is comparing our words to fire, a fire that can destroy things. So this imagery that James is using is powerful for when we think about our words, that our words have this ability to cultivate or destroy, and even more so, James says that the evil words that come out of our mouth are from straight from Satan.

Now, we've talked about in the sermon series that James doesn't mention Jesus very often, but James knows Jesus's words. In Matthew chapter 12, Jesus says, Either consider the tree good and its fruit good, or consider the tree rotten and its fruit rotten. A tree is known for its fruit. Then Jesus says, Children of snakes. How can you speak good things while you are evil?

What fills the heart comes out of the mouth. Jesus is connecting what's in our hearts and what comes out of our mouths. And what comes out of our mouths can fill our hearts, James says. It can contaminate our entire beings, our entire lives. Our tongues have the power to change our hearts. So Jesus indicates that we cannot speak good if evil is in our hearts.

And I guess that means the flip side is also true that our hearts cannot be good if we speak evil, unkind, or hurtful things. And as I think about some of the things that I've said over the last week, mostly to my husband, right? I think, Oh, wow, that stings a little, maybe. You know what I mean? So James continues, and he says people can tame and already have tamed every kind of animal, bird, reptile, and fish.

No one can tame the tongue, though. It is a restless, evil full of deadly poison with it. We both blessed the Lord and Father and cursed human beings made in God's likeness, blessing and curse. Cursing come from the same mouth. My brothers and sisters, it shouldn't be this way. Okay? Both fresh water and saltwater don't come from the same spring, do they?

My brothers and sisters. Can a fig tree produce olives? Can a grapevine produce figs? Of course not. And fresh water doesn't flow from a saltwater spring either. My mom and dad's church are also studying the book of James. They're in a sermon series, but they're a week ahead of us. And so my mom said that they talked about speaking kind words and controlling the tongue last week.

And my mom said that her pastor reminded them of the wisdom that you've probably heard accredited. This wisdom is credited to Bernard Meltzer, and Bernard was a radio show talk show host who gave advice from 1967 to 1990 or so. And he said this Before you speak, ask if what you are going to say is true, kind, necessary, or helpful.

Because if it's not one of those things, then don't say it. I've also heard it to ask yourself, is what I'm about to say going to improve on the silence? Because if not, don't say it. Jesus said that we can't be both a good tree producing good fruit and we can't be both a good tree and a rotten tree at the same time.

And then James questions how we can both bless God. We bless and praise God. We come here and do this. We bless and praise God, and then we leave. And then sometimes we yell at the car that pulled out in front of us or is going too slow. Our words display our attitudes and our commitments.

Our words are in part. And we may be the only Christian our coworker or neighbor knows. What attitude? What commitments are you displaying with your words? So we wonder, like, is there any hope for us? I mean, James already kind of indicated taming the tongue. It's pretty much impossible. Well, here's the rest of chapter three. This is when we get into the wisdom section.

James says, Are any of you wise and understanding? Show that your actions are good with a humble lifestyle that comes from wisdom. However, if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, then stop bragging and living in ways that deny the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above. Instead, it is from the earth, natural and demonic.

Wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there is disorder in everything that is evil. What of the wisdom from above? First, it is pure and then peaceful, gentle, obedient, filled with mercy and good actions, fair and genuine. Those who make peace sow the seeds of justice through their peaceful actions. Humbling ourselves is a way to start controlling our tongues, start controlling our actions, and start controlling our words.

Jesus came to this earth humbly. Jesus came to serve and not be served. And asked us to live in that same way. If you think about the power of words, think about some of Jesus's most powerful words, some of which included Jesus saying, Ask and you will receive. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you.

Jesus said, Therefore, stop worrying about tomorrow because tomorrow will worry about itself. Jesus said I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. Now, for me, I think the most powerful words that Jesus said were words that he said when he was on the cross, and he said, Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing.

Now, sometimes these words are called Jesus's greatest miracle because while nailing him to the cross, Jesus seems to forget his own pain. He feels the damage of what the people are doing to their own over

the nails, going through his wrists and going through his feet. He forgets his own anguish in order to speak words of love and forgiveness.

Lives were changed that day when Jesus spoke those words on the cross, the lives of those whom Jesus forgave. Our lives were changed that day, and we can use those words of Jesus as an example of how to live with your words. Do you need to forgive someone today? Maybe in person or via text, or through a prayer?

Maybe that person, the person that you need to forgive, is yourself. Our words are important because I forgive you and may change more than just your life. Controlling the tongue is really about checking your heart, and what's in your heart is only known by God and by you. I was the only person who really knew what was in your heart.

But the people around you get a little glance at what's in your heart by the words you say or the words you don't say. And maybe it's words that you need to speak today. And maybe it's words that you need to stop speaking when thinking about what we should say or what we shouldn't say. We should probably listen to the wisdom found in Scripture.

And so I want you to hear these words again from James at the very end of chapter three. These words about wisdom. What of wisdom from above? First, it is pure and then peaceful, gentle, obedient, filled with mercy and good actions, fair and genuine. Those who make peace sow the seeds of justice by their peaceful acts. Would you pray with me, Father Almighty? We thank you for the cross.

We thank you for forgiveness when we speak words of hate or anger, or impatience when little ones are around, reminding us that we might be the only Christian our coworker or our neighbor knows. Remind us of the power of words. Both through the words that come out of our mouths but also through the power of Jesus's words. And may we live by Jesus's words.

May we live the hope and the light that those words can bring to our life as we think about starting school or starting a new routine, or getting back into the swing of things; God be with us. Help us to tame our tongues, help us to serve and not be served. God, we say all of this in Jesus' name, Amen.