



SERIES: FEBRUARY – MARCH FAITH IN REAL LIFE

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Tuesday, 03/08/2022

Scripture: James 3:5-6

TITLE: Burn or Bless?

As the saying goes, if you play with fire, you're going to get burned. In today's passage, James compares the power of a person's tongue to the danger the fire. For some context, in the passage just before this, James has illustrated the power of a person's tongue, like the small bit that guides a big powerful horse or the small rudder that has the ability to guide a giant ship. In the same way, the tongue is such a small part of a person's body, yet through the words, we say to one another, our tongue holds enormous power.

Just as Uncle Ben said, from Spider-Man, “with great power comes great responsibility.” We have incredible power with our words, and this power can be used for both good and evil. James makes this point clear when he says in James 3:5-6 (ESV):

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.

Again, in verse 5, James repeats the same idea good even though the tongue is small, it boasts of great things or contains great power. Like with anything powerful, it should never be used carelessly. Like our moms told us, we shouldn't run with scissors, and we shouldn't play with fire, because from even a small flame an entire forest can easily go up in smoke! This is an illustration we understand all too well; in places like California and Colorado, we see the devastating effects of wildfires. The two often destroy people's homes, land and even claim human lives. Miles of land can be brought to ashes by something as small as a cigarette that someone didn't care enough to throw away, or a campfire that someone didn't put out early enough. Knowing how devastating its effects can be, the majority of us would never play so carelessly with something like fire, and yet how often do we speak to strangers, friends, and even loved ones with careless and hurtful words?

I believe the root cause of such carelessness is the pride that so easily can ensnare our hearts. We hurt people with words when we are angry, hurt, and defensive. As James tells us, though our tongue so small, it has the ability to stain or defile a person's entire body. What's more, if we continuously use careless words, James makes it clear that the entire course of our life can be set ablaze with evil words. Ultimately, James identifies the root of this pride, this arrogance, and this evil as coming from hell itself. It's like Satan wants to use our tongue as a means to bring about his destruction in our lives and the world around us.

Jesus teaches us in Matthew 15:11 that "it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person." That is to say, there is no food we can eat that would make us spiritually unclean, but our words reflect our hearts, and evil words reflect a heart and spirit that is being guided by Satan! This is serious!

Followers of Jesus must never use their words flippantly or carelessly. We must understand that in the same way our tongue causes a wildfire of pain and suffering, our words have the power to encourage and build up. As we were reminded in the Book of Proverbs, "Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones." (Proverbs 16:24)

May Jesus take hold of our hearts and use the words we speak to pour out his sweet blessings and speak of his excellencies to the world around us. Rather than spread a wildfire of evil, may Jesus use our words to extinguish the flames of evil around us and draw people into the peace of the Gospel!