



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Discovering A Living Faith – (James)

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Message Title: Restless Evil pt. 2

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I've said it before. We have a habit in churches of kind of setting apart certain sins as really naughty and others as kind of dismissed as no big deal. I mean, if somebody is addicted to alcohol, man, that's a biggie. You're messed up. But if somebody is addicted to gossip, addicted to critical speech, addicted to a tongue out of control, that's no big deal. Yet every one of us could name times in our school, in our place of employment, in our family, in our neighborhood, in our church, where somebody's mouth was out of control and it lit a fire that did a lot of damage.

Over the years we as leaders on occasion have had to remove people from positions of leadership, from ministry roles because they had a mouth that was out of control. And as I process back through my head and every instance that I can recall, when the people around them were made aware that this is why we had to do that - in every case, people immediately minimalized it. That's all? That's all? It was not like they were committing adultery or something. See that's the problem and I think that's the problem James is addressing, we tend to minimize this as no big deal. And James says this actually it's a really big deal because this little fire sets the whole forest on fire and then you've got a big problem.

Verse six, "And the tongue is a fire. The very world of iniquity." Now he's going to get into some very severe language. What does he mean by the whole world of iniquity? The best way to explain it, I think is to say it means that the sum total of everything that's wrong with you makes its way into your mouth. That's what he said. It's the whole world of iniquity. It's a sum total of everything about you that's wrong, that's sinful, that's evil. It seems to collect in our mouths and outcomes. In other words, whatever your struggle is, whether you struggle with arrogance, whether you struggle with pride, whether you struggle with anger, whether you struggle with bitterness, whether you struggle with unforgiveness, whether you struggle with fear, whether you struggle with insecurities, whether you struggle with lust, whatever your deal is, the sum total of everything that's wrong with this somehow finds its way into our mouth and our mouth gives expression to it. It's the, it's the world of iniquity for us. That's why it's such a big deal.

The very world of iniquity. The tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body. That word defiles is the word that he used in 1:27 when he says remain unstained, remain undefiled. That's our word from the world. You remember when we defined the world, we said the world is basically defined by a value system. That and at its core has me operating as my own God, so to be stained by the world would be to buy into a value system where I run my own life. I'm in charge, I'm my own God. Clearly, James is tapping back into that when he says, this is this whole world of iniquity, and the problem is that it's been stained by the world. In other words, the reason your mouth is out of control is because you're still operating as God. You're running the show and as long as you're running the show, you're never going to bring that tongue under control. That's why it's the barometer. It's saying the spirit's not in control. You're in control. You're being your own God. You've been defiled by the world.

"It defiles the entire body. It stains the whole body and sets on fire the course of our life." There's a lot of debate on what's meant by this phrase, the course of our live. Literally the Greek is the wheel of our origin or the wheel of our life. There's a lot of discussion as to whether or not James was picking up something from a first century philosopher and bringing it in or what exactly he meant. I think the best way to understand it is think about a wheel and in a first century culture, the idea of a wheel being set on fire and as that wheel turns, the fire just keeps coming around. I think we would refer to it today as a cycle, a pattern, a habit. This wheel is on fire and the wheel keeps going round and round, so the fire keeps coming back over and over and over. That's why the NASB says it sets on fire the course of your life. It becomes a habit. It becomes a pattern. It becomes what defines you.

There are certain people everywhere they go, there's conflict, there's conflict at work. There's conflict at home, there's conflict in the church, there's conflict in their neighborhood, there's conflict everywhere they go and in their minds it's always somebody else's fault. But what's happened is this is now become a habit. This is become a pattern. This is now defining the course of your life and you're going to scorch not only your own life, but the people around you that you love most because you have a mouth that's out of control. It now defines you and if something doesn't change, it will destroy you.

"And sets on fire the course of our life and is set on fire by hell." Now think about how many new testament texts do you know with that kind of language? What exactly is lighting my mouth on fire? Answer. It is hell itself. The enemy sticks his match into the fires of hell. Lights your mouth on fire and backs up and watches you do his work, destroying your life and the lives of those you love most out of control. The severity of this language again tells us this is a very big deal.

Verse seven, "For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea is tamed and has been tamed by the human race, but no one can tame the tongue. It is a restless, evil, full of deadly poison." There is one beast that we've never been able to tame and that's the tongue. What's being said there is you cannot tame your tongue. That's why it's the barometer of your spiritual condition. The only way your tongue can be brought under control is through the power of the spirit. It's an evidence of your brokenness and your surrender to the spirit of God. That's the only way your tongue is going to be brought under control. No person in this room contain his or her own tongue. If you walk out these doors saying, you know, that's probably a good point. I probably need to bite my lip and be a little more thoughtful what I say, you are in trouble. You do not have the ability to tame your own tongue. It's not going to happen. It will just recycle again and again and again.

The language here: It is a restless, evil. It's ever lurking in the shadows. There's a restlessness to it. It's just waiting to explode. So a matter of fact, the description is of a poisonous viper. The death delivering poison is the literal Greek there. It's a very vivid imagery. There is this snake in my mouth and it's restless and it's always waiting for an opportunity to come out and deliver it's poison.

Let's imagine that I had a dozen very cranky rattlesnakes. Now, I don't know what makes a rattlesnake cranky, but these rattlesnakes are upset and I dumped them in your house. 24 hours later, you can return. You live every day knowing they're there. Every time you walk into a room, you don't know if they're hiding in the shadows. You don't know if they're in the closet. You don't know if they're in the couch cushions. You don't know where they are, but you know they're in there. Nowhere feels safe and you know at any moment you're going to get bit and that snake is going to deliver a death, delivering poison. Some of you know exactly what I'm talking about. That's how you live every single day and I am sorry for you. You live with someone whose mouth is out of control, and you'd never know from one day to the next what's going to set it off. But there's this restlessness. There's this snake that at any given moment is going to strike and deliver the poison.

Again, the language, the imagery here is very strong. The reality to this is that probably every single one of us here this morning could go back a year, five years, 10 years, 20 years, 30 years, depending on your age and identify something someone said that deeply wounded you and you can still feel the pain to this day. That is sobering. 20 years later you still show the scars of where you got scorched by somebody's tongue.

James says in verse nine, "And with it we bless our Lord and Father and with it we curse men who have been made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren these things ought not to be this way." Literally what he's saying, it can't be this way. Now he's going to make his case for that. "Does a fountain send out from the same opening, both fresh and bitter water? Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives or a vine, produce figs nor can salt water produce fresh?" The point he makes is you can't do it both ways with the same tongue. You can't bless God and curse men, but he makes his point. Is it possible for a fountain to bring forth both fresh and bitter or fresh and salt? Is it possible for an apple tree to produce an orange? And the obvious intended to answer is no. Therefore, it's not possible for both to become out of my mouth. So let's think about that. What is he saying?

There's two options. One is that when you bless God, that genuinely comes out of an authentic heart that is surrendered and yielded to him. Can you imagine anyone under the control of the spirit pretending to curse men? No, that'd be silly. No one under the control of the spirit would do that. So we eliminate that option, which leaves us only one option. If what's coming out of my mouth is fire, is poison, is scorching the people around me, then whatever blessing I'm offering to God is just pretend. It's just a show. That's exactly what he's saying. He said in chapter one verse 27 if your religion doesn't lead to an ability to control your mouth, your religion is worthless. Jesus said it in the gospels. Whatever's coming out of your mouth, that's a reflection of what's in your heart. It's the barometer of what's really going on in the inside.

Now again, I want us to think about the severity of this language, the intensity of this language. There's very few New Testament passages like this. What comes out of my mouth is the sum total of what's going on in my life. Everything that's messed up and wrong with me somehow makes it to my mouth and comes out in a fire that scorches the people around me. And that fire is lit on fire by hell itself, which is clearly an evidence that I am not broken and surrendered to the life of the spirit in me.

So where do we go from here? Some of you have work to do. The place to start is some of you need to sit down, eyeball to eyeball and make some things right. Some of you need to sit down with your spouse and say, I have a mouth that's out of control. And because of that, I have deeply wounded you and I'm asking for your forgiveness. Some of you parents need to sit down with your teenagers and say, I've had a mouth that's out of control and it has deeply wounded you. And I'm asking you to forgive me. Some of you teenagers need to talk to your parents and say, I've had a mouth that's out of control and it is injected deadly poison. And I'm asking you to forgive me. Some of you need to go to work tomorrow morning and talk to somebody there. Somebody in your life group, somebody here in church. I don't know who it is, but I am telling you this: If you're unwilling to do that, nothing's going to change. If you're still so arrogant that you can't admit that there's no hope for you to change. This is the cycle that's going to destroy your life and scorch the people you love. That has to be the first step.

Where do we go from there? We need to look deep inside. Each of us needs to look deep inside and assess our own lives. What we don't need is psychotherapy, what we don't need as a counselor on this one. This isn't complicated. If you have a mouth that's out of control, it's clearly an indication that you're still your own God. You're still running your own show. That's why it's coming out of your mouth. You don't need a counselor. You need brokenness and surrender. You need a willingness to come before God and brokenness and humility and say, God, I'm tired of being my own God and I need you to step in and do

for me what I could not do for myself. Controlling your tongue is ultimately an issue of brokenness and humility before God.

One of the things that grieves my heart, I've been doing this long enough to know regardless of the intensity of the text, regardless of my best effort to reflect the intensity of the text, possibly those who need to hear this the most, we'll walk totally unaffected. Some of you checked me out 20 minutes ago. In your mind, you have become so diluted. You're so self-deceived that you cannot see the scar tissue all around you, on the people that you love and you simply cannot acknowledge you have a problem. I don't know how to help you other than to pray that the spirit of God penetrates your heart and opens up your eyes to something you need to deal with. I have absolutely no doubt before the sun sets tonight someone in this room, will have their tongues set on fire by hell itself. And you will so severely scorch someone else that 20 years from today, that person will still feel the pain. The only question is, will that person be you?

Cara: Bryan, I have to ask you, how did your own congregation respond to this message?

Bryan: Yeah, so I would say very well, one of my values as a preacher's, I think the sermon intensity should match the text. So in this case, James is really blunt, so I was pretty blunt. But I think our congregation, I'm going to guess this is true of most of our listeners, is they're not interested in somebody standing up just giving them a big lecture, kind of a holier than thou lecture. But when it's evident, this is just the truth of God's Word, they want to learn, they want to grow, they want to be more like Christ. It's not always easy. It's sometimes it's really painful, but that's why they come. That's why they walk through the doors. And so, you know, sometimes people have this knock on big churches that they water everything down so people will come. You know, I've never heard people in our congregation say that. We're pretty blunt and to the point. But people want to learn, they want to grow. That's why they're there. They don't want to hurt the people around them. They don't want to say things that are painful to their kids. It's not always pleasant, but I think they're appreciative of presenting God's word.

Arnie: So Bryan, I know that if my horse leaves the barn, I can bring him back. But at the same time, once my words leave my mouth, they're gone. They're gone forever and the damage is done.

Bryan: Yeah, the other damage is done. But I also think it's never too late to go back and try to make it right, try to heal what we can heal. But I think it's the patterns that wear people down. So all of us from time to time are going to say things we shouldn't have said. And it's hurtful to someone. That's really different than a pattern of behavior. And we keep saying, I'm sorry, and we do it again and sorry. That's what wears people out. And I think that does more damage over time.

Cara: How do we keep the critical talking gossip then from becoming a habit? And I mean it has to start with the heart, I would assume.

Bryan: Yeah. So it does start with the heart and I've always found the process for any sin to be helpful of confession. And I actually use the word, the word means to agree with God and I always use that God, I agree with you that this was hurtful. And then repentance, which is, if that was offensive to God, then that implies it has to stop that what breaks the sin, sorry sin, sorry sin, sorry cycle is I have to come to grips with God. I agree with you that it is sin and it grieves your heart, repentance is that it has to stop. But it has to stop now and then there has to be whatever steps are necessary to bring that to pass. So whether it's help from someone else, but if we're serious about it, then then we'll do what's necessary to stop it and not just get in this sin, sorry cycle.