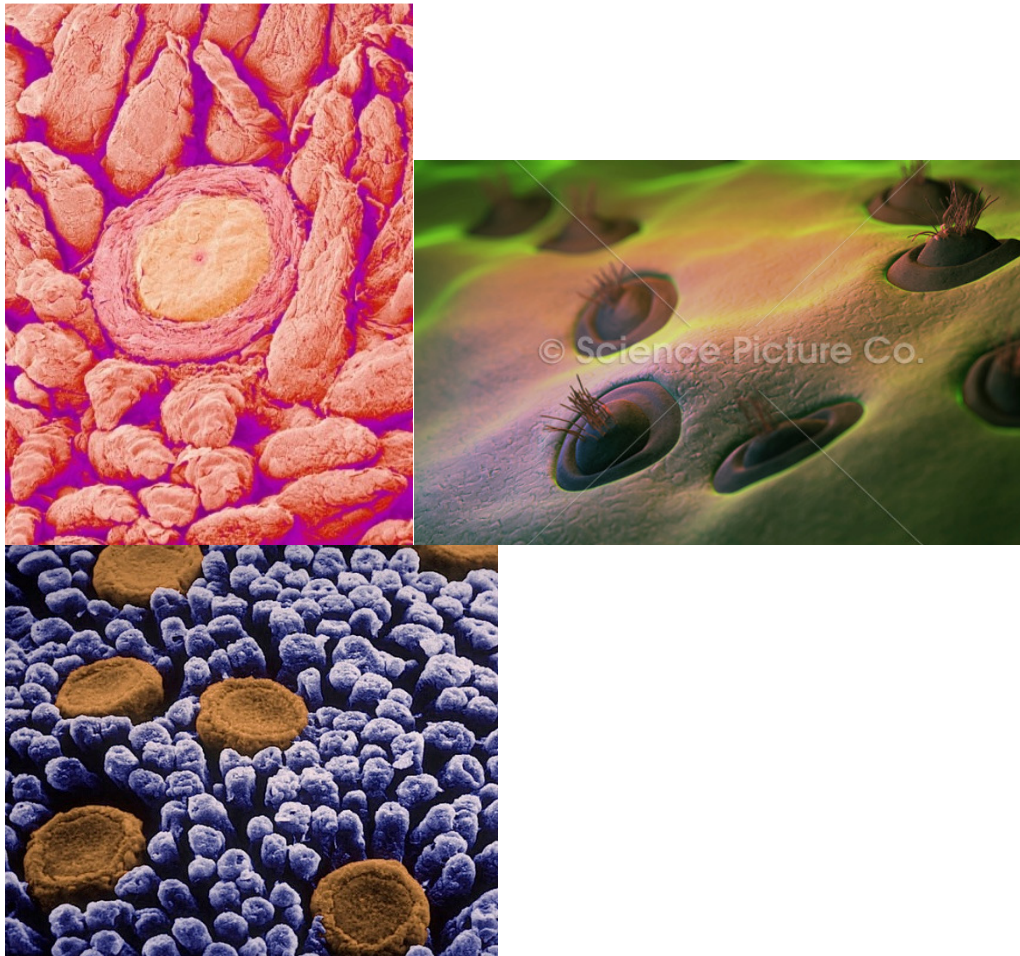


**Christ Community Covenant Church**  
**Street Level Christianity - "Street-Talking Faith"**  
**James 3:1-12**  
**Pastor Gloria Merritt - November 1, 2015**

As we start today's message, I have some really neat science-y photos to show you. I don't know if you've seen these before but I thought they were pretty cool. We've had so many great photos from outer space lately. Can you guess what these photos are?



Well, if you haven't guessed, they are greatly magnified photos of the tongue. They look somewhat other-worldly which is why they're appropriate for today. We're going to look at what James has to say about the tongue. As the title on the bulletin says, we're going to get after our "street talk". And, let me say that I'm pretty excited to talk about this subject because right here at the beginning of chapter 3 it starts out by saying that, "not many of you should become teachers, for in doing so, you are judged much more strictly." Now, that's extremely comforting for me as I stand up here talking about this, today! Thanks so much, Dave. Thanks.

Before I am judged so strictly, let's see how clever you all are this morning. I found some fun riddles!

*This first one is in honor of Martha Schrock:*

Q: What do you call an Amish guy with his hand in a horse's mouth? (A: A mechanic.)

Q: Where are Average Things Manufactured? (A: The satisfactory.)

Q: What's the best thing about Switzerland? (A: Not sure, but the flag is a big plus.)

Q: How do you get down from an elephant? (A: You don't. You get down from a goose.)

*And this one is especially for the youth in the audience:*

Q: How do you drown a Hipster? (A: Throw him into the mainstream.)

[Prayer]

[Read James 1:26 and 3:1-12]

If you'll look at your notes in the bulletin, I want to look at 3 general points about the tongue; then discuss an important physical and spiritual connection to our tongue; and lastly consider some ways to improve our street-talk for this street-level faith that James talks about.

Actually, I do appreciate the warning in verse 1 to those who are teachers – this warning can be taken by anyone who has influence over others: parents, grandparents, coaches, teachers, pastors, and all who have a public platform where their words are under scrutiny. We can especially see this right now as the presidential races are taking place, can't we? Parents, especially, our words have HUGE influence on our children. It's no small thing that James included this warning as he begins to talk about the tongue.

As James continues, he seems to speak from some first-hand experience. After all, it's pretty amazing to think that he lived in the same house with Jesus, the Son of God, the Word made flesh. How would a sibling argue with THE WORD? James might have been thinking back to some times when his own sarcasm or sass just didn't work out too well. Then, he also uses some powerful word images to get his point across, which makes me think that he learned a few things from His big brother's teaching style. He makes the point that the tongue is small but powerful by comparing it to a bit in a horse's mouth, or a rudder on a ship, or a spark that can start a forest fire. All of these things, including the tongue, are disproportionately powerful in relationship to their size. James even tells us that if we don't stumble in what we say, then we can have control over our whole bodies, even to the point of perfection. Talk about power – to have that much self-control would be amazing.

The greatest impression we can make on people can be with our speech. Here at 4Cs we talk a lot about being a light, about being the hands and feet of Jesus – witnesses to Christ's love and mercy. One of the first places we can do that is with our words. What others say to us and what we say to others can last a long time, for good or for evil. The casual sarcastic or critical remark can inflict a lasting injury on another person. The well-timed encouragement or compliment can inspire someone for the rest of their life. So the first point is:

**The tongue is small, but powerful – both positively and negatively.**

Proverbs 18:21 tells us that "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." Let's look at some ways we can be life-giving with our words:

- **Life-building and encouraging** – an example of a young man who passed away from a brain tumor at age 26. Many stories were collected from others who had been impacted by his positive encouragement. People "felt" built-up in his presence in much the same way as it must have felt to be in Jesus' presence. The hope is that we might have that same influence.
- **Praise and Worship** – James tells us in this passage that we bless and praise our God. I truly feel this is the greatest use of our tongues. That probably doesn't surprise you! Psalm 119:171 says, "May my lips overflow with praise." Psalm 34:1, "I will bless the Lord at all time, his praise will always be in my mouth."
- **Truth-telling** – Proverbs 8:7 and 8, "My mouth speaks what is true, for my lips detest wickedness. All the words of my mouth are just; none of them is crooked or perverse." We should also be accurate in our speech, ready to give a good report.
- **Promise-keeping** – James himself tells us in chapter 4 to let our yes be yes and our no be no.
- **Gratitude** – Hebrews 12:28 says, be thankful and so worship God – our gratitude is an act of worship – which is why we have a THANKS service here at 4Cs at the end of each November. And, grateful words can be healing words.
- **Healing** – Proverbs 15:4 says, "the tongue that brings healing is a tree of life." We all know that words of encouragement are so important in our relationships, but we so quickly fail to give them.
- **Silent** – when we withhold our words it can keep that great forest fire from starting. Proverbs 10:19 says, "he who refrains from speaking is wise." Husbands, would you like to say, AMEN?

You've probably heard that a woman can speak up to 20,000 words in a day, while a man usually speaks around 7,000. Scholars think that the reason for this difference is that after a woman has spoken, there's just not enough time for a man to catch up. Scientifically, it takes more energy for a man to speak because of thicker, longer vocal cords compared to a woman's shorter ones.

Of course, we need to remind ourselves that our speech can be destructive. This part of our speech needs to be submitted to God on a regular basis. Because another point about our tongues is:

### **The tongue is humanly untamable.**

Have you experienced this? Have you experienced the great challenge of controlling what you say? However, we have HOPE, because our tongues can be submitted to the power and the control of the Holy Spirit. We might say that only God Himself is mightier than the human tongue! That's good news because here are some of our struggles:

- **Boasting** – and thinking more highly of ourselves than we should. Boasting keeps us from giving God the glory. Prov. 27:2 says, "Let another person praise you, and not your own lips."
- **Lying or exaggeration** – Proverbs 26:28, "a lying tongue hates those it hurts." Think about it, that's destructive. Lying is a form of hatred, not love. An absence of truth in our lives is an indication that deep down, something is out-of-sorts.
- **Negative self-talk generated from the lies of the enemy.**
- **Being double-minded** – praying for things and exercising unbelief afterwards especially in our speech. (See James 1:6)
- **Complaining** - also very destructive, it poisons and destroys us, it keeps our focus on the bad and not on the good. Do you remember the story from the book of Numbers when about 14,700 people died in a plague because of their grumbling and complaining against Moses? Yikes!
- **Gossip** – it goes right along with grumbling and complaining. Gossip is speech that judges others behind their backs and puts them in a negative light. It lacks compassion and mercy. It's one of the most destructive things there is. Proverbs says it betrays confidence and separates close friends. It speaks against people who are made in the image of God.

A well-known theologian was asked what he thought was one of the greatest threats to the Body of Christ, and without hesitation he said, "gossip." It has destroyed churches, communities, and families. Another way we struggle with our words is when we use

- **Death-giving speech** – Proverbs 12:18, <sup>18</sup> Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." Ephesians 4:29 says, and let's read this one together: <sup>29</sup> "Let no unwholesome word proceed out of your mouth, but only that which is good for building up, that it may give grace to the listeners."

We can certainly figure out from this passage that unwholesome speech is the opposite of words that build up or give grace.

You know what – some of you might be feeling kind of smug right now and thinking, "Well, that's easy. I just keep my mouth shut, because saying nothing keeps me out of trouble. True. Proverbs 17:28 says, "Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue." So, as we pointed out earlier, silence can be the perfect answer. But, don't forget the power of life-giving, encouraging speech. Don't let the relationships in your life suffer because you failed to give these kinds of life-giving and grace-filled words. Sometimes a person only opens his or her mouth to complain, or cuss, or have somebody have it with both barrels. My guess is that we've either been on the giving or receiving end of this truth. In fact, if you were paid ten dollars for every kind word you said about people, and collected five dollars for every unkind word, would you be rich or poor? Something to think about, huh?

The ultimate reason we struggle with our tongues is because of what's in our hearts.

### **The tongue reveals our spiritual condition.**

You know how a doctor can tell a lot about a person's health by looking at their tongues? Well, what we say indicates what lies deep in our hearts. The fact is, we need heart surgery. We need a renewal and restoration of our hearts. This process can happen through the life-transforming power of God's word – remembering that Jesus IS the Word!

Jesus talked about this. Let's look at Matthew 12:34-36. It's in your notes taken out of the New King James Version. It says, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. <sup>35</sup> A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. <sup>36</sup> But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment."

In Psalm 19, which was sung at the beginning of today's service, it says, "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, Lord." When our hearts are filled with good things, our mouths will flow with good things.

I have to admit that I don't like to think about accountability when it comes to my tongue. But, sadly, I am accountable, and no one knows that better than my family. I wish I had ten dollars for all of the times I've needed to apologize to them for my reckless words. Humility is an important part of our speech – especially when it comes to admitting when we're wrong.

One way we can begin that process is by coming to the table, remembering our Savior's atoning work on the cross. We can humbly admit our struggle with the tongue, and be confident that He desires to help us and change our hearts so that we have life-giving words for others. Dave is going to lead us in our prayer of confession today and then I want us to take some time for reflection. Please get out your sermon notes and see that there is a section on the back for taking some action. What is the Holy Spirit speaking to you today about your words?

### **["Man of Sorrows"]**

Closing comments and BENEDICTION

So, we have HOPE. While we can truly say like Isaiah said, "we are people of unclean lips" we can submit our tongues to the power and the control of the Holy Spirit, because only God Himself is mightier than the human tongue! We can hide God's word in our hearts so that out of that abundance, our mouths will speak. In fact, I found one website that gave 84 different scriptures that teach about the tongue, so God doesn't leave us without help.

Let's use this as our closing prayer today. It comes from the Psalms:  
"Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips."  
Go in peace and speak wonderful words of life!

### Community Group Questions:

**These questions are more personal in nature and may feel quite transparent. Share answers only as feels comfortable within your group, or perhaps break into smaller groups while sharing.**

- 1) Discuss the implications of James 1:26. "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless."

Proverbs 18:21 tells us that "Death and life are in the power of the tongue."

- 2) Who is a person in your life from whom you received life-giving, encouraging words?
- 3) If you're willing to share, how about a person from whom you received destructive words?
- 4) How has the Lord ministered to you in this area of hurt?

Matthew 12: 34-35 (NKJV) 34"For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. <sup>35</sup>A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.

- 5) Is there a time in your life that you can remember when the Holy Spirit enabled you to bring forth good treasure out of your heart by speaking life-giving words?
- 6) Do you remember a time when you felt convicted by the Holy Spirit about what was being said or shared in a conversation? How did you handle it?
- 7) Have you utilized or memorized any specific scripture about the use of your tongue? If so, which one(s)?
- 8) In what way do you feel hopeful about God's help in the area of the tongue?