**The Tongue Makes Great Boasts**

**The Word**

Read together James 3:1-12

**The Big Idea**

James confronts us with the power of our tongues for both good and bad. A purified tongue holds one of the keys to a purified life in general, but only with God’s help can we hope to tame our tongues.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. Share a time when someone spoke a word over you (either a word of blessing and encouragement or a word of judgment and criticism) that had a profound effect on your life.

2. Discuss Jesus’ approach to speech (starting with the heart) vs. James’ approach to speech (start with the muscle of the tongue) and this idea that sometimes we need to lead with the body. How does that idea sit with you?

3. What do you think of James’ idea in v. 2 that purified speech really is the key to a purified life in general? Where does that seem true to you? Where does that fall short of reality in your mind?

4. As you consider your tongue as your super power for good, what’s a specific context or relationship that you’d like to focus on when it comes to speaking encouragement and blessing in this next month?

**Neighborhood Question of the Week**

Consider your speech in the context of your neighbors. Are there any specific ways you’d like to be more intentional in how you speak to your neighbors?

**Sermon Outline**

I. Introduction

A. Jesus and James care deeply about our speech

See James 1:26 and Mt 12:36-37

B. But they come at the issue from different angles

1. Jesus starts with the heart out of which the mouth speaks (Mt 12:34-35)

2. James starts with the muscle of the tongue

a. Consider our embodied series. We are souls that have bodies, and we express ourselves through our bodies

b. Sometimes we need to start with the heart and discern what’s going on deep inside, and sometimes we just start with the body and trust that the heart will follow over time

C. James’ point is to help us see that our tongues/speech are our super power – for good or for ill

II. The Passage

A. The power of the tongue

1. Teachers are judged more strictly. God cares deeply about how we speak, and teachers’ central role is to speak (v. 1)

2. The tongue holds the key to righteousness: a righteous tongue brings about a righteous life (v. 2)

a. At first glance this seems unlikely: could something as small as our speech really bring our entire spiritual lives in line? Surely righteousness is about a lot more than our speech!

b. James gives us two examples of how unlikely (but true) it is for something so small to influence something so large (horses and ships)

c. The tongue similarly makes big boasts (and can back them up!) v. 5

d. So, as we navigate the powerful forces inside of us (greed, lust, anger, anxiety, etc.) and the powerful external forces (tough jobs, challenging marriages, health issues, etc.), perhaps a focus on righteous speech could be a key to walking faithfully through it all.

1) Consider a difficult marriage. Maybe simply verbally affirming your spouse and verbally apologizing for something each day would go a huge way in bringing relational health

2) Consider anxiety. Maybe verbally acknowledging two simple words (“thank you”) to God each day, followed by a list of 5 things you’re grateful for, could go a huge way

3. The tongue has a disproportionate influence for evil

a. The tongue appoints itself as a world of unrighteousness among the members of the body. The tongue is like that unruly student who is the ringleader of an unruly class. If you can win that student over, the class with follow (v. 6)

b. The tongue is set on fire by hell (v. 6). It’s particularly susceptible to Satan’s influence

c. Harmful words are like a spark that can create a forest fire

1) We’ve all had the experience of watching one careless word escalate to open conflict

2) We all have words we wish we could take back

B. The un-tame-ability of the tongue (v. 7-8)

1. We have fulfilled the creation mandate to subdue the animals, but we still can’t subdue our own tongues

2. James seems to be saying both “tame your tongues,” and “you can’t tame your tongues”

C. The inconsistency of the tongue (v. 9-12

1. We praise God with our tongues and curse his image bearers

2. We’ve all had that experience (consider singing to praise music on the freeway then cursing the person in the car in front of you)

3. Every human being is an image bearer worthy of dignity and respect

4. It must grieve God when we are buddy-buddy with him while we curse his other children made in his image

III. Conclusion

A. Embrace your superpower, and use it to bring blessing and encouragement to those around you

B. Only with God’s help can we hope to tame our fiery tongues

1. We need the forgiveness of Jesus’ sacrifice (see Isaiah 6:1-7)

2. We need the empowerment of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:1-4)