

them. We can remind them of God's presence, even when they cannot see it in any other way except in us. We can speak the creative word of have faith in God.

James is right... our words can be creative or destructive. Either way they carry great power.

I want to close by saying that there are two phrases that might be the most powerful words we can speak to each other. These two phrases apply whether the words we have spoken were intentional or careless. Here is the first phrase: I am sorry.

There is power in the words "I am sorry." Kirk Franklin wrote a blog about a time when he hurt someone with a careless word. His attempt at being funny backfired and he hurt someone he cared about. In his blog he writes that it is hard sometimes to say I am sorry because we think it shows weakness and saying I am sorry means I am wrong and I want to be right. He goes on to say that the price of "being right" is many times a price to high to pay. Divorce courts are full of right people; families who have not spoken in years are full of people who are right. If you are not careful, you will be celebrating your being right all by yourself. Franklin goes on to say, how he hurt this person and he didn't comprehend, but God does not need his comprehension for him to cooperate with, God calls me to do and that is to apologize.

Who have you hurt with intentional words or careless words? How powerful would it be for you to make that call today, or go by that office tomorrow, or send that email tonight and say I know I hurt you and I am sorry. How powerful is the word I am sorry?

There is one more phrase of great power and that is I forgive you. We many times do not forgive because we want to hold onto the power. We don't want to forgive because we think there needs to be consequences but Jesus reminds us that we are to forgive as we have been forgiven.

We also need to learn to say, "I love you." I don't know why those words are hard for us to say, but they should roll off our tongue more often.

God looked upon us with our imperfection and sin and still says to each of us "I love you." Let us love because we have first been loved.

James is correct that the word has great power. Herman Edwards is right as well. There are sometimes when we should keep quite and also not hit send. However, when it comes to these three phrases we need to speak.

I am sorry... hit send

I forgive you... hit send

I love you... hit send. For God looked upon us and out of love he looked at his one and only son Jesus our Lord... and hit send.



# Don't Hit Send

James 3:1-12

TRINITY PULPIT



It has been said that a hot microphone can lead to hot water. That is true. The news is full of those moments when careless words are uttered not knowing the microphone is on. Time magazine commented in April of this year with a list of the top 10 hot mic moments. They listed President Obama's comment to Russia's president concerning needing more space. They also mentioned President Bush's comment to Vice President Cheney concerning a reporter. In addition, there are President Reagan's comments about outlawing Russia. Vice President Biden's comments to President Obama concerning health care reform, Newt Gingrich's mother's comment about Hilary Clinton, and a Jesse Jackson graphic threat were among the top ten. These political moments remind us that words that are spoken are often not simply spoken into a vacuum but many times have great effect.

We also know that in our world it is not only the spoken word, but also the words of emails and social media that also take on a life of their own.

Since this is the first day of the National Football Season it seems appropriate to begin the sermon today with words from NFL analyst, and former coach and quarterback, Herman Edwards. Herman Edwards, who is a popular speaker and analyst, had a speech that went viral on you tube and social media several years ago. Edwards was addressing NFL rookies about how to act as professionals. In particular, he was warning them against the use of social media. In his warning to them about posting something on Facebook or sending a tweet in a moment of emotion, Edwards said he was going to invent a new phone and he wanted everyone to buy it. The new phone, according to Edwards, would have a new button and that new button would not say send, it would say do not send. He went on to say you have to think before you comment. You have to know that once you share it, once you say it, everyone will

know it. He again said just don't hit send.

In our social media culture and in the world of emails as important as it is to bridle the tongue, it is just as important to control your right pinkie on the computer or your thumb on your phone. The careless word now no longer simply comes from the mouth, but also from our hands.

Since most of us are not celebrities we don't have to worry about our posts or tweets or even words going viral, but we do recognize that they can be like a virus. They can destroy and inflict pain upon another. How many of us have uttered words in a moment of frustration toward someone and wish we could have those words back? How many of us have sent a response to an email wishing we had not hit send? How many of us have spoken to loud about someone as we engaged in that "Bless Her Heart" gossip only to realize that someone overheard our conversation and was hurt? How many times have we panicked because we realized that when we hit reply we hit reply all? How many words do we wish had never uttered or typed? No wonder James describes the tongue as restless, evil and full of deadly poison.

James laments "All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue."

James, we must remember, is a Jewish man and was the leader of the church at Jerusalem and was one of the leaders who at first were in conflict with the Apostle Paul regarding the salvation of the Gentiles. We must remember that James brings to his faith and writing all of the thoughts of Jewish law and life. In particular today, we remember the power of the word in Jewish thought. In Jewish thought the spoken word had its own power to bless or to curse. It was the word that was spoken that took on a life of its own. James is very aware of the power of the word.



Trinity Baptist Church  
4815 Six Forks Rd \* Raleigh, NC 27609 \* (919) 787-3740

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There is power in the word that is spoken with intent and there is power in the word that is spoken carelessly. James first reminds us that teachers have an incredible responsibly because of the power of the word. James writes, “not many of you should presume to be teachers my brothers because you know that he who teaches is judged more strictly.” The teacher inherited an important role in the life of the early church. They essentially stepped into the role that the Rabbi had filled in the Jewish synagogue. The importance of the role of the teacher in the early church cannot be overstated. The apostles would come and plant churches and go, but the teachers were there to instruct the church and help them grow. There are many examples of teachers who became false in their teaching.

James reminds us of the power of the intentional word. The teacher who taught would be held accountable for the word, which they shared with the listener. You have heard me say that when I was licensed to ministry my pastor said to me be careful what you do because someone always sees it and be careful what you say because someone will believe it. It is true. Those who are called to teach have an enormous responsibility before God because the word, the prepared word is powerful.

How many of us have been moved by the power of a well-crafted and passionate speech? How many cultural shifts have occurred because of the power of the spoken word? We are aware that the well-crafted and intentional word is powerful.

Yet, in the same way James reminds us of the power of the careless word or the passing word? James writes “we all stumble in many ways and anyone who is never at fault in what he says is a perfect man able to keep his whole body in check. The word all stumble literally means, “slips-up.” It is the picture of someone slipping on a floor or like an old cartoon banana peel. The word picture is of someone who makes a mistake. It is not only the intentional word that has power, but also even the careless or unintentional word that also has great power.

In fact, sometimes it is the careless word that has more power than the intentional word. James uses three illustrations to speak of the power of the word. Two are positive. The bridled animal. If you place a bridle in the mouth of a large horse you are able to turn the horse and control the horse. In the same way a rudder is small in comparison to a great ship, but that small rudder is how you steer and give direction to a great ship. The tongue might be small and even the word spoken might be small, but it is controlling this small part of the body and the small careless words that make all the difference

in our lives.

James continues by reminding us that the careless word can be like a small spark that sets a forest aflame. The small careless word can corrupt the whole person.

We could make a long list of celebrities, politicians, CEO’s, ministers, and others whose whole reputations and careers have been ended with a few misspoken words. There is power in the careless word.

There is power in the word to destroy. James calls the tongue a restless evil, full of poison that not only corrupts the whole person and has a destructive power.

In our culture, we have seen a rise in the use of words when it comes to bullying not only among our children, but adults as well. It has been estimated that 30 percent of children and teens are involved in bullying either as the victim or the perpetrator. Bullying of course can be physical in nature, but in most cases it is verbal or uses cyber-bullying techniques of social media. This is especially true among young girls. The males tend to be more physical in bullying, while the girls are more verbal and social. If you or your child has been the victim of bullying or if your child has been accused of bullying, you know the power of the word. Those aggressive, continual words can do incredible damage to the one to whom they are directed.

Studies show that those who are bullied as children can have long term effects of depression, anxiety and other disorders. Also, some who are bullied become the bully.

Now we need to know that the good nature kidding is not necessarily bullying, but our experience with the increase of bullying among teens and now even children is a reminder of the power of the word.

There of course is the old saying that sticks and stones may break my bones, but words never hurt me. The truth is sticks and stones may break my bones, but my bones will heal. The word sometimes inflicts pain that never heals.

It does not have to be a bullying situation it might simply be the negative word that we heard from a parent, a friend, a teacher or a pastor. It might be the hurtful comment made by even a stranger that takes root in our lives and creates a false sense of our own self-understanding.

Larry David, the co creator of Seinfeld and Curb My Enthusiasm, tells the story of being at a New York Yankees game and having his face put on the big screen. When people saw his face they all began to cheer. Thousands of

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people cheered Larry David. As he was leaving the park, one person shouted something harmful and negative toward him. He heard this one lone loud voice and it drowned out all the other thousand cheers.

One word can inflict great pain. It can take on a life of its own and be destructive not only to others, but also to us.

In the same way, the word can be creative. We are reminded that in the beginning God created all that is and the creative process was the word. God speaks the world into existence. The word is in its very nature creative. It can create in a negative way or it can create in a positive way. James alludes to this creative power by reminding us that out of the same mouth comes praise and cursing. The same word that can be destructive can also be creative.

JAMES IS RIGHT... OUR WORDS CAN BE CREATIVE OR DESTRUCTIVE. EITHER WAY THEY CARRY GREAT POWER.

How can the word be creative? First, it can create praise. The highest act that our words can achieve is to bring praise and glory to God. With our mouths we praise the Lord our father. Our words should bring glory to God. First directly. We should use our words to speak of God’s goodness, God’s grace and God’s greatness. We should use our voices to sing praise and to lift up prayers of praise. We should also use our words to bring God glory indirectly. What I mean by this is our words should reveal the Christ that dwells in us.

How we respond to others reveals who we are in Christ. Jesus taught this to us. In Matthew 15, Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees in regards to His disciples not ceremonially washing their hands before they eat. Jesus reminds them that it is not what goes into someone that makes them unclean, but what proceeds out of their mouth. Jesus says in verse 18 “the things that come out of the mouth from the heart make a man unclean; for out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. This is what makes a man unclean.

Our words reveal our hearts. This is why James asks us how can we in one moment praise God and then in the next moment curse others who are made in God’s likeness? This should not be. Now I was interested in James’ choice of words here. Is James saying that we should not praise God and curse our brothers or sisters in Christ? That would seem obvious. How can we praise God with the same mouth that curses our brothers and sisters in Christ? To be sure this occurs. Yet, James seems to take this a step further. He says we should

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not curse men who have been made in God’s likeness. The term is similitude to God. The term refers back to creation and humanity being created in the likeness of God. Although sin has separated humanity and God, humanity still possesses the likeness of God through being God’s creation and the object of God’s love. James is not saying don’t curse those like you and those who belong to the church and the family of faith. That should be obvious. James is saying that how can we praise God who is the God of creation and then curse God’s creation, namely others, who are created in God’s likeness.

James does not give us a pass when it comes to our enemies or even the enemies of God. The one who is a follower of Jesus must not curse, even the one who is the enemy of God. Why? It reveals the hatred in our hearts. James puts it this way.

Can a fig tree bear olives or grapevine figs? Of course not. Can a salt spring produce fresh water? Of course not. What comes from our mouth reveals our hearts.

Our words can create praise of God and they can be creative in the lives of others. My friends, as followers of Jesus in a world of cursing and harmful words, we have the power to speak a creative word. That word is Jesus. We can speak a word of hope. When the world speaks of doom and gloom and hopeless situation we have the power through Jesus to speak a word of hope. We are the ones who can say with God all things are possible. We are the ones who can remind those around us that God is always at work bringing good in every and any situation for those who love God and are called to God’s purpose. We are the ones who speak the word of hope that God gets the last word in this world because this world belongs to God.

We can speak words of grace in a world that demands revenge and retaliation. In a world that says he or she got what they deserved, we say all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. So we all deserve death and hell but because of God’s unconditional love, because of God’s unspeakable gift of Jesus, we did not receive what we had earned in our sin but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus. When we deserved punishment instead of getting what we deserved, we received grace. This is the creative word we have to offer our world.

We can speak the creative word of faith. When people have given up on themselves and God, we can speak a word of faith and encouragement. We can encourage