

James: Faith That Works – Part 6
The Weight of Our Words – James 3:1-12
Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – February 15, 2026

Introduction

- Last week, James helped us to determine the difference between saving faith and false faith. He told us that saving faith will be evidenced by our actions, that our actions display our faith, and that our faith without works is dead.
- Today, James addresses how our words are a demonstration of our hearts. They matter, they will be judged, they are powerful, and all of our words have a source. Last week, we considered how our faith shapes our works; now we are to consider how it shapes our words.
- This is another important lesson for all of us, so let's open our Bibles and open our hearts as we turn to James chapter one, and we will take a look at verses one through twelve. It is on page 1044 in your pew Bible. Here is the first thing I would like us to consider: our words will be judged.

Our Words Will Be Judged

James 3:1-2 NIV

Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. 2 We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

- Apparently, some of the church at that time were considering becoming teachers in the church. Perhaps people were thinking, based on James's teaching in the last chapter, that their faith must have evidence and that the best way to express their faith was to teach others in it.
- In typical blunt James fashion, he hits that thought straight on and says, “Not many of you should become teachers.” Now, it is not that the church does not need teachers, because it does; teachers are one of the gifts to the church, and elders of the church are required to be teachers of the Word. But not everyone should teach. Why? Because those who teach “will be judged more strictly.”
- I imagine that James was remembering the teaching of Jesus when He was condemned by the religious leaders at the time who said he was able to drive out demons because He was using the power of a greater demon. Jesus responded by schooling the religious leaders on the flaws of their logic and saying that those who speak against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.
- Then He ends His teaching by saying this:

Matthew 12:33-37 NIV

“Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. 35 A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. 36 But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

- In reality, our section of James for today is an extrapolation and application of this teaching of Jesus. Not only must our actions give evidence of our faith, but our words must also do so. On

our day of judgment, we will have to give an account for every empty word we have spoken. That truth should be more than enough to give us pause before we speak, helping us to be slow to speak.

- Our words along with our works will provide evidence if we truly have saving faith. By our words we will either be acquitted, that is declared innocent, that we indeed have the new life of Christ in us through faith by His grace, or we will be condemned by the evidence of our words which show that we are not in Christ and have not been made new by His grace.
- We are all going to have quite the body of evidence. I did a little research this week and found out that, on average, we speak around 16,000 words a day: $16,000 \text{ words/day} \times 365 \text{ days} = 5.8 \text{ million words per year}$. Now, a typical printed book averages between 250–300 words per page, which means you fill roughly 19,000–23,000 pages per year with your words. Now, if we bind your filled pages into 300-page books, you fill between 63 and 77 books a year.
- The average life span of an American is 78.4 years. If we take off a few years for when you were just learning to speak and give you about 75 years of talking, that means you will produce in your lifetime a verbal library of 4,735–5,775, 300-page volumes of your words. That is a lot of evidence to give an account for.
- Here is the deal: those who teach in the church, who teach the word of God, will be judged more strictly, because the words are more precious, authoritative, and have both temporal and eternal value and weight.
- And James says in verse two that we all stumble in many ways, including in and with our words. The faults and failings of our words reveal the faults and failings of our hearts. The more “perfect” our words, the more “perfect” are our hearts and lives. If our words are reformed and sanctified, which is the hardest thing for us to control, then the rest of us will be easy to keep in check.
- So, the first thing that James wants us to know and remember is that our words will be judged. Then James points out that our words are powerful.

Our Words Are Powerful

James 3:3-8 NIV

When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. 4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. 5 Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

- James points out, using multiple examples, how something small is used to control and give direction to something big or how something small can have a huge impact on something large. A bit and a horse, a rudder and a ship, and a spark and a forest. Our words can set our direction and shape our lives. The bit does not merely express the horse's direction; it controls it. The rudder does not merely describe the ship's movement; it steers it. Our words can set a course for our lives.

- Our words can also burn things down or build them up. They can burn down our marriages, destroy friendships, demolish teams, blow up businesses, separate families, deeply wound children for decades, and obliterate churches. Hell fire indeed.
- Paul also instructs us to watch our words and says: **“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up” (Ephesians 4:29)**. If you just used this verse as a filter for your words, they have the power to change your life and the lives of those you interact with. Your words can either blow things up or build them up. Proverbs 18:21 reminds us: **“The tongue has the power of life and death.”** Words can infuse power and illuminate truth and a path forward, or they can burn you down, poison your thoughts, and destroy your life.
- Here is the deal. We can control all types of animals, but no human being can tame the tongue. So what does that mean? We can’t control our tongues on our own; we need the help of God. This means we have to cry out to God for Him to control our tongues. And it also means that when our tongues are controlled, it is evidence of the work of God in our lives.
- Our words have power, and those who have saving faith, those who have given their lives over to God, will have the help of the Spirit to direct their lives and change their words.
- James goes on to not just take a look at our words, but also the true source of them.

Our Words Have a Source

James 3:9-12 NIV

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. 11 Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? 12 My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

- So what is going on in our lives? With our mouths, we praise our Lord and Father. Like we do here every Sunday. We sing praise songs, we pray, we worship, and we bless. And then from the same mouth we speak curse words, and cut people down. So we praise the God of all creation, and then we curse what He has made, human beings, who, by the way, are made in God’s image (see Genesis 1:27). John reminds us that **“Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar” (1 John 4:20)**.
- This should not be! This is not just a problem with our words; it is a problem of our hearts. **“Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34)**. Our problem is not ultimately our words; it is our hearts. Our words reveal what is in our hearts, and our hearts have a problem. This is why we need a new heart. This is why we must ask God for a new heart, and if He changes our hearts, our words will follow.
- If you have a hard time controlling your words, I am asking you to take stock, and ask God to give you a new heart and take the reins of your life. Change the way you speak, to yourself and to others, and in doing so you will change the course of your life and provide evidence of the Spirit’s work in your life and that you have a saving faith. Ask God to shut down the salty source of your life, and have your heart produce the fresh living water of eternal life.

Conclusion

- So here is where James leaves us. Last week, he told us that our faith must show up in our works. Today, he tells us that our faith must show up in our words. Our words will be judged. Our words are powerful. Our words have a source, and that source is our heart.

- If that is true, then this is not just a sermon about talking less, or being more careful, or simply watching what comes out of our mouths. It is a sermon about the condition of our hearts. Because you can filter your speech for a while. You can try harder for a season. You can memorize verses and set reminders.
- But eventually, under pressure, what is in your heart will come out. Jesus said, “Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” So the real question is not, “How can I say better things?” The real question is, “What is filling my heart?”
- James has already told us that we all stumble in many ways. That means every one of us has a lifetime library of evidence. Thousands of pages. Millions of words. Moments we wish we could erase. Conversations we would redo if we could. So, what do we do? We run to Christ. Because here is the good news: Jesus never spoke a careless word. He never lied. He never slandered. He never tore someone down out of pride. And yet He went to the cross not only for our sinful actions but for our sinful words, every cutting remark, every exaggeration, every boast, every sarcastic jab, every moment we blessed God and cursed someone made in His image. Isaiah says, “The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” That includes the iniquity of our speech.
- When we place our faith in Christ, He does not just forgive our words; He gives us a new heart. And when He gives us a new heart, the source begins to change. And when the source changes, the water changes. And when the water changes, the fruit changes. That is sanctification. That is transformation. That is evidence of saving faith.
- So take stock of your words this week. Listen to how you speak about others, about your spouse, about your children, about your church, about yourself. Ask God to show you what your words are revealing, and then ask Him for a new heart. Pray like David, “Create in me a clean heart, O God.” Because if He changes your heart, your words will follow, your direction will change, and your life will move toward life instead of destruction. When you stand before Him on that final day, you will not stand on the record of your words, but on the righteousness of Christ. And that is the only safe place to stand.

Our prayer team is available to pray with you after the service, near the “prayer” sign at the front of the sanctuary, and in the prayer room next to the offices. Also, you can send your prayer request to prayer@crosspointrockford.com

Questions for Growth Groups

1. Last week, James said that saving faith is shown in our works. This week he says it is shown in our words. In what ways have you seen your speech either support or contradict your profession of faith?
2. James and Jesus both teach that we will give an account for our words (James 3:1–2; Matthew 12:36–37). How does that truth affect the way you think about everyday conversations?
3. James compares the tongue to a bit, a rudder, and a spark. Which image stands out most to you, and how have you seen words shape direction or cause damage in real life?
4. James says, “No human being can tame the tongue.” What does that teach us about self-control and our need for God’s help?
5. Jesus said, “Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” What do your recurring speech patterns (complaints, encouragement, criticism, sarcasm, gratitude, etc.) reveal about what fills your heart?
6. The sermon emphasized running to Christ rather than simply trying harder. How does the gospel give hope for our failures in speech?
7. What is one specific area this week where you need to ask God to change the “source” of your words? How can this group pray for you?