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God's Good News Story: The Church Alive & Growing

The Book of James – Pt. 5 (James 3:1-18)

Faith Speaks

Today we continue with our multi-year sermon series called 'God's Good News Story'. We are going through the Bible from Genesis all the way to Revelation hearing what God has to say to His and reviewing the story of how God has interacted with mankind from the very beginning to bring us and keep us in A Right Relationship of Faith with Him through Jesus Christ. Our focus has been to listen to words of this Good News Story and the Action-Packed adventures (both good and bad) with the hope of understanding more about God's plan and will for our lives. We are taking a story format because the Bible in a sense is God's Love Letter and Life Guidebook where God speaks to us in every generation with power and might. Words and Speech are the main way God conveys His will and plan to us.

Today our sermon topic is on that very aspect – Words & Speech, and of course the actions that should align with them. We will be looking at James 3:1-18 which is known for its strident and forthright discussion on our Words/Tongue. But James didn't just make this topic up. He follows God's pattern of using words and speech to communicate His will throughout the Bible.

Let's start from the beginning.

Genesis 1:1-3... In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² And the earth was a formless and desolate emptiness, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. ³ Then God SAID, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

Then in Genesis 1:26,27...²⁶ *Then God SAID, "Let Us make mankind in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the livestock and over all the earth, and over every crawling thing that crawls on the earth."*²⁷ *So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

Then God speaks again and begins giving His creation directions and commands in Genesis 1:28... *God blessed them; and God SAID to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

And again, in Genesis 2:15-17...¹⁵ *Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and tend it. ¹⁶ The LORD God COMMANDED the man, SAYING, "From any tree of the garden you may freely eat; ¹⁷ but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for on the day that you eat from it you will certainly die."*

Sadly, God was not the only one speaking words to early mankind. Satan tries to undermine God's plan for mankind by speaking words not of truth and life, but of lies & deception.

Genesis 3:1-6... Now the serpent was more cunning than any animal of the field which the LORD God had made. And he SAID to the woman, "Has God REALLY SAID, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" ² The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; ³ but from the fruit of the tree

*which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’”⁴ The serpent **SAID** to the woman, “You certainly will not die!”⁵ For God knows that on the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will become like God, knowing good and evil.”⁶ When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took some of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband with her, and he ate.*

Thankfully, God did not leave us out defenseless against the words of lies & deception of Satan. God clearly and faithfully SPEAKS WORDS of TRUTH & LIFE which are recorded for us on every single page of the Bible. God spoke to Abraham, to Moses, to Samuel, to David, to Solomon, to Isaiah, to Daniel, to Ezra, and the list goes on. God’s Good News Story is replete with God reaching out to mankind with words of Direction, Insight, Purpose, Correction and Judgment. Words in of themselves are powerful, but God went even further to reveal to us Who He is and His purpose and plan for our lives and how we can be made right with God through salvation.

Listen to what the writer of Hebrews has to say...
Hebrews 1:1-3... *¹God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ²in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom He also made the world. ³And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

Then listen to the words of John, the Apostle ...
John 1:1-5;14-17...*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being. ⁴In Him was life, and the life was the Light of mankind. ⁵And the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not grasp it.....¹⁴And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us; and we saw His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵John *testified about Him and called out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who is coming after me has proved to be my superior, because He existed before me.’”¹⁶For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. ¹⁷For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.*

So, it is clear that Jesus Christ is the very Word of God that speaks to us to give us insight into Who God is, and What He wants from us and for us.

Now, we circle back to Jesus’ half-brother, James, who uses this same motif and pattern of Speech and Words and addresses the Christians of his day as well as to Christians in every age.

I think you can obviously understand the power of words and speech from all the previous verses. James addresses the early 1st Century Church who had been scattered from Jerusalem to all different parts of the world.

Thankfully, these scattered Christians took the Words of Life in God's Good News Story and shared it with people everywhere they went. There was a great explosion of growth. However, as we have all experienced, with growth can come problems. It seems that the early church was not only using their words and tongue to share the Good News, but some were using their words in ways that were not helpful, but hurtful.

You may have heard the old saying "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me". Sadly, that is not true. Words have great power, power that can hurt and bring great pain to people or to help and heal! In this section James shares that words can Direct, Destroy or Delight. (Wiersbe. P. 358-360)

1st Words that DIRECT...

James 3:1-12...*Do not become teachers in large numbers, my brothers, since you know that we who are teachers will incur a stricter judgment. ² For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to rein in the whole body as well. ³ Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their whole body as well. ⁴ Look at the ships too: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are nevertheless directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot determines.*

This passage addresses the DIRECTING words of teachers (I think we could also add this applies to Pastors and Preaching as well).

Key Point: We Must Recognize the Great Responsibility of Teaching God's Word. (Platt. P. 73)

James firmly and clearly warns his readers that great care and great prayer must go into becoming a teacher/preacher of God's Word. Obviously, James is particularly addressing the church leaders called to the task or teaching/preaching, but I think we can extend this to every believer who is called and commissioned to speak the Good News....

Matthew 28:18-20...¹⁸ *And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. ¹⁹ Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

We must take seriously the task and call to teach God's Word. It is not a task to take lightly, it should be done with great prayer, preparation and pure living. There is a real and dangerous chance that we can actually sin if we teach in a manner that is not according to God's design and Spirit empowered.

James uses two (2) illustrations to show the power of words (he uses the word tongue) by using a euphemism or a metaphor of (1) bit as in the mouths of horses that direct them where to go, and (2) rudder which directs a ship where to go. These both are small but have great DIRECTING power. Our Words/Tongues also have the power to DIRECT people for the better or for their harm.

2nd Words That DESTROY

James 3:5-12... ⁵ *So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!* ⁶ *And the tongue is a fire, the very world of unrighteousness; the tongue is set among our body's parts as that which defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of our life and is set on fire by hell.* ⁷ *For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race.* ⁸ *But no one among mankind can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.* ⁹ *With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people, who have been made in the likeness of God;* ¹⁰ *from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, these things should not be this way.* ¹¹ *Does a spring send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?* ¹² *Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, bear olives, or a vine bear figs? Nor can saltwater produce fresh*

In this section James uses more metaphors or analogies...
(1) Fire and (2) Animals (3) Spring or Fountain of Water
(4) Fig/Olive Trees

Key Point: We Must Recognize the Great Power of the Tongue to Sin & Destroy. (Platt. P. 75)

Key Point: We Must Recognize That Our Words Are Indicators of the True Condition of Our Hearts.

3rd Words That DELIGHT

James 3:13-18... ¹³ *Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.* ¹⁴ *But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.* ¹⁵ *This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.* ¹⁶ *For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.* ¹⁷ *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, free of hypocrisy.* ¹⁸ *And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

I will not spend much time on this passage as I will repeat it and expand upon it next Sunday. But as a counterpoint to the negative uses of our words/tongue – James gives the remedy – Let Wisdom fill our hearts and thus influence our words. It is obvious that James is speaking of Jesus as the True Word of Wisdom, The Word Incarnate.

Our time is up for this weeks. Let me leave you with these two closing Key Points:

- **We Must Recognize** Our Responsibility to Speak the Truth in Love to One Another.
- We Must Recognize Our Responsibility to Share the Good News Story with All the World.

Will You Accept the Challenge to Use Your Words to Help, Heal and Bring Others to Christ?

The following references were utilized in preparation of this message:

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