



## Bitter & Sweet

### Class Five

*Who can control their tongue? James tells us that it's vitally important for our spiritual health.*

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- In Chicago, on October 8, 1871 at 8:30 P.M., it was reported that a cow kicked a bucket in Mrs. O'Leary's barn, and it scraped against a metal pole creating a spark. And before it was over, the fire from that one spark from that one cow in Mrs. O'Leary's barn burned down 17,000 buildings, 300 people lost their lives, & 125,000 people were made homeless. And in 1871, they estimated the damage at \$400 Million, which is the equivalent of over \$6 Billion today.

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- James 3:5-6 NLT

- 5) So also, the tongue is a small thing, but what enormous damage it can do. **A tiny spark can set a great forest on fire.**
- 6) And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is full of wickedness that can ruin your whole life. It can turn the entire course of your life into a blazing flame of destruction, for it is set on fire by hell itself.

- Today we talk about the tongue...

- Like I said earlier, I've always loved the book of James

- So, it was exciting for me to get the opportunity to sit down and prepare these classes

- I always thought that Chapter three was about the Tongue...
- But, I started looking at chapter one, and noticed quite a bit was being said about the tongue

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- James 1:19-20 NIV

- 19) My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, **slow to speak** and slow to become angry,
- 20) for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

- And again a few verses further down...

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- James 1:26 KJV

- 26) If any man among you seem to be religious, and **bridleth not his tongue**, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion *is* vain.

- Then I looked at chapter two, and saw more on the same subject...

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- James 2:12 NIV

- 12) **Speak** and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom

- And then I continued reading on to chapter 4

- And chapter 5...

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- James 4:11 KJV

- 11) **Speak not evil one of another**, brethren. He that speaketh evil of *his* brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.

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- James 5:9 NIV

- 9) **Don't grumble against each other**, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

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- James 5:12 NIV

12) Above all, my brothers, **do not swear**—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your “Yes” be yes, and your “No,” no, or you will be condemned.

- James brings up the matter of the tongue in every single chapter!

- Chapter 2 introduced us to the topic of Faith

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- James actually combines these ideas, and presents the matter of the tongue as another **test of a living faith**

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- in James’ eyes, true faith will be demonstrated by your speech and so will false faith

- Nothing is more telling on the state of the heart than the tongue

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- Transformation of the disciple of Christ will show up in the way we **TALK**

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- James is demanding that we recognize that living faith shows itself in the control of the tongue

- That will be the goal of what we talk about today...

- The first question came up when I read James 3

- *Why does James blame the tongue, when we all know that in reality it is the heart (or the mind) that controls what we say or don't say?*

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- Why does James personify the tongue?

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- Why not blame the real root of the problem? **THE MIND!**

- Wouldn't it be more effective to actually get at the “heart” of the matter, and talk about where good speech and bad speech comes from in the first place?

- Then I realized that it's actually pretty common to speak this way in Scripture
- For example, we read about "*feet swift to shed blood*"
  - As if somehow the feet were the culprits in a murder
- We read about "*eyes of adultery*"
  - As if the eyes were guilty when we know, of course, it's the inner person that made the decision that lead to the action
- But that is the way that Jews thought

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- The distinction between the man and the guilty member is not as clearly distinguished in Hebrew thought
- The Jew, frankly, focuses very often on the guilty member rather than on the heart
- And the Jewish writers of the Scriptures continued those same thoughts
- That was why Jesus told people that "*if your eye offends you, then cut it out*"
- Jesus understood that the tissue and flesh contained in the eye socket wasn't the problem
- Just as much as James realizes that the muscle that wiggles around in your mouth isn't really a problem
- But in the Jewish desire for concrete and practical expression, they very often spoke of the very member of the body itself as if it were the guilty party
- And so, when James talks about the tongue, it isn't that he in fact blames the tongue as if it operated independently of any other impulse

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- It is simply that it is the organ by which the heart expresses itself
- And nowhere is the union of faith and works more visible than in your speech

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- Saying the right words do not make you a righteous person
- We are all very skilled at talking like a good Christadelphian
- But, that doesn't mean that we are all righteous

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- But, right words **are** the manifestation of a righteous life
- That's what James is saying in chapter 3
- James calls us to measure our speech to see if it is consistent with what we claim to be the reality of our faith
- A faith which does not transform the tongue is not a saving faith at all
- If the eyes are a window to the soul
- Then the tongue is a mirror of the heart

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- Controlling the tongue then is essential and James gives us **FIVE** compelling reasons for doing so

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### 1) **Potential to Condemn**

- James calls us to control the tongue because the tongue's potential to condemn us is so **great**
- If you go back to chapter 1 verse 26 James says that,

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- James 1:26 KJV

26) If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's **religion is vain.**

- We've talked about how you can do good works, even if you don't really have a saving faith
- But, more often than not, your tongue will condemn you if you aren't really converted
- It's awfully hard for people to control their tongue, and what is in their heart will often shine through
- If you're not really converted in your heart, then the stresses that arise in life will more often than not bring out the most unchristian words
- James gives some specific advice to those of us who stand up here...

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- James 3:1-2 NIV

- 1) Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.
- 2) We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.

- Why not “presume to be teachers?”
- Because a teacher basically trades on his tongue and you have such a high liability to abuse that, and to bring upon yourself potential judgment
- James is not restraining the genuinely gifted
- He is not restraining the genuinely qualified and those that are called
- He is not restraining the sincere and knowledgeable
- But he is saying that you should take very great pains to ascertain the seriousness of the role of teaching before you go shooting off your mouth
- “Well,” your thinking, “I don’t teach. Maybe I can avoid being condemned by my tongue.”
- Look at verse 2

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- **We all stumble in many ways**

- And the implication James is saying is that *“the mouth is certainly one major one”*
- Everyone sins in a myriad of ways
- And this one way, the mouth, underlies the warning that James has for us
- The scriptures doesn’t have much good to say about the tongue

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- The Bible refers directly or indirectly to a wicked tongue, a deceitful tongue, a lying tongue, a perverse tongue, a filthy tongue, a corrupt tongue, a bitter tongue, an angry tongue, a crafty tongue, a flattering tongue, a slanderous tongue, a gossiping tongue, a back-biting tongue, a blaspheming tongue, a foolish tongue, a boasting tongue, a murmuring tongue, a complaining tongue, a cursing tongue, a contentious tongue, a sensual tongue, a vile tongue, a tale-bearing tongue, a whispering tongue, and an exaggerating tongue

- I heard a great saying, that I think applies...

- ***Your tongue is in a wet place and it can slip easily***

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- One of the easiest ways to sin is to sin with your tongue
- Nothing is more representative of man's sinfulness than his mouth and there is probably no easier way to sin than with your mouth because you can say anything you want to say
- You can't do any evil deed you might want to do because maybe the circumstances aren't there for you to do it

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- But you can say absolutely anything at any time
- Your tongue then has an incredible potential to condemn you

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## 2) Power to Control

- Not only does the tongue have a great potential to condemn us, but it has incredible **power to control us**
- To the degree that our holiness approaches the holiness of Christ, to that degree we are conformed to His image, and to THAT degree our speech will be Godly
- Continue reading what James says in verse 2,

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- James 3:2 NIV

2) We all stumble in many ways. **If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.**

- I don't think I ever really grasped this verse before
- Do you see what it's saying?

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- If a person can **MASTER** his **TONGUE**, he can master his evil tendencies throughout his **WHOLE BODY**

- Because the tongue is the instant expression of the heart, because it can sin more readily and more often than any other member of the body just because of circumstances...
- Because the tongue can sin so easily, because it is such a monitor of depravity, if you can control the tongue... the greatest sinner in your body... then by virtue of controlling the greater, you have gained control over the lesser
- What James is saying that if you can gain control over your tongue, then every other sin in your body will be easy compared to that
- Proverbs says,

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- Proverbs 21:23 KJV

23) Whoso keepeth his **MOUTH** and his **TONGUE** keepeth his soul from troubles.

- To help us understand this idea, James gives us two illustrations
- First from verse 3

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- James 3:3 KJV

3) Behold, we put bits in the horses' **mou**th**s**, that they may obey us; and we turn about their **whole body**.

- How do you control a horse?
  - *Don't ask me! I'm not getting anywhere near one of those things!*
- But, I understand that you control a horse by controlling his tongue
- You put a piece of metal in a horse's mouth and it lays on his tongue
- And then you put a harness around that, pull it up over his head, take some reins and when you pull the reins, you pull that metal bit against the horse's tongue
- By controlling the horse's tongue, you control the horse's movements
- A horse, by the way, is pretty useless without a bridle
- Did you ever know a horse to volunteer to plow a field?
- Did you ever see a horse volunteer to carry a rider?



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- By controlling the **TONGUE**, the **WHOLE LIFE** is directed to a **USEFUL PURPOSE**
- Without the control of the tongue, the horse is absolutely useless
- Without controlling our tongue, **OUR** lives are not very useful to God either...
- All of a sudden, what David said in Psalm 39 makes a little more sense to me...

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- Psalm 39:1 KJV

1) I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: **I will keep my mouth with a bridle**, while the wicked is before me.

- If we want to be useful to God, and not act like some willful, rebellious beast
- We have to bridle our tongues also...
- James gives us another illustration in verse 4

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- James 3:4 KJV

4) Behold also the ships, which though *they be* so great, and *are* driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

- You might think, “Well, the ships they had at the time of James weren’t very large...”
- Remember the ship that Paul was on in Acts 27? 276 passengers!
- That’s a pretty big ship
- No matter the size of the ship, they are all guided by a very small rudder
- Such a small little part controlling the entire course of action for a huge ship
- James sums it up when we add in Verse 5

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- James 3:4 KJV

5) Even so the tongue is a little member, and **boasteth great things...**

- Why does James say that the tongue boasts great things?

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- Because it can do **GREAT** things!
- The tongue is proud of its power to control...
- The tongue is a powerful instrument
- It can tear down people. It can break apart Ecclesias. It can destroy relationships. It can wreck a marriage. It can devastate a family. It can rip up a nation. It can lead to murder. It can even lead to war
- On the other hand, it can build up. It can create love, enthusiasm, encouragement, comfort, peace, joy
- The tongue can also do wonderful and great things
- A powerful, powerful thing is the tongue
- It has great power to control

- **SLIDE**

- The tongue has the power to do great and wonderful **GOOD** things, and the power to do terrible and rotten **BAD** things

- **SLIDE**

- And if we get a hold of it and **CONTROL** the **TONGUE**, it can control the rest of our bodies

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### 3) Peril to Corrupt

- The tongue can lead us to terrible things
- The tongue is very dangerous
- In verses 2 through 5, James was simply saying the tongue controls
- He didn't necessarily say that was bad
- He didn't say that was good either, he just said the tongue is a controlling member
- And because of its power to control, it must be controlled

- The analogy of the rudder is helpful, because the rudder controls the ship, but it really doesn't tell the ship where to go
- The captain guides the ship into port safely
- But, if pirates take control of the ship, they will drive it into destruction
- The person that has the control has the power
- And the tongue **KNOWS** this!

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- Like all power, the power that the tongue has **CORRUPTS**
- Now James is going to go on to show us that the tongue, because of its power to control, is a tremendously dangerous thing
- A definite negative tone dominates James' words as he talks about the power of the tongue and its danger
- Continue reading where we left off in verse 5

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- James 3:5 KJV

5) Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. **Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!**

- Now James begins to warn us about the danger of the tongue
- It has a fearful potency for destruction
- More recent translations get a little closer to the actual meaning of the text here...

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- James 3:5 NIV

5) ...Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.

- I come from fire country
- And we see every single year how one single cigarette burns hundreds of thousands of acres of forest
- Fire has an amazing capacity

- Water cannot multiply
- If you have a cup of water and you pour it out, it won't become a flood
- But if you have a match, you can down a whole city because fire has a way of multiplying
- And the tongue is like fire
- Consider gossip, for example...
- Like toothpaste that you squeeze out and can't get back into the tube, once you say something about someone you can't get it back, and it spreads and spreads and spreads like a forest fire
- It multiplies and grows, consuming everything that is healthy and thriving in front of it, and leaving nothing behind but ruins, ashes and waste
- By it's nature it multiplies
- Don't think that you can say something in private about someone else, and that it will stay right there
- It will spread like wild fire, and the only way to control it is not to say it...
- Look at what comes in the next verse

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- James 3:6 NIV

- 5) ...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 person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

- This is the most powerful statement on the danger of the tongue ever made
- Look at the progression of these statements

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- It says, "**The tongue is a fire,**" and then it says...

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- "**A world** (or a system, or a cosmos) **of evil**"
- Now that's a strange title for a tongue... a **cosmos of evil**

- What James is saying is the tongue is a sinful system
- It's not just a simple little thing that speaks
- It is an unrighteous, hostile, rebelling system within ourselves
- It has it's own agenda, it's own goals, it own desires for how it wants to control and corrupt you
- It inflames all of our capacities in its effort to bring the whole person into its wicked system
- No other bodily part has such far-reaching potential for disaster as the tongue

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- Secondly, the tongue "**corrupts the whole person**"
- It defiles the entire body
- It's evil is not just constrained to what you say, but it corrupts your entire character

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- And look thirdly, this is really incredible, it "**sets the whole course of your life on fire**"
- Your tongue affects the entire machinery of your life
- It touches everyone and everything that you touch
- Gossip, rumors, slander, false accusations, lies, and evil speech can stain and pollute and destroy a whole family, a whole group of people, a school, an Ecclesia, a company or a community

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- Talk about a peril to corrupt!

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- It doesn't just want to **CONTROL** us, it actually wants to **RUIN** us!

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- It ruins more than just **YOUR** own life, but those of **EVERYONE** around you
- So we must control the tongue because of its potential to condemn, its power to control and its peril to corrupt

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#### 4) Prohibitive to Combat

- The tongue is primitive, it is **WILD**, it is **UNTAMED**, it is savage, it is uncivilized, undisciplined, irrepressible, and irresponsible
- And the tongue will fight every effort we attempt to **COMBAT** it
- It simply will not let you reign it in
- Notice what James says in verses 7 and 8

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- James 3:7-8 KJV

- 7) For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:
- 8) But the tongue can no man tame; *it is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

- What James is saying is that the tongue is untamable
- So, how are we supposed to control it?
- If James says that we can't, then why are we having this class?
- Look a little closer at what he says,

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- James 3:8 KJV

- 8) But the tongue can no **MAN** tame

- James doesn't say that the tongue can't be tamed, he just says that **NO MAN** can tame it
- Who can tame your tongue?
- God **CAN!**
- It's a wild, uncontrolled and primitive beast that you battle against when you battle against your own tongue

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- You will **NOT** be successful in fighting it if you try to tackle it on your own

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- Give your tongue over to the Lord, and ask for His help in controlling it
- Only then will be begin to make headway
- I think of the wild man Legion whom no man could bind, not even with chains
- He would run around naked and screaming
- When people tried to bind him with fetters and chains, Mark says that he would pluck the chains apart, and break the fetters that were on his feet
- He was prohibitive to any kind of control over him
- But, when he meets the Lord Jesus, the next thing you know he is sitting there peacefully, clothed and in his right mind
- Your tongue has the same kind of superhuman strength like Legion, able to tear chains apart and throw off any shackles that you attempt to put on it
- But, only when you bring it to meet the Lord, will you ever combat it's natural tendencies, and reign it in
- The tongue is prohibitive to combat, but nothing can withstand the power of God
- The last reason that James gives us for controlling the tongue is the tongue's:

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##### 5) Propensity to Compromise

- Although it's hard to curl your tongue upside down...
- Nothing can flip-flop quite as easily as your tongue

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- Your tongue has a built-in predilection to speak out of both sides of it's mouth, to say one thing once and the opposite thing next, a natural propensity to compromise
- It's like it wants to be two-sided
- It doesn't want to be genuine, truthful or honest
- Let's keep reading in James 3

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- James 3:9 KJV

9) Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

- There is the duplicity
- There is the hypocrisy
- There is the treachery of the tongue
- The same tongue that blesses God, curses those made in His image, slanders them, criticizes them, accuses them, abuses them in anger and jealousy and envy and hatred and bitterness
- And so, in verse 10 James says,

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- James 3:10 KJV

10) Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, **these things ought not so to be.**

- These things ought not so to be
- It's simply not right!
- Any profane speech is inconsistent, it's unacceptable, it's a compromise
- Your tongue has a propensity to compromise, a predilection to compromise
- God has saved us and when God saved us He transformed us and when He transformed us, He gave us a capacity for new speech and He expects us to speak that way
- This is an impossible compromise to tolerate
- And James illustrates the obvious with this great analogy in verse 11,

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- James 3:11 KJV

11) Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

- **NO!**



- It's not really a question, is it?

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- What James is saying is that a clean heart, a fresh heart **CAN'T** produce bitter water
- The taste of the product tells the nature of its source, right?
- So, we are right back to where James started
- We are right back to what James has been saying all week...
- True believers, those who have the saving faith that believes that God has forgiven them, will be revealed by their works
- We're clear that it's not your works that save you
- But, you have to have good works if you are in the way of salvation
- The reality of what we have learned is that you have to come to fully believe, deep in your heart that God's mercy is great enough to save even a wicked person like yourself
- That no matter how hard you try, you will not be perfect, and you will need grace at the time of judgment
- God wants you to have the faith required to believe that **NOW**, and the test of whether or not we truly do have that kind of faith is how we respond to it
- If you tell a small child that you are going to give them a really, wonderful, amazing gift on their 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, you shouldn't expect much of a reaction
- But, we are not children!
- Our faith should be mature
- When God tells us that we are to receive the most wonderful, amazing gift that could possibly ever be given, he expects us to react to that message
- He expects us to be so full of love and thankfulness that we just won't be able to control ourselves, and the good words will just pour out of our mouth
- If we don't really believe Him, then we probably won't react much
- But, if we truly do believe Him, then we will be ever so grateful, joyous and full of love that we will not be able to contain ourselves from doing such great works of good to those around us, simply in an effort to share some of the great love that we have been shown

- And our speech will reflect that wonderful sense of appreciation
- David does a wonderful job of expressing this in several of the Psalms
- We see the love of God deep in his heart, and he just can't contain it, so that it flows out in what he has to say
- David believed in the salvation of God, and it was reflected in his tongue

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- Psalm 35:28 NIV

28) My tongue will speak of your righteousness and of your praises all day long.

- Consider what he says about the captives returning to Zion

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- Psalm 126:1-3 NIV

- 1) When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed.
- 2) Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."
- 3) The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.

- We have been brought back from captivity also, and may our tongues be filled with songs of joy

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- True believers will be revealed by their speech

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- That's why James has reminded us of these five reminders about the Tongue

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- 1) **Potential to Condemn**

- **SLIDE**

- We are revealed by our mouth

- **SLIDE**

## 2) Power to Control

- **SLIDE**

- If we can control our tongue we can control our whole bodies

- **SLIDE**

## 3) Peril to Corrupt

- **SLIDE**

- If we don't control our tongue it can lead to terrible things for us and for those around us

- **SLIDE**

## 4) Prohibitive to Combat

- **SLIDE**

- The tongue is a wild, uncontrollable beast, and only by calling for the miraculous help of our Father can we begin to reign it in

- **SLIDE**

## 5) Propensity to Compromise

- **SLIDE**

- Out of the same mouth comes forth both Bitter & Sweet
- True believers speak with a tongue that is under control, under the control of a loving God that wants the best for us

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- True believers will not have mouths that gush forth both **Bitter & Sweet**

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- But, only **Sweet...**