

This morning, we're turning to the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapt. of the book of James.

James ~ has several distinct characteristics ...in his writing.

One of them ~ is to mention a subject briefly ...

And then return to it ~ in a following chapter,

To explain in more detail ~ what he wants to say.

For example ...

Ch.1.v19. **My dear brothers & sisters, be quick to listen,  
slow to speak, and slow to get angry.**

Ch.1.v26.

**If you claim to be religious, but don't control your tongue,  
you are just fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless.**

So let's read: **James, Ch.3 ...vs.1-12.**

Where he continues this theme

Firstly 3 **true stories** that relate to our reading:

**The 1<sup>st</sup> Story:**

My maternal Grandfather had a sister,

who was well past the usual age, for getting married ...

When she met ...William ... ..In no time at all ~

And with an eye to the future ~ he'd courted & married her.

Uncle Will, was then offered a position in the family business.

'Will' was a **determined** "Go Getter" with a private agenda,

Of how he could achieve ... his desired goals !

Even **his own mother** said:

"William ...will get to the top ~ by fair means ~ or foul."

William climbed swiftly through the ranks of the company ...  
Until he came under two men, who'd **always** worked together,  
and had **always** been good friends.

They were ranked 'third equal' in the Company.

One of them was my grandfather: John Suckling.

Will called him aside and said 'I know, you & Joe have always  
been good friends ~ so I was very surprised when he said ...'

Then Will spoke in a similar vein ... to Joe.

His strategy was simple ...

**Divide & conquer**, using a carefully constructed web of **lies**.

After that ~ it was only a matter of time ... until one of them,  
said something ... that the other one, became suspicious of,  
and a flaming row ensued !

William took over their position and kept heading upwards.

Both men's careers were **ruined** ~ by William's lies.

'Will' didn't need to resort to force ~ or threats.

**He simply sowed 'suspicion'... and let it fester !**

**The 2<sup>nd</sup> Story:** Is personal ... and it was all my own fault !

When my son David was still small...and made a mistake.

I often said: 'Don't be stupid' then I told him ... what he  
should've done ... This became a habit !

It was years ... before I realised... that my language,  
was 'over the top ~ & undermining his self confidence.

As parents and grandparents, does our **tongue**, our **speech**,  
Our **attitude**, build the child up... or put them down ?  
Of course it's **never** our **intention** ... to put them down,  
or make them feel inadequate ...

But, whether it's a child ~ or an adult employee,  
its important **to say** things ... *in such a way*,  
that the right message gets across ~ & not a misunderstanding.

**The 3rd Story:** Occurred some years ago ...

in a church ~ in another part of Auckland,

We had a very difficult issue within the church ~ to deal with.  
The Minister & the Elders discussed it, & decided to discuss it  
further, with the Church Deacons ~ the situation was explained,  
And everyone was told **This subject must not leave this room**  
**But it did**...with disastrous results.

When the Treasurer got home, his wife asked him how the  
meeting went, and he 'spilled the beans' on this private issue.  
They ... were **very close friends** with another couple  
who'd recently moved to the UK ... for a job opportunity.  
She rang England and gossiped the story ~ in detail !

The couple in England, had friends in Australia,  
who were related to the people, we'd been discussing.

So they rang Australia ~ with details of who said what !

The Kiwi's in Oz ~ then rang their rellies in Auckland.

Saying "*This is what was said about you last night  
at the Deacons Meeting !*"

Just as James has said ...in v6.

**The tongue can be a flame of fire, it can ruin your whole life.**

The damage done ~ by that **deliberate gossip**, was immense.  
It didn't achieve anything positive, but was **hurtful** to all concerned

Back in chp.1 ~ James has said

**Persevere** ~ through trials, testing, & **overcoming** temptation  
So that you'll grow in 'maturity'.

In Chapter 2 ... He's said ...

Our financial status doesn't cut any ice with God !  
Neither the rich ~ nor the poor ~ have any advantage !

In ch. 2 He continues to explain, that our **commitment** to faith  
& **our words, of faith** ~  
need to be confirmed by ... **Our acts, of faith.**

Now here in Ch.3 James asks:

Does what we say...**support** our Christian stance,  
Or does it ...**detract** from it ?

**Read v1.** All teachers ... must accept responsibility for what  
they teach ! Both, for its **accuracy** ... & its **integrity**.

By **integrity** we mean ...its truthfulness ...

And explaining something in such a way ...

that it's **unlikely** to be misunderstood !

So ... we must always explain **God's truth** carefully,  
Not just present ...our own ideas.

This is applicable, in every situation where Christian truth, is at stake. With adults ~ & ~ with children ...

In Church, In SS, or in a home Bible study group.

Probably one of the worst situations in any church ... is when someone, has formed **prejudiced** opinions and now wants to persuade everyone else, they're the only 'correct' viewpoint !

To have a strong faith, we need strong convictions !

But our convictions need to be '**informed**' ones.

I used to sell 2 booklets for new Christians, entitled:

**Know what you believe...and ...Know why you believe it.**

At Bible College, I was taught: 'Teach what the Bible teaches. Don't just imitate ~ what the bible reports has happened.'

It follows ...that those who teach, need to search their bibles ~ to make sure their message ... fairly & accurately represents ~ what the Bible teaches !

In Ch.2 - James has emphasised, that mouthing the right words without doing the right deeds ... is just a sham !

Now, here in ch.3 ...He turns that around ... & says:

The testimony of your Christian behaviour, can be ruined ...  
By inappropriate speech.

An article, in a Science magazine, I was reading ...  
on the latest research ~ into the DNA, of Monkeys,  
Explained ... that the genes that enable us humans ... to talk,  
are not present in a Monkey's DNA.

No other part of God's creation ~ can **think & talk** & ...  
keep a **written** record, of what they've discovered, like we do.

But that's no **accident** of science ~ it's how God made us !  
By writing down our thoughts, our ideas & our discoveries,  
We can **teach** or **inform** others ~ train our children,  
& **retain** that information ~ over a long period of time.

Why ? ...do you think ...

Some groups of people, say in New Guinea, for example,  
have remained 'primitive' ~ while others have developed  
A high level of education ~ in arts ~ & science ~ & maths ?  
A significant factor is ... **the written word**.

Whether it's inscribed on wet clay tablets,  
Chiselled into stone ~ or written on papyrus ~ or paper.

And now ... over the last 40 years ...  
Computers have changed ...both the way ...and the speed ...  
With which ... we can find out information ...  
or ... share it with others !

Thoughts, ideas, discoveries, recorded for review & analysis,  
Complete with pictures ~ can **educate** the next generation.  
But ...the **Bible** also brings to that education ...

the concept of **truth & error**. Of right and wrong.  
 And of God's **revelation** to us,  
 As to **why** something is **right** ... or **wrong** !

God says, we have a moral responsibility, to tell the truth !

Listen to what God said: Through Moses,

(It's part of the 10 commandments)

**Do not testify falsely against your neighbour.** Deut.5.20

Through Solomon: **A false witness will not go unpunished,  
 Nor will a liar escape.** Prov.19.5

Through Isaiah:

**The Lord says, These people, say they are mine ...**

**They honour Me with their lips ... but their hearts are far away**

Is. 29.13

At the beginning of our chapt ~ James uses three examples  
 To illustrate ...how small things can have a huge effect.

And to emphasise ~ that the physical smallness of our tongue,  
**contrasts** with the huge influence it can have.

**He talks about:**

- The Bit ...in the horse's mouth.
- The rudder ...on the stern of a ship.
- A spark ...that sets a forest on fire.

In our own lifetime ~ each of us ~ have seen various dictators  
 take control of a country, using the power of words ...

One of the most dramatic, of course, was Adolf Hitler.  
Remember those Newsreel clips of Hitler ...  
addressing a vast sea of people ~ standing shoulder to shoulder.  
He didn't **threaten** them with a firing squad,  
or slave labour camps.

The people he addressed ~ were disheartened ...  
By the **prolonged financial depression** of the 1920's & 30's.  
They were tired of being desperately poor,  
no matter how hard they worked !  
But ...there was also another issue ...  
They were **tired** of the petty rivalry that existed ~ between  
the various 'Arch-Dukes' of the different German states.

Adolf **said** he could offer them: Hope - Honour - Importance,  
and Financial Prosperity ~ through a **united Germany** !

No wonder they said... You lead...we'll follow. "Hiel Hitler"

All this was done with WORDS ... the power of the tongue !  
Carefully constructed ... **persuasion** !  
Driven by the power of **hope & encouragement** !

Of course '**Hope**' & '**Encouragement**' are good things.  
But good things ~ can be misapplied ~ to evil ends !

As you know ... Hitler didn't stop at unifying Germany.  
Because he had a **secret agenda** ... to conquer the world !



Coming back to James ch.3.

James says our **words** have the power to inspire, to persuade,  
And to lead others ...for better ... or worse.

So our words must be handled wisely ~ because ~ it brings an  
awesome responsibility ~ to teach God's truths, **faithfully**.

Throughout history, there's been problems with the **power**  
of the Church ~ & the **power** of the Priesthood.

Many times someone has led a group away ...

& persuaded them ... to start a **new Church**.

To escape the power & politics of **the 'Establishment'**

But ...all too often...Power, domination & control...

Have surfaced again ~ within just a few short years !

James presents a restraint on power-hungry leadership !

He says ... You will be held accountable before God !

**Read vs6-8. ~ 'no one can tame the tongue'**

James is using a figure of speech, called '**hyperbole**'

Which means ... 'overstating or exaggerating'

for emphasis ~ to make a point !

In NT times ...it was widely used and understood.

For example: The Lord Jesus used hyperbole in Mat. 5.29,30.

When He said: **If your right eye, causes you to sin,  
gouge it out, & throw it away.**

It is better for you to lose one part of your body,  
than for your whole body, to be thrown into Hell.  
And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off & throw it  
away, It is better for you to lose one part of your body,  
than for your whole body to go into Hell.

We know that, this emphasis ~ this fig. of speech,  
was well understood by the people listening ~ **for 2 reasons:**

1stly Because his enemies never quoted these sayings against him.  
Nor were there 'one eyed' or 'one handed' disciples ...  
following Him around, Israel !

Do you or I ... use 'hyperbole' ? Yes, of course, we do.

Suppose I come into the house saying 'Where's the fly spray,  
There's millions of ants, running across the veranda.'

Just for fun, Anne grabs a camera and photographs them.  
She transfers it to the computer screen ~ & counts them.  
Then she says: 'there's only 152 ...not millions' !

When we exaggerate for effect ~ & it's **understood** that way,  
There isn't a problem.

However... our Media and Advertising people know ...  
that if you're confident ~ & positive ...  
& repeat something often enough ...

People will begin to believe ~ that the **exaggeration, is true !**  
**...Now that's dangerous !**

Adolf Hitler... knew that too ! And that a confident speaker  
with a secret agenda, can sway a crowd with a few well chosen,  
**but ~ deliberately emotive words !**

And the people will rise up to ...

Depose the **King** ...or the **Arch Duke** ... or even the **Pastor** !  
An emotive speech is a powerful tool, but it's a dangerous one.

People may over-react with 'panic decisions'  
with 'angry criticism' ... or even with 'impulsive action.'

James likens this ~ to a small flame ~ that becomes a forest fire  
'Wild Fire' ...out of control !

He **even** says 'our tongue can be set on fire ... by Hell !

**Read vs9-10.** Here now ... is the heart of the matter.

Our Christian witness, our actions, our kindness & compassion  
Can come crashing down ...**like a child's pile of blocks** ...

If ~ our tongue, gets out of control ...in anger...or reveals ...  
We have very different attitudes, hidden beneath the surface !  
Our **Tongue's words** ...

Are ultimately determined ~ by our **Heart's attitudes** !  
But if we become angry, we may say things we regret later !

As we began, this morning, we read James 1.19:  
...be quick to **listen**, slow to **speak**, and slow to get **angry** ...

Finally ...to conclude on a positive note:

Some of us ...have had a friend describe  
a particularly hard time, in their life ... saying:

I didn't know what to do ~ I didn't know who to turn to  
**I didn't know ~ who I could trust !**  
I didn't want my personal affairs ~ spread all over the church.  
And I didn't know ~ who would **really** listen !

For our tongues to be used **positively**...

We need to **listen** carefully ... & **patiently** ...

So that we can thoroughly understand ... the issues,  
Before we begin ~ to suggest solutions or answers.

And ... we need to be **trustworthy** ...  
when someone shares a secret with us.

Let's grow our maturity !

Let's **walk & talk** our faith, in such a way...

That we commend our Lord ...to those around us,

To other Christians ... but also ...

To those who are 'not yet' committed, to following the Lord.