



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

James 3:1-18

James

“The Tongue”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, thank you for the time we have together this evening. We pray that you would instruct us and build us up in the faith as we read the Scripture and consider it in some detail. We look to you to bless us in that way and to teach us. We are thankful that we are not left to a human teacher alone, but fundamentally we have within us the divine teacher, the Holy Spirit, **the Anointing**, as John calls Him, and we know all things because of Him. We can be guided into the truth because of Him. We pray that His teaching ministry would be foremost this evening, and that He would build us up in the faith and give us clear minds, open our hearts to receive your truth. We look to you to bless us in this part of the hour, and also in the last part as we pray together and bring our petitions to the throne of Christ. Thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ for His death for us, and it's in His name we pray. Amen.

[Message] Our text is James 3:1-18. I'll read the text. “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing *[break in audio]* in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we will direct their entire body as well. Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. 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! And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and

creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the very same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh. Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

There is an old Jewish teaching that compares the tongue to an arrow. One day, a student asked his rabbi, “Why not another weapon?” The rabbi answered, “Because if a man unsheathes his sword to kill his friend and the friend [*break in audio*] changes his mind, he’s able to put the sword back into its scabbard. But an arrow, once it is shot, cannot be returned.” That’s a good analogy and a good description of the danger of words, the danger of speech. The Bible has a lot to say about the power of speech for good and evil, and James 3 is a classic passage on the subject of the tongue.

Like the rabbis, James recognized its potential for evil. What they called an arrow he calls a fire, the very world of iniquity. That’s his first subject in chapter 3, the tongue, followed by a second subject, which is wisdom; the need to control the tongue and the need to exercise wisdom. The two, I think, are to be understood as related in this chapter. The power of speech is one of the greatest gifts God has given to mankind, but it takes wisdom to use it for good. Without wisdom, the tongue is uncontrollable.

James begins this instruction in regard to teachers, and that’s understandable. Teaching is done primarily by means of the tongue. It’s also done, of course, by the pen. But in James’ day, teaching was done principally by speaking, by one who

spoke to a group of disciples, a class of people, and it is principally done that way, as well, in our own day, so it's natural that he would, when he takes up the subject of teaching, take up the subject of the tongue. Knowing the responsibility of teaching and the danger of the tongue, James gives a warning, “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.”

I think that statement reflects the structure and the nature of the meeting of the early church. It was open to the men of the congregation to speak. We see that very clearly in 1 Corinthians 14:26 and following. It's the meeting that we seek to follow, the pattern we seek to follow on Sunday evening, where various men who are gifted to speak or who have a hymn to request or a prayer to make can stand and they can do that. So, if someone in the congregation to which James was writing wanted to teach, he had an opportunity to do that, and, often, people want to do that, and not always from the purest motives. Very often, or sometimes, they do it out of pride, they do it out of conceit. There's certainly that possibility.

That probably was the case in the congregation that James was correcting. There was a problem there. He wouldn't be writing this if there wasn't a problem. But he warns them that if they do that, they need to know that there is a stricter judgment for teachers. It is a great privilege to teach, but greater privilege carries with it greater responsibility, and Jesus spoke on that very fact. He said in Luke 12:48, “From everyone who has been given much, much shall be required,” and much is required of the individual who's been given the opportunity to be a teacher. Truth is required of the teacher. Consistency in teaching but consistency in behavior is required of the teacher, and all of that requires diligence in the study and it requires watchfulness in ones walk before people.

So, the person who takes on that responsibility is also putting himself under a stricter judgment for, as James explains in verse 2, “We all stumble in many ways.” It gives us a picture of someone walking along and striking his foot against a stone or an object and stumbling, it causes him to trip, and the world is filled with stumbling blocks. It's filled with temptations that cause us to stumble, that cause us to fall, that cause us to sin, but it is more serious for the teacher. It's common among all people, but for the teacher is it particularly serious because he has set himself up as a standard for others, and he will be judged more strictly.

Now, that is true of all things in life, all areas of life. We trip and we stumble and we sin in various things. That is particularly true of speech. “If anyone,” he says, “Does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.” As James will explain as he goes on in this lesson on the tongue, the tongue is the most difficult member of the body to control, and so the person who can control his or her tongue he says is perfect, and he means by that he’s mature, he’s complete. Not that he’s sinless, but a mature person. It takes a very mature person to be able to control the tongue. The tongue, though, is something of a window on the soul. It tells us a lot about a person, whether he or she is mature or immature, godly or profane, things can be faked, and people can say things. We know that from what he said about faith, that genuine faith involves more than just words. Anybody can say certain things, but if it’s real it must be backed up by ones activity, ones conduct, and he’ll say the same thing as we go on about the subjects that he’s dealing with this evening.

But still, the way a person talks at some point reflects a great deal about that person. It’s something of a window on that person’s inner life. In verses 3 and 4, he gives two illustrations from daily life to emphasize the importance of controlling the tongue. The first is from controlling horses, and the second is from controlling a ship, verse 3. “Now if we put the bits into the horses’ mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well.” The horse is a powerful animal, but it can be controlled by a small bit in the mouth. The same with a ship. In the ancient world, they could build large ships, not perhaps large by our standards, but still rather large ships, ships that were capable of carrying 276 passengers and large cargos, cargos of wheat, so that’s large *[break in audio]* large vessel, and while they don’t have a will like a horse, they are subject to the winds that blow, and the winds can be very strong.

We’ll see that in our studies in the book of Acts, when we come to Acts 27, how the winds were driving the ship about the Mediterranean, and the sailors had a very difficult time controlling it. In fact, they couldn’t control it in that situation. But the winds are equivalent to the horse’s will, and the winds drive the ship, and yet, even so, James says they are directed by a very small rudder, wherever the pilot desires the ship to go. By that one small rudder, that piece of wood, he can direct a very large ship. So, small things like the rudder and the bit can control great and powerful things and make them useful. In that way, they are like the tongue, and

James makes that application in verse 5, “So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things.”

The tongue, though small, can exert and does exert a great influence on the entire body, the person’s own body and the body of others. James makes the point by personifying the tongue, “It boasts of great things,” and so he describes it as though it’s a person boasting of what it can do, and the boast is not empty. The tongue does great things. The tongue is a great blessing, as we said at the beginning of the lesson, and its greatest blessing comes from the teacher of God’s Word if that teacher is clear and that teacher is accurate, the greatest blessing of it comes from the Christian evangelist as he gives the gospel, and the greatest blessing of the tongue comes from the Christian who gives wise counsel at the right time and is a help. So, the tongue is a means of the greatest blessing, and the tongue can boast of great things, great things that are good, but it also boasts of great things that are catastrophic, “See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!”

Well, there are plenty of examples of that from history, plenty of examples of that from church history. There was the Peter the Hermit who was a fervent preacher in the Middle Ages, and he stirred up the peasants of Europe to go on the first crusade. Well, they weren’t soldiers and they weren’t equipped to be soldiers, and they weren’t prepared for that. They weren’t disciplined in that way. But they marched off because they were stirred up by this guy’s fervent preaching, and they went for the Holy Land and they reached Asia Minor, they reached Turkey, and they were all slaughtered by the Turks because of that Hermit who was able to stir them up with his preaching, or, in more modern times, we can think of things in a more secular way.

Think of someone like Hitler who set Germany on fire with his oratory, and we’ve all seen film clips of him giving his speeches. He was very studied in that. He practiced his gestures and he gave a great deal of attention because he knew that he could stir people up with good oratory, and men can do that and people will be stirred up by good speeches. He was able to set that nation on fire, and, as a consequence, ignite the world in war and in a holocaust. The tongue is small, just like a spark is small, but a spark can set a whole forest aflame, and the tongue can ignite trouble throughout society, but I think more particularly, to James’ concern, in a church itself.

James develops this in verse 6, and of his statement, the Lutheran, Lenski wrote, “Nothing stronger was ever said about the tongue.” The tongue is a fire, James says. It is an instrument of destruction. Gossip, and slander, they spread throughout a community, they spread throughout a church, and they bring with them hurt and shame. The tongue is a fire, and to that he adds, “It is the very world of iniquity,” which may be a hyperbole, an exaggeration, which James is saying it’s just the tongue is a great amount of evil, like the world is great, the tongue is great in its evil, or James may mean something more specific than that and he may be saying that all of the wickedness that’s in the world is embodied in the tongue.

Most every sin that occurs in the world in some way is related to the tongue, to speech, to communication, and that may be his meaning. But his meaning is very clear [*break in audio*] it is a great and a varied iniquity that’s in the tongue. It has great potential for destruction, and its destructive and corruptive influence is indicated in the next two descriptions. It defiles the entire body, meaning the entire person. It does affect the body physically, it affects the body or the person, and the inner man, the inner person, the soul as well as the body, so it defiles the entire body, the mind and the body as well, and sets on fire the course of our life by means of speech. Evil thoughts, seductive thoughts are communicated to others, and that has a corrupting influence. It sets on fire the course of our life, which is literally the wheel of our life, and the wheel was a symbol among the ancients for life, which is like a wheel in that it rolls along a certain course.

Life moves from birth to death and through all of the phases in between, and so they would speak of life as being like a wheel or like a circle, and so the tongue affects that. It affects the wheel of life. It affects the whole course of life and all of the phases of life when it is uncontrolled. This is true in a variety of venues. It’s true in social conversation. The tongue can affect people in that situation. It’s true in political rhetoric. It’s true of preaching or theological dialogue. In all kinds of ways, the tongue with various subjects can corrupt and defile the individual inside and out. So, when false teaching occurs in a church, it affects the whole course, the whole wheel of that church, the whole course of its life and the whole course of the lives of the individuals in it. When men of authority make false pronouncements, when they say things with authority that are not true, it has a lifelong influence.

James is very concerned about teaching in particular, but this applies to things generally. The way Christians in the church conduct themselves and handle their speech has a very significant influence on the lives of individuals, inside the church and out. As I was going through this, the thought occurred to me of what Paul says in Romans 1, where he deals with the Gentiles and the immorality of the Gentiles, and he comes down toward the end of that chapter and that description of what was characteristic of the Gentiles, and he describes those who are inventors of evil, who not only practice the things that they know are worthy of death, but he says they also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

They encourage others to practice what they know is evil, what they know is wrong, what they know is worthy of death. It's that bad that it's worthy of death, they know that, but they encourage others to do that. They may do that in private conversation, they may do that in a public forum from a pulpit or in a classroom, but they do that through speech. The tongue is used in that way. We see a lot of that in our own day, the various ways the tongue is used to encourage evil and to draw people into it. The tongue pollutes others and it has a lifelong influence.

James then gives the source of all of this evil, this source of evil that affects the tongue, and he says it is set on fire by hell. Well, there are two kinds of fire in the Bible. There is the fire that purifies and illuminates and there's fire that destroys. Throughout the Bible, we see the good kind of fire. We see the fire that purifies, for example, in Isaiah 6. The prophet is qualified to become God's prophet when a seraphim takes the coal from the altar and he places it on the lips of the prophet. It's a symbolic gesture, but it demonstrates that now he's purified and he can now speak God's truth. Then we come to the New Testament in Acts 2 in the day of Pentecost, and you'll remember how the Spirit comes upon the apostles as tongues of cloven fire, and the fire is to suggest the purity that is brought to them, and what they say, with great power and authority through the power of the Spirit, is pure, and so there is that aspect of fire.

But there's also the opposite, and that's what James is referring to here, fire that enflames passion. It is satanic, and the tongue that is set on fire by hell is the tongue that permits itself to be used in that way, permits itself to come under the influence of evil and acts to advance evil. The strength of the tongue in its perversity is developed in verse 7, where James describes the untamableness of the tongue. “For

every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race.” Now, by taming animals, he doesn’t mean that all the animals of the human race have been domesticated. I don’t think fish have been domesticated. Maybe in some way. But what he’s saying is that they’re controlled, man is able to control every kind of animal on the face of the Earth. He’s master of the animals of the world, he rules over nature.

That’s what man was intended to do, and man does that. He doesn’t do it perfectly, he doesn’t do it as he would have had sin not entered the world. He doesn’t do it as Adam and Eve did when they were in their pristine, sinless, state, but still, man exercises control of nature, and he can do amazing things with the animals of the world. But he can’t master the tongue, verse 8, “But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. By the grace of God, it’s possible to master the tongue, it’s possible to control the tongue. But, humanly speaking, and generally it is the case, no one can tame the tongue, and I think it would be true to say that even of the most mature, the people who James describes as perfect earlier, would say, “I fail in that way myself.”

None of us can fully and completely control our tongue. It is, as James says, a restless evil. It’s constantly prone to break out in wicked words or words that the person who spoke wishes he or she hadn’t said. Haven’t you ever done that, you say something and say, “Why did I say that?” We do that all the time. Not all the time, but periodically. That’s a restless evil. It can’t be controlled. It’s pictured here as an animal, and one of the commentators described it, one of the older preachers I should say, described it as something like the picture of an animal in a cage, pacing back and forth like a tiger, restless, waiting to do something. I think the animal that is being described here, if it is an animal that James has in mind, would be the serpent that’s always moving and restless, because it’s full of poison. A serpent has poison in its tongue, and that’s what the tongue is like, it’s like something that’s poisonous. It’s like a viper.

James also recognized that the tongue does good. It’s not altogether evil. It does good, as well. It’s inconsistent, and yet in that fact, which he describes in verse 9, the inconsistency of the tongue, you see the perversity of it. Verse 9, “With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God.” Here James recognizes that the tongue is not really the culprit. It’s

only the instrument of sin. It's the organ of the heart of man, and he adds, as I said, personified the tongue for the person who's using it. That's really the problem. The tongue is not the problem [*break in audio*] if you had your tongue ripped out, you would still have the same problem with **your thought life**, you just couldn't express it quite as well. The tongue reflects the human condition, which is a kind of Jekyll and Hyde spiritual personality: blessing God on the one hand, cursing man on the other. Well, God should be blessed, He should be praised, and blessed as Lord and Father, two titles that speak of God as sovereign and God as a loving, generous God who gives all good things, they come down from above, as James has told us.

It's customary for pious Jews to do that, to bless God whenever they would speak of Him, to add the words, “Blessed be He,” after they had made reference to the Lord. James must have seen a lot of that, but he also witnessed in those same people a different personality when it came to people, when it came to speaking of them. They would speak of God, “Blessed be His name,” and then maybe a little while later they would be cursing some other individual in anger or due to some controversy they were having. The contradiction in that is that they curse the one who is in the image of God, and so, in doing that, impute dishonor to God. James had probably witnessed that inconsistency in the Pharisees. He's a man of Jerusalem, that's where he lived, and that was the heart of the Pharisee community, and no doubt he saw a lot of this piety on the outside but this corruption on the inside that would come out in the things that they would say.

I think we have an example of that in John 7:49. The soldiers don't come back with Jesus, or the temple police don't bring Him back, they don't arrest Him, and the authorities are very upset with them when they hear about the crowds around Him and how they're so enthusiastic about Jesus, and so they denounce them as ignorant of the law and accursed. There was that mentality among the leaders, the Sadducees, of course, but even the Pharisees had this arrogance about them and looked down upon the people, particularly up north, the people of Galilee. They called them the “people of the land” which sounds innocuous, but it meant they're just peasants; they work with their hands, they scratch the earth, they're not cultured, they don't know the Word of God. It was a disparaging term, and they frequently spoke of them that way.

Well, James saw a lot of this. He saw this blessing God on the one hand and cursing men on the other. Not that we don't do that [*break in audio*] on LBJ and

someone cuts in front of us, we find ourselves in Dallas traffic. I’m not the only one that does that, am I? I am? Okay. Well, there’s inconsistency in all of us, and the inconsistency in the same mouth is what shows its perversity, the perversity of the tongue, and so James rebukes it in verse 10, “My brethren,” he says, “These things ought not to be this way.” Now, that’s a gentle rebuke. He recognizes human frailty and that, as he said in verse 2, is common to all of us, we all stumble, nobody’s perfect, but still it’s wrong. It’s inconsistency. The same tongue, the same mouth issuing a blessing to God and a curse to men, but it’s a gentle rebuke. He calls them brethren. He assumes them to be that. But such conduct, nevertheless, is completely inconsistent with the life of God that the brethren possess, “These things ought not to be.”

Well, he illustrates that, he brings out his point, he reinforces his point that they ought not to be that way from verses 11 and 12 from nature itself. Nature is not that way. The world around us doesn’t have this inconsistency of the source of blessing and cursing coming from the same source, and so he says in verse 11, “Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?” No, of course it doesn’t. “Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs?” No, it doesn’t do that, “Nor can salt water produce fresh.” The meaning here is clear. This kind of inconsistency that is seen in people is impossible in nature. A good fountain cannot produce bad water.

Maybe he was thinking of the Dead Sea, a traveler walking along the Dead Sea, which is salt water and more, completely undrinkable, wouldn’t dare to dip his cup in that place and expect to drink fresh water. He knows this can’t produce anything but salt water, and a fig tree can’t produce olives. There’s consistency in nature, and so there ought to be consistency in the people of God. The children of God are to use their tongues well, and they are to exercise wisdom in all that they do, and that is James’ next subject in the chapter, which he develops in verses 13 through 18.

This passage may or may not relate directly to the teacher. There’s division among commentators. Some say with verse 13 he goes back to verse 1 and takes up the subject more directly with the teacher; others say, “No, it’s not.” It seems to me that what he says here about wisdom is applicable to everyone, it’s generally true, but of course if it’s generally true, then it’s certainly true of the teacher, as well. Now,

what he says here is that there are two kinds of wisdom, and the tongue that's to be controlled will be controlled by the right kind of wisdom. It would be controlled by a wise heart, that's the only way it can be controlled, and so he speaks of two kinds of wisdom. He begins, though, in verse 13 with a challenge, “Who among you is wise and understanding?”

It's essential that we possess those two virtues, wisdom and understanding, particularly it's important for a teacher to have those. Wisdom can be defined, I think, very simply as skill in living. It's knowing how to live. It's knowing how to make the right decisions, while understanding is knowledge. It's knowing the truth of Scripture. It's knowing the facts of Scripture and understanding those things, it's having it all in ones mind, and they go together. Wisdom should follow from a deep understanding of the things of God's Word. Now, this is particularly needed by teachers. They need to have wisdom, they need to have knowledge, they need to have understanding, but all Christians are to possess wisdom and knowledge, and we're to strive for that.

But James is issuing a challenge here. He asks, “Who has it? Who has these things?” because these things alone are not enough, just as faith alone is not enough, meaning if faith is genuine, it won't be alone. It will be accompanied by works. It will manifest itself in a righteous kind of life, and James makes that point about wisdom and knowledge: those who have them will prove them by their conduct. It's not enough to say, “I have wisdom,” it's not enough to speak wisdom, it's not enough to be able to speak all kinds of facts about the Bible and explain all kinds of conundrums in theology. One has to be able to live a life that is consistent with it, so he says that. He says, “Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.” Good behavior is governed by gentleness. This is the opposite of arrogance, of self-assertiveness. It's not weakness, but it is power under control, and it is not self-serving. It is humble. It puts others ahead of oneself. It doesn't seek out ones own advantage. It doesn't try to make the point for ones own pride. It sets all that aside. Gentleness seeks the best and the good of the other person above ones own good.

But there is a false wisdom, and James describes that in verses 14 and 16. First, it consists of wrong motives, verse 14, “But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.” These

are the opposites of gentleness. These are traits of a person who wants to build a kingdom for himself, is motivated by pride and a desire to promote himself, jealousy, selfish ambition. If these traits are in a would-be teacher, what James is saying is you shouldn't be a teacher, and every teacher has to deal with this kind of aspect, this motive, and so it should cause every one of us who do teach to re-examine ourselves and our motives. But the person who is a teacher and who has this within his heart – jealousy, selfish ambition – James says, is lying against the truth. That is he may teach the truth and he may say the right things, but his conduct and his heart, his motive, all of that is a denial of the very things that he teaches. It repudiates the truth.

This so-called wisdom is not uncommon among people, but I think it's not even uncommon in the church, but it is from the pit. James indicates that in verse 15 where he describes its character, “This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.” This is worldly wisdom. It's not divine wisdom. More than that, it's demonic, he's saying. James sees in this kind of wisdom, this kind of person, he sees something demonic at work, which divides the church, which destroys the work of God, and it's very disruptive. That's how it can be identified. Thoughts and motives are hidden. You can't see my thoughts and my motives, I can't see yours, but we can know the nature of our motives, the nature of our thoughts by the things that we do, by the results that follow, and so James identifies wrong results.

He's gone from wrong motives to wrong results in verse 16, and this is what justifies his warning against this kind of worldly wisdom and bad use of the tongue. He writes, “For where jealousy and selfish ambition exists, there is disorder and every evil thing.” Ministries are split because one man is jealous of another man, or one woman is jealous of another woman. We have examples of that in the Scriptures. That's really what occasioned the separation between Saul and David. There's something a little more fundamental. Saul was an unrighteous man, an un-Godly man, and David was a Godly man, but the thing that set off this division between the two and really set Saul against David was after his victory over Goliath. They come back to the home of Saul, and the women all along the way come out of the cities and they sing their song, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands,” and Saul became jealous of that, and it began this rift between them.

That may have been the problem in Philippi between Euodia and Syntyche, the two women who had served Paul so faithfully but were divided. Evidently, if the context of Philippians helps us with the problem, which is not specified for us, but in chapter 2 Paul talks about these things, about putting others ahead of yourself, of not being selfish and having selfish ambition. Maybe that was the problem with those two women. Something had caused jealousy between them. It happens, and it divides people

True wisdom doesn't have those consequences, and in verse 17, James returns to that wisdom which he describes as wisdom from above. He then gives a full description of it with seven characteristics, “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.” It is first pure, so it's clean of all these vices that James has mentioned in the previous verse. It's free of jealousy. It is first pure, meaning this is the basic virtue from which everything else flows, so because the source is pure, the stream is good, so to speak, and the results are pleasant. James give them in verse 18 the fruit of true wisdom, “And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” That's what real wisdom produces.

How can you know that wisdom is within an assembly? Well, if there's peace and there's harmony, and there's order and there's growth, there's fruit, then you can assume that wisdom is governing that group of people. It produces that. That will be the result if the tongue is being used well, and if the tongue is governed by this kind of wisdom, which is pure and is peaceable and produces peace, then the tongue will not be the fire, as James has described it. Well, how do we get that kind of wisdom, wisdom that can govern the tongue itself, which is a restless evil and no one can control? Well, without being too simplistic in the last minute that I've got, it's through the study of Scripture, it's through prayer, it's through faith and obedience. It takes a lifetime of effort in that way.

We're not going to find wisdom outside of the Word of God, and we're not going to gain the wisdom that's in the Word of God unless we apply ourselves to it, or I might be even more specific. We gain this kind of wisdom by knowing Christ, by making it our ambition to know Him personally. Now, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, and I look over the audience and I assume every one of you has trusted in Jesus Christ as your Savior, you know Him. Paul knew Him, but in Philippians 3:20,

he said his ambition was to know Him even better, “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings.” He’s toward the end of his life and he wants to know Christ, and, as we know Him, we learn these things. They are embodied in Him.

Isaiah gives descriptions of Him, and they fit with the very subjects that James is speaking of. In Isaiah 53:9, he says that there wasn’t any deceit in His mouth.” In Isaiah 9, he speaks of Him as the Wonderful Counselor. In other words, he is the embodiment of the pure tongue and perfect wisdom, and, if we want those, then we should know Christ and grow in our knowledge of Him. Well, may God help us to do that, to know Him increasingly and to increasingly become like Him, that we will exhibit all of these characteristics in our speech and conduct. Let’s pray.

[Prayer] Father, thank you for the instruction that James has given us, very basic instruction but very necessary instruction. May we be a people who control our tongues, and may we control our speech because we have the wisdom to know to do that. Make us increasingly like your Son. We thank you for Him, for His life that is a model for us. We thank you for His life that was perfect and was offered up as a sacrifice for us and for the salvation we have in Him. It’s in Christ’s name we pray. Amen.