

**HARRINGAY UNITED CHURCH-BAPTIST
SUNDAY JULY 1, 2012.**

TOPIC: THE POWER OF THE TONGUE

TEXT: JAMES 3:1-12

Introduction:

Spiritual maturity does not come easy and cheap just like physical maturity. Just as we face physical elements that threaten our survival, so we have spiritual elements that hinder us from spiritual maturity. However, if we persevere, and willing to be refined, we will be mature.

Today, we are going to examine the power that is in the tongue. So, whatever you say has power.

Before I talk on the tongue, I follow James' steps. He warned in verse that Christians should become teachers because teachers will be judged with stricter standard. In other words, even though pulpit is powerful, prestigious and influential and many people clamour to become teachers, pastors or overseers and anyone who teaches God's people, they will face a tougher and stricter judgment.

Their own measure of judgment will be higher hence their roles must be taken seriously and they must be faithful in their work to equip the people of God for the work of mission.

However, there is no way you would say anything without thinking it first in your heart. The heart and the tongue are closely knit together. You may draw what you say from immediate thought or from suspended thought.

What do I mean by this?

Immediate thought is what you think when a situation arise and you respond immediately. Many people are very good at this; they think quickly and respond quickly. Though their responses may not be the right, it may even get them into more trouble but they respond.

Suspended thought is what you have thought ahead of time and decide this is what I am going to say when so and so happens. Or something had happened and unable to respond at that time which one regretted and promised oneself that when it happens.

The issue of tongue is a very serious one because all of us have problems with our tongues. James said anyone who is unable to guard or tame his tongue is not a true Christian 1:26.

In order to make his point clear James described the tongue power with six illustrations, which neatly fit into three powers the tongue has.

He speaks of the tongue as the bit and rudder, which is the directive power of the tongue.

He also speaks of the tongue as fire and a poisonous snake, which is the destructive power of the tongue, and lastly he speaks of the tongue as a fountain and fig tree, which is power of delight that brings life.

Therefore, I can say that the tongue has the power to direct, destroy and to delight.

I decided to discuss this exactly how James puts the sequence because I was tempted to talk about the bad first and then round up with good news.

THE TONGUE HAS POWER TO DIRECT:

James says that the tongue has the power to direct lives away from danger to safety, from wrong way to the right way. He illustrated this by two small tools.

The first is **the bit**, which is used to direct horses to obey their rider so that they are able to direct them to any direction they want to go. And even when they want the horses stop, the bit is still very useful.

The second illustration is **the rudder** in a ship. As big as any ship is, and can be driven by the wind to dangerous and unwanted route, it is easily controlled by a small rudder to stay on course and safe.

Looking at these two examples, the message should sink that when we allow the Holy Spirit to control our lives, we are able to use the tongue, which is being driven by our thoughts to direct affairs and lives to safety and success.

As a wild and untameable horse could be dangerous, and shipwreck is a disaster, so a pronouncement from the tongue affects lives and things. A judge in court pronounces a word 'guilty' which affect life forever is a classic example.

Malicious gossips have taken people's livelihood from them, therefore making lives of family members miserable.

Lies have sent people to jail for the offence they did not commit. Only few months ago a young man who was convicted of murder he did not commit was released after spending 5 years in jail. Five good years of his life had been wasted because someone had lied against him.

Only last Wednesday Jade and we went to bless Atim's new home. We could not find the address on the Sat. Nav. so we asked a man who directed us the opposite direction. Would it not have been better if he said 'I don't know'? We asked for a direction and the man led us completely opposite where we wanted to go.

You need not have all the answers to all questions and enquiries, that is human and it is good to keep our mouths shut instead of offering wrong answer or advice.

I want to talk to African who speak negative to their children. When children ask 'shall I do this? And you respond 'don't do it' when actually you want them to. You are misleading them and it will be wrong of you to reprise them when they take what you have said literally.

Jesus used his tongue to direct people to the right path. He spoke to the Bad Samaritan woman by the well of Jacob in Sychar, directed her to call her husband and that changed her life forever. She recognised the messiah and became the first woman evangelist.

Years ago, a friend of mine met a woman he had known previously after a two-year break. He asked where she was working and that led to discovering the wrong steps this woman had taken. My friend directed her to find work in any of her previous Trust affiliations within four week her visa was going to run out. By the grace of God the mission was accomplished within four weeks and her stay was regularised. My friend has used his tongue to direct this woman to her destiny.

THE TONGUE HAS THE POWER TO DESTROY: FIRE AND VENOMOUS SERPENT

Only on last week gone, President Obama declared the Colorado fire a disaster. That fire like any other fire was caused by a little spark. Quickly it becomes out of control and beyond imagination. The green living and beautiful forest quickly become a smoke and charred wood and it takes ages to restore if it will ever restore to its original state, which is always doubtful.

Fire is good when used in controlled environment to cook our meals and manufacture useful tools that benefit human kind. But when used unwisely, it is extremely dangerous and it will destroy beyond repair. So also is our tongue when used in the Holy Spirit controlled manner it will season and develop people and make them grow. But if used uncontrollably, like uncontrolled fire it destroy people and beyond your imagination and it may be beyond repair. Like fire, tongue can heat things up and escalate things beyond repairs.

Proverbs 26:20-21 "Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases. As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife." NKJV
James also compares untamed tongue to untamed animals
We must pray David's prayer in

Psalms 39:1,3 "I said, "I will guard my ways, Lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, While the wicked are before me My heart was hot within me; While I was musing, the fire burned. Then I spoke with my tongue:" NKJV
Proverbs 14:29
Proverbs 17:27

Fire burns and hurts, so our words burns and hurts people. I remember when someone we had helped turned round and accuse of 419 meaning we have defrauded her. It burned and hurt us badly.

Just like James said that fire spreads, so the words we speak to people set the course of their lives and a person's whole life could be destroyed and built up by what we say.

A woman from a part of Nigeria that is noted for swearing always swore that her son would die in the bush. She reared this boy through university education and he got a very good job. One day he went home to see his mother and on his way back to his station, he had an accident and his car went straight into the bush and the boy died. No one saw him until his body decomposed and became stench.

You may ask for forgiveness for the sin you committed with your tongue but the damage is done already in the life of the other person and it is only the blood of Jesus that can cancel the damage. So when you ask for forgiveness of your own sin, you must also cancel the damage you have done through the blood of Jesus.

Tongue is not only like fire, it is like a poisonous snake. It is restless and untameable. Yes people have tamed wild animals like Lions, tigers, bears, crocodiles and the like and have become soft, but the fact remains that they are wild. But they are still wild animal animals and when they behave truly like their nature, they destroy people. Snakes especially the poisonous ones are no exception. They are deadly, poisonous and dangerous.

The way poison works is that it finds its way to the blood vessels and through the circulatory system, to the heart and then kills its victim. Sometime it may be slow or fast because of its route but the end is sure death.

An unruly tongue can be tamed and be made to be a source of power, strength, blessing and progress to those we speak. Just as fire can be controlled to give energy and produce meals for the benefit of humankind.

No one would release a cobra and lion into the sanctuary on a Sunday, so why would Christian unleash their tongues to damage others?

What I want to emphasise here is that we must rid our hearts of hatred, bitterness, anger, jealousy and envy because all of these Satan use to fan the flame to destroy peoples' lives.

But if our hearts are filled with love, kindness and joy, Satan cannot penetrate those things. Because out of the abundant of the heart, the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34).

There is no excuse that 'I did not mean it that way'. It is better to keep quiet and be considered a fool than to say something that you will regret. A fool for Christ' sake is better than the wise of the world that is full of regret, apology and shame.

The last thing I want to talk about the tongue is:

POWER TO DELIGHT: GIVING GREAT PLEASURE

In this section, James illustrated tongue with the fountain and tree. He asked could bitter and sweet water come from the same source. The answer of course is NO. He then argued how we could use our tongue to praise God (sweet) and at the same time curse someone who is made in the image of God (bitter). Both do not go together. So if we are truly followers of Jesus, we must not curse people with our tongues and with our hearts.

Water is life giving, so the tongue can give life. The water of Jericho was bitter, but the man of God, Elisha, added salt to its source and wholeness came unto the river. Until today, it is the same river that supplies Jericho water without damming it and its water is still fresh.

If water is not controlled, it can destroy properties and lives just as we are seeing in recent times even in

Britain's flood. If our tongue is not properly controlled, it can like flood that sweep people and lives away.

Tongue is like a tree or vine that brings shade and rest for travellers and hardworking people and it also brings fruit for nourishments.

Our tongue must be living water that refreshes weary souls; it must speak life into the lethargic hopeless spirit

Our tongue must be like a tree providing shelter, comfort, rest and refreshment to those who are weary.

The question I want to ask you is 'how many people are free to come to you to be refreshed, to be comforted and be uplifted?'

The book of Proverbs gave many advices about the use of the tongue and in order to know how, we must study the book of Proverbs well. The assignment for July is the Proverbs 1-31 one chapter a day.

Conclusion:

Do not let emotion and temper take the best out of you, they will always mislead you and say what does not bless people and honour God. It will always put you into trouble and will affect people negatively.

Instead, pray quickly that God will help you and you may be surprise that He will come to your aid. Also practice James 1:19, swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to get angry.

Proverbs 18:4

Proverbs 18:21 "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit. "

NKJV.

Which one would you choose, life or death?