

HEART AND TONGUE

(James 3:1-4:3)

DAY ONE READING AND QUESTIONS:

¹Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ²We 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.

³When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.

⁵Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.

⁶The 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.

1. *Why will teachers be judged more strictly?*
2. *How can the tongue control the whole shape of our lives?*
3. *Is the tongue evil in itself? What can make it evil?*

DAY TWO READING AND QUESTIONS:

⁷All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, ⁸but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

⁹With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

¹¹Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹²My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

1. *If no one can tame the tongue, then why do we have these warnings about it? Can we do nothing to tame the tongue?*
2. *Why is inconsistency with the tongue such a problem? Why would those who praise God curse others?*
3. *What is the point of the water and produce illustrations?*

DAY THREE READING AND QUESTIONS:

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. ¹⁶For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

¹⁷But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good

fruit, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

1. *How does one show wisdom? Is this similar to how one shows faith?*
2. *What characterizes earthly wisdom?*
3. *What things characterize wisdom from heaven?*

DAY FOUR READING AND QUESTIONS:

¹What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ²You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. ³When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

1. *How does the worldly wisdom discussed above lead to fights and quarrels?*
2. *Can desires actually lead to murder? Give an example.*
3. *Should we ask God for anything we desire?*

DAY FIVE READING AND QUESTIONS:

Go back and read the entire passage.

1. *How does wisdom relate to controlling the tongue?*

2. *Is ambition a good thing or a bad thing?*

3. *Compare the description of wisdom in verses 17-18 with the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. Are they similar? What might this say about the source of heavenly wisdom?*

MEDITATION ON JAMES 3:1-4:3

"I regret saying that." It seems I have such regrets often. I don't think I am alone. Who among us has not desperately wanted to take back our words? But how can we control our tongues? Is it a just a matter of speaking less, or thinking before we speak? If so, why do we still regret what we say?

What is at stake here is not just watching our words but being controlled by God. As Jesus said, "For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34b). What we need is not so much self-improvement but character. The real question is, "Who controls our speech?" or rather, "Who controls our life?" James reminds us that the true answer to this question is not seen in our intentions but in our speech and actions. It is a matter of the heart.

Or rather a matter of who controls our heart. Do we live according to worldly wisdom? What passes for wisdom or common sense in our world tells us that positive thinking, self-promotion, and tapping into hidden internal resources will bring happiness, excellence, and success. Such thinking is not just "out there" in the world; it is taken for granted in the church.

God offers us another type of wisdom, a heavenly common sense that is in direct opposition to the thinking of our age. This wisdom seeks peace, not success. It desires purity, not happiness. It shows itself in a willingness to yield to others, a sharp contrast to ambitious self-promotion.

Are we humble enough to receive this wisdom from God? If so, he will give it to us. And if we receive it, this heavenly wisdom will be shown even in our speech.

“Father, give us the wisdom from above. May your words be in our hearts and on our tongues, so we may be people of peace.”