

LIVING out LOUD

James

Studies in Practical Christianity

Session #5 War of the Words

James Chapter 3 Verses 1-12

*“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.
Do what it says.” – James 1v 22*

Sladebrook Evangelical Church

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Introduction and Aim of this Teaching Series:

The book of James is often considered to be the most practical book in the Bible. Apart from the logical lessons of the Proverbs and, of course, the unavoidable challenges we find in the Sermon on the Mount that is probably true! As the half-brother of Jesus, James shoots from the hip; having witnessed firsthand what a life before God should be lived like, he speaks clearly with penetrating truths that leave little room to manoeuvre or excuse.

James wrote with divine insight that cannot be compromised. His epistle, written to scattered saints in need of encouragement, comes fresh upon each reading. Some books of the Bible require not only careful examination, but also careful interpretation, as different views can surface and political persuasions are formed. Not so with James. The challenge of this short book of 108 verses is not so much interpretation, but application! The meaning is all too clear and the challenge unequivocal. James' message throughout is clear: Practical Christian living reflects genuine faith that goes on to transform our lives. So says James, if you believe it, your life should show it!

The aim of this series is to highlight this teaching and the need to "Live it out Loud" personally and within our corporate context. James wrote to Jewish Christians facing all sorts of trials and who due to their heritage, were tempted to resort to the thankless task master of law keeping, rather than to Christ. James' message is clear: We are to aim for all that God intends us to be; not by merely verbalising a creed, or looking back to law, but by expressing a radical, counter cultural Christ-life that defies the wisdom and ways of this world. As a local church, we need to hear James' words again and heed their heart beat if we are to embrace all that Christ would have for us, both within the fellowship and as we reach out to those yet to see what genuine faith looks like: As God's people, may we learn to "Live out Loud" the truths we discover during the time we spend in the book of James.

LIVING out LOUD #5: Introduction

Sadly, at times we turn on our TV's only to hear horrific headlines where someone, somewhere has gone on the rampage with a loaded gun. Fuelled by unholy rage, they embark on the cruellest of crusades, wreaking wanton carnage without thought or conscience. Such manic, malevolent behaviour results only in bloodshed and unnecessary loss of life. The outcome is inevitably destructive and tragic and leads to yet another hollow enquiry about the availability and misuse of guns. Barbarism like this rightly appals us when it unfolds in such vivid, senseless and wicked ways and rightly begs the question, how can such things be stopped from happening ever again?

Yet there are more subtle crimes that rarely offend. Even though the same sinful nature is manifest with its always unpleasant outcomes, we are often content to overlook its impact. Sin is sin and whatever stage and scale it plays out on, it will always offend a holy God. Ammunition can be fired, people are wounded or worse and lives are destroyed. Somehow one sinful outburst makes us recoil in horror, whilst the other is explained away. At this point in his letter, James points out that there is a potent weapon within each of us that can be used to build up or tear down. Its use or abuse rests with the way we choose to employ it. Intended as an instrument of high praise, sadly, says James, the tongue can instead be used to inflict lasting wounds.

James points out that to "live out loud" as consistent Christ-like people, we must learn to **tame the tongue**. He likens it to a bridle or rudder **that seeks to control us** (v3-4), to a forest fire **that wants to consume us** (v5-6) and warns that the poisonous source of such sinful speech **seeks only to corrupt us** (v8). He warns that our conversation has consequences. Whether slating someone to their face, or slandering them behind their back, words, like bullets, can wound. Godless gossip and Christ-less criticism have no place among God's people, yet Satan sneaks these unexploded bombs into our midst. It takes but one foolish follower to take their eyes off Christ and the bomb goes off, an angry outburst erupts and God's name is brought low.

James says the tongue can unleash all kinds of evil; damaging disciples, ruining reputations, and tarnishing testimonies. As a result, churches have stumbled, split and even shut. Instead of salt-seasoned speech, Christians can resort to cancerous comments characteristic of the flesh and the fire spreads. James spells out the potential to praise and the choice to curse with the tongue. He illustrates its devastating influence and in doing so betrays the true state of the heart that indwells those who employ their words unwisely. What motivates our mouths? James causes us to examine our words and what lies behind them, remembering that those we speak to and about are precious to the same God to whom one day we will give an account of every word.

War of the Words

This section of James' letter highlights the power and potential of the tongue. Whilst God has granted us the ability to steward our speech for His glory, we are also accountable for our words and the way they can influence others.

1. V1-2: Watch your Words: How our words speak loudest about ourselves

Anyone aspiring for a preacher's prominence should first realise its sobering implications: Words must be wise; teachers must lead by life as well as by lip.

2. V3-8: Fighting Fires: How we must all learn to tame the tongue

James warns of an abusive tongue's frightening full potential; noting not only its powerful influence over us and its shattering impact, but also its hellish origins.

3. V9-12: Sweet or Sour? How we must discover what motivates our mouths

Words have the power to praise and curse, revealing the true state of our hearts. James calls us to search for their source and steward our speech accordingly.

LIVING out LOUD:

- *Why is it so important that "not many" should presume to teach? Why are they to be judged more strictly?(v1)*
- *Which of James' illustrations speak most powerfully to you and why? List all the negative aspects of un-Christ-like speech noted in this passage. Likewise, list all of the positive things this text tells you can be done or accomplished with godly speech.*
- *Have you ever said something you regretted? (v6) Explain what led up to your outburst and what the outcome was. What lessons came from it?*
- *How do you react when you hear someone cursing, gossiping or using abusive language?*
- *Why do you think sins of speech are often overlooked as not as serious as other kinds of sin?*
- *What practical advice would you give someone who wanted to control his tongue better?*
- *Set yourself a target this week to get rid of any profanity, swearing, gossip or other poisonous forms of speech. Ask the Holy Spirit to aid you in making any necessary change to develop the character of Christ in you.*
- *Ask God to help you be self-controlled about the way you speak to others and, at the same time, that He might loose your tongue to praise Him with fresh audible expressions of worship.*