

Season 2, Episode 6: James: Grace that shapes our speech (3:1-18)

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Felicity: Hello, everyone. Welcome to two sisters and a cup of tea. My name is Felicity and I live in America and this is my sister Sarah and she's in England.

Sarah: Hello, everyone.

Felicity: Tell us, what is your biscuit choice today?

Sarah: Well, it's a running theme, really, of trying to find the Jammy Dodger, and I'm very pleased to report that I found the Jammy Dodger with cream in the middle. Jam in the middle as well, and great crunch on the biscuit. And it's delightful. It's better than I actually imagined it could be. It's so wonderful. So just if you want to go and buy it, it's actually not called a Jammy Dodger, it's just called Jam and Cream. What?

Felicity: Jam and cream. No, they've changed the name.

Sarah: What is yours, then, felicity?

Felicity: Well, if anyone had been following us on social media over the last couple of weeks, then you'll have seen the biscuit Ferrari that arose out of this particular field guide to Biscuits, that a lot of things were free from the biscuits big opinions and a lot of omissions from the apparent kind of top notch guide to biscuits. And lots of people did mention the ginger nuts or the ginger snap. And lo and behold, the very next day, I got a package from a friend with a high class ginger biscuit in it. I mean, not just one a packet. And it is really good. I had kind of forgotten about their existence, but all in all, really good. But remembering not to put them in the biscuit tin with the normal biscuits.

Sarah: Well, exactly, because every other biscuit then tastes of the ginger nut. I think they're a bit of a level hate biscuit for that very reason.

Felicity: Oh, for the tin reason? Not for the taste reason, no.

Sarah: Anyway, as we talk about our ginger nuts and German Dodges, I just wanted to ask you for the what difference do you think it makes chatting through the Bible or chatting through James, or anything in the Bible, really? Anything from God's word with someone in the flesh, as opposed to just listening to a sermon online that you put from someone you don't know, or two strangers you don't know, what difference does it make, you think, chatting about it in a flesh for someone else?

Felicity: Great question. Especially in our day and age where it's so easy to listen to anyone, isn't it? In this question, we're not saying, don't listen to this podcast, but just along with this kind of thing, the value, I think, of reading the Bible with an actual person, or even just chatting about the Bible, chatting about our Christian lives with people who are in our lives, in our local context. Just think the life on life aspect of that. Like the whole person is involved in that in some ways. I think we need people to be seeing all of us and to know what our lives look like in order to then speak into that life and to push us in ways that we might not push ourselves. Take our passage today. I don't really like talking about the way I use my words, but how helpful if there's someone who I'm talking with on a daily basis or I see them at church every Sunday, whatever it may be, that they're able to then just help me think through how I do use my words. I think that's something which the kind of disembodied voice on the Internet or on a podcast or whatever cannot really do. What about you, Sarah? How do you answer that question?

Sarah: Yeah, I think we're made for relationship, don't we? And the word is relational in the fact that it impacts how we do relationships. I think if we just say passage like this week. Which we'll get into in a minute. But I'm really struck that I've been able to ask a couple of people to pray for my heart this week and my tongue. Because I feel really convicted about

the way that I'm speaking to my children and actually they know me and they know my children. So they know that context and they can challenge me rightly as well and encourage me when they see me using my words in a bubbly way as well. And I think that just makes all the difference. That is the word lived out in action, isn't it? Because it's not just abstract at that point. Actually, we're kind of encouraging one another to live out what we're eating because we're seeing each other's lives played out. And I think it's really crucial.

Felicity: Yeah, I think that's right.

Sarah: Should we get into it?

Felicity: Let's do it. Yes. We're in James three and we're going to read the whole chapter. So that's chapter three, verses one through to 18. Here we go. Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect able to keep their whole body in check when we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us. We can turn the whole animal or 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 them to go. Likewise, 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. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body it corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind. But no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father and with it we curse human beings who have been made in God's likeness out of the same mouth. Can praise and cursing, my brothers and sisters. This should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring, my brothers and sisters? Can a fig tree bear olives or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done under humility. That comes from wisdom. But if you have a bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from heaven, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But 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 peacemakers, who sow and peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

Sarah: Thanks, Kristy. There's so much in today's passage as we're finding every week in James. There's so much to go through. But before we get stuck into what we have here, can you quickly just recap for us where we've got to in the letter so far? We're kind of hitting the midway point. Can you just kind of give us a recap of where we got to? Yeah, I think it's quite helpful, actually.

Felicity: To go back to the end of chapter one and just remember James saying those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues, deceive themselves and their religion is worth it. So we have this kind of kicking off at that point, we had this idea of true religion or true faith and what that looks like. And he's talked about looking after the orphans and widows and not being polluted by the world. He's kind of explored those last couple of things. And so here it seems we're getting to that idea of kind of reigning in the tongue and that being an aspect of what it is to live out this godly life, this not double minded kind of life. And I think last week when we were with Sam, we were thinking about this idea that faith without deeds is dead. He used the phrase embodied faith. And I think what we have here is that the really good reminder that our words are as much an embodiment of our faith as actually our actions. And we can do all the right stuff and we can look like we're doing the Jesus way, but in reality, our words might actually be betraying where our hearts really are. I think that's why it's quite so challenging, isn't it? Because really echoing Jesus, he's saying, out of the heart come the words. And so as we hear our words, we kind of know the true state of our heart. And that is quite a sobering kind of picture or thing to hear.

Sarah: Speaking of pictures, James just is really helpful in this passage because it's full of illustrations, isn't it? And I just love that when authors in the Bible, she used to use

illustrations to help us just really bring it home. So she would just pick out some of the illustrations that he talks about. We've got this first very challenging bit in verse one or two about teachers and the kind of sobering nature of teaching, and teachers will be judged more strictly on their words.

Felicity: That's so challenging. I mean, here we are using words on a podcast, talking about the Bible, hoping to point people to Jesus, and I wondered whether we shouldn't record like it was that kind of thing, isn't it? Kind of stopped you short in a good way, though. In a good way. Like just accountability in that I think is good. I don't really like it, but I feel like it's just so true. This anyone who's never able to keep their whole body in check, like the idea that your tongue and your words actually are an indicator of where your whole body is at, like you can't separate what's going on with your mouth as much as what's going on with your body. So it's good setting up for this whole passage.

Sarah: Yeah. And interestingly, the word perfect, that means it's sinless. I think it's me. It comes back to the mature and completely thinking about the beginning of chapter one. Maturity is demonstrated by those who are able to keep their tongue in check, who are able to speak with restraint as provenance, put it in. And the more that you see someone do that, the more that you trust what they say and trust what they do as well. And kind of see faith lived out, I guess, isn't it? And that leads to the illustration, doesn't it, of the bits in the mouths of horses and the ships in just demonstrating how powerful the tongue is. It's such a small muscle in our body, and yet it has such power. I think that's the drive of the three and four, isn't it? How powerful it is. Yeah.

Felicity: I was talking about this with my children yesterday. I was saying, what do you think is the most powerful thing about your body? Like, what is the thing that could really do the most damage? And one of them said my leg, the other said my arm. Which is kind of like that is the logical conclusion. But actually just that's the surprise. And in a way it doesn't surprise us because we do know that the tongue is mighty. But it's a good reminder that actually it's the smallest bit. And yet the way it's described is really shocking, isn't it? Did you notice that in verse six, a fire, a world of evil, it corrupts the whole body and is itself set on fire by hell. It seems to be saying that the tongue kind of drives us the wrong way. Like left to its own devices, it will push us into I mean, the use of the word hell there is really quite extreme, it seems, isn't it?

Sarah: Yeah, I think. And that then displays our hearts, doesn't it? Because we've seen that tongue is powerful with verse three and four. But then what he's saying is it's destructive. Like that power is not used for good. And if you actually check your heart and check the words that you use throughout your whole life, you can see the destruction that can be caused by such a small muscle. But he's kind of turning around that he doesn't need that actually. We don't use it for good. And then he goes on to that. Doesn't he say it can't be tamed? He's saying creatures can be tamed. All manner of animals, birds and reptiles, sea creatures can be tamed. But actually you can't tame your tongue. Again, it's shocking, isn't it? But he explains it with the fact that we easily think that we'll just praise our Lord and Heavenly Father, but in the same breath we can curse someone who's also made in his image and that displays and kind of betrays what's really going on with that muscle.

Felicity: Yeah, I thought that was a helpful kind of reminder who have been made in God likeness. It kind of reminds me of the neighborly things that we were talking about, like what it is to love your neighbor and loving those who are made in God's image. And so just a reminder that is what we do. We do praise God and then the next moment we speak ill of our fellow kind of image bearer in that he says it's a restless evil full of deadly poison. I feel as a good reminder to me that I can kind of get to the end of the day and think, right, well, okay, it wasn't too bad today. Okay, right, that's it, I've got it sorted. And that's so wrong because actually the restlessness of it, our hearts are always shifting, our tongues will always reflect that shiftingness. And so we're constantly having to just guard and battle and fight and just this tongue is just so kind of willful it will do different things all the time, wouldn't it?

Sarah: And I think therefore, it's not a surprise that there's so much on it here, is there? So he's taking a whole chapter to think about the tongue. But actually the whole word, the whole Bible is full like full to the brim of things about the term. It's as old as chapter three of Genesis, isn't it? In terms of the devil deceiving. Adam and Eve proverbs I'm just reading

through Proverbs at the moment in my Bible times on my own. And just like even Proverbs chapter 18 today, you go through that and it's words, lips, mouth, tongues and just the kind of insistence of this, this is the problem, this is the problem. And as we're starting to see in James, it's not the only problem, is it? Because as he said, has he kind of alluded to Jesus language? You're recognizing a tree by its fruit out of the overflow of your heart, the mouth speaks. So actually the problem is not the tongue at the end of the day, it's the heart beneath the tongue. Yeah.

Felicity: And I think you can get to the end of the first twelve when we've been talking this week, haven't we just been like the number of text messages we sent, we were like, what do I do with my heart? I think it's to remember he says it twice in verses ten, 11 and 12. There my brothers and sisters, my brothers and sisters. And Sam was talking about it last time, wasn't it, that James is being a really good friend. This is a gracious thing, a good thing to have our hearts through our words, revealed to us. So that and we're seeing this through James, aren't we? So that we might then look to God. We fall back on Jesus because actually we realize there's very little that we can do. Left on my own is a nightmare.

Sarah: Yeah, that is where we get to, isn't it? And as you say, we've been hugely convicted of this this week and the Lord's been, I think, challenging us and showing us graciously our hearts this week, particularly in relation to our children. And for me, in relation to how I speak to my children this week. This has been lived out in action for me. And actually I think the temptation can be to rush over it and think, well, I just get to Jesus because I know that I need Jesus and that's it. But actually there's a reason why James labour's over these trees. There's a reason why he takes 12, 14, 15 verses to really let you bring these trees home. And part of a big application driving us to our heart is letting that sit on our hearts and kind of letting it process and mullet and be willing to let the words speak into your heart on this, isn't it?

Felicity: Absolutely. Yeah, I agree. Not rushing on, but also remembering where we're headed. I know what a joy it is to actually hear. So I love this verse 13 who is wise and understanding among you, let them show it by their good luck. And that idea of wisdom, that takes us back to chapter one and asking God for wisdom. He says that at the very start we ask God who is generous, to give us wisdom by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. And that idea of humility, that is it, isn't it? Like a dependency on God because we know we can't do it on our end through that heart, this humble heart, the humble dependency, then we come to the Jesus that we see in 17 to 18. So the wisdom that is of heaven is the wisdom that we see in Jesus. And this is a picture of Jesus. And as we see the picture of Jesus, I think it makes it so clear what Godly heavenly wisdom looks like. It makes it desirable, it makes me want to ask for it, it makes me want to be like this Jesus. And I just think that is yes at the end of that.

Sarah: Yeah. And it's really striking, isn't it? If we just dwell on these couple of verses, that picture is beautiful and it's beautiful because it's relational, it's not standalone wisdom, is it? It's not kind of out there. All of those words can actually be in relation to other people. And as we see that fleshed out in Jesus himself, we see what taming the tongue wisely looks like because we see Jesus fulfill that picture in relation to what it looks like. Going back to verse two, anyone who's never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check. That is what Godly heavenly wisdom looks like in relation to the term. Yeah. But yeah. We have to see our need for it and we need to fly again as we've been going through the book and seeing the only thing we can do is to lean into the mercy of Christ at this point because we see our sin. We see our double mindedness. We see our need and so we cry out for that wisdom and we say lord. Please change us. That's been my prayer this week. I don't know how you process this.

Felicity: No, I think that's right, absolutely. I think that is exactly that process of convicted feeling helpless and then reading these verses and thinking I long that God would be at work in my heart and I love verse 18 peacemakers are so in peace, reaper harvest of righteousness and I've been really struck by that. We've heard it before, that human anger gets in the way of righteousness, which.

Sarah: Is a similar kind of idea, isn't it?

Felicity: And here, as we humbly dependently, lean into God, ask him, ask the Lord then actually a harvest of righteousness in his strength, by his grace. That is my prayer for my life, for our lives, for anyone who's listening that we would be those who strive after righteousness by god's grace. Sarah, would you pray for us?

Sarah: Yeah, I'd love to. Let's pray. But 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 or heavenly Father, how we long for that to be our hearts. We long for that wisdom to be overflowing from our hearts to our lips into the words that we speak. Whether that's in conversation, whether that's in relation to disciplining our children, whether that's in relation to what we write in a text or an email and social media, we learn that our tongues would be tamed in this way, in this beautiful, wise way that shows us more of Jesus. Lord, we want to confess right here that we need your help. We're so sorry for us in and we just pray. Please, would you help us to strive to be wise? Holy Spirit, please do this work in our hearts. We cannot do this without you. And so we pray for your help today. Amen.

Felicity: Amen. Thanks Sarah. Been a joy as ever.

Sarah: Yeah, it's been good. But yeah, lots to malani. Check out their show notes, questions, chat it through with someone, ask someone to challenge you and encourage you in your words to tweet. And we look forward to chatting next time.

Felicity: Absolutely. Bye everyone.

Sarah: Bye. Thanks for listening to this episode. It's sponsored by Terravos.com. Check them out for great discounted resources that point to Jesus.