

OUT OF CONTROL **The Tongue – James 3**

What do you call an “out of control” photographer? A loose Canon.

Out of control is what we’ve been seeing a lot of lately, right?

The storm out east is a raging maniac, spiraling and spinning with wind and rain and uprooting trees, flooding homes, and leaving a trail of debris and destruction in its path. When will it end? Pastor Jim Daub, Tom’s son in North Carolina, whose wife Megan is a First Responder and needed to stay local, has been posting many pictures on Facebook of the effects around his home. He and Megan have been blessed to remain safe as trees have literally come within inches of their parsonage.

On the other coast we’ve had blazing fires ripping through forests and homes like a butter knife through soft margarine. Firefighters use every imaginable device to contain the flames, but are constantly putting themselves in harm’s way in order to get ahead of the curve. Celebrities such as Ellen DeGeneres, Chelsea Handler, Maria Shriver, Lionel Richie, and Kylie Jenner have had their homes either burned or near the flames.

Out of control. Today’s text reminds us that there is another area where things can get out of control which, on the surface, seems far less damaging than fires and floods, but in the end can cause even greater destruction. You and I have certainly have known and experienced it first hand in life.

James declares: "The 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. ... It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison."

You’ve know the power of this tremendous force.

Political rhetoric – wars of words between people of different ideologies. Lies, accusations, threats, slander.

Twitter has become the new way to try and undermine people.

Gossip. – conversations that take place behind people's backs. Over the phone. In private chat rooms. Rumors. Half-truths. Backbiting.

Lies.

Harsh Words.

Critical Words.

Shaming Words.

Curses and swears.

Crude and inappropriate jesting.

The tongue. Our text declares it is a weapon — a weapon that virtually everyone possesses. A weapon impossible to control. And a weapon that can cause tremendous damage. In some ways it's kind of like being a child carrying around a gun and not knowing how it works. Can you imagine how you would feel if you saw some three year old boy carrying around a loaded pistol — pointing it this way and that -- swinging it here and there? And every once in a while it lets off a bullet at random into the air?

And left in the rubble of the tongue are people. People created by God. People for whom Christ died. But people we injure or dishonor or denounce. People we hurt and abuse and scorn.

So, the question then is, what do we do with this uncontrollable weapon? How do we get a grip on it and tame it so that it doesn't control us and diminish others?

Well, my friends, if you take the words of our text seriously, the answer is we cannot. "No man can tame the tongue," it says, and I believe those words are literal. The tongue is indeed a "raging fire" — and, like the recent blazes out in California, when it lets go and burns away, it is altogether unstoppable by all human abilities. And so, left to ourselves, we fight a losing battle.

But, then again, that still doesn't mean there isn't an answer. After all, we, as Christians, do not live by human power alone. Otherwise we would find ourselves lost and

condemned creatures — forever stuck in the trap of sinful behavior and forever doomed to the raging fires of hell.

But, you and I, my friends, have hope — hope that is wrapped within the outstretched, bloodstained arms of a Savior. Hope that stands secure not in our own abilities, but in His divine power, — not in our human will, but in His omnipotent strength — to stem the tide of the uncontrollable.

Consider the following instances as Jesus deals with raging, wild powers..

From Matthew: Then Jesus got into the boat and his disciples followed him. ²⁴ Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. ²⁵ The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" ²⁶ He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. ²⁷ The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

From Mark:¹⁷A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."

²⁰So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

²¹Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"

"From childhood," he answered. ²²"It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

²³"If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes."

²⁴Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

²⁵When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."

²⁶The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." ²⁷But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

You see what I mean? This Jesus is no simple man. He is the Son of God -- the King of All Creation — the Lord of the Universe.

And yet He came into this world not to be exalted or to rule on human thrones. He came to be our Savior. He came to stem the tide of uncontrollable sin and certain death. He came to quiet the raging fires of everlasting condemnation and to bring life and immortality in its place.

You see, when Jesus died on that cross 2000 years ago, He carried all of our sin upon His shoulders; and, as the Son of God, He put it to death forever. To the world it looked hopeless. To the human eyes it appeared impossible. But, the wisdom of God saw beyond human limitations and worldly restrictions and worked a miracle.

What that means for us, as His 21st century people, is that we are not animals hopelessly controlled by our raging and wild instincts. Rather, we are His children, lifted, by His mighty power, and enabled, by His strength, to tame our passions. As weapon-wielders that means He is there by our side as we experience the temptation to misuse our words and cause damage with our tongue. He is there when we feel that drive to hurt and to harm our neighbor with our words — as we are faced with the uncontrollable urge to say whatever we feel or to gossip or backbite. His omnipotent power stands ready, just like He did with that furious sea or those violent demons, to stem the tide of those passions and bring restraint and self-control. "Quiet, be still," He says. And, if we truly trust in Him, they can be gone.

And in their place, His Spirit breathes into our flesh new words --words of forgiveness, words of encouragement, words of life and words of hope. Constructive, uplifting, supportive words. And what we leave behind, then, is not damaged and deflated debris; but a people who see the love of a Savior active in the lives of His people. A people strengthened — a people uplifted — a people renewed.

My Friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, may we never close our hearts to such power. Instead, I pray, that we experience it anew, each day. And then we can join forces with St. Paul as he says in Ephesians:

Let us put off falsehood and speak truthfully to our neighbor, for we are members of the body of Christ. In your anger, do not sin; and do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, giving the devil a foothold. ... Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you.

The young woman came home after a long day at work, tired, frustrated, and worn out. She felt like a crumpled napkin after a long meal, and was not looking forward to preparing dinner for her family. But when she entered her house she found, much to her surprise, that her husband had planned a few extras. There, on the table, were some beautiful flowers, he had arranged a babysitter for the evening and planned for a night out. He put his big arms around her tired frame, stared into her eyes and declared, "let's go out for a quiet evening, you deserve it."

And as she left that night, after hearing those words, she had a new energy, a new excitement, a new enthusiasm.

That, my friends, is the power of the tongue that is guided by the Spirit of God. May we use it that way in all our relationships. God grant it, for Jesus' sake. Amen.