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6-29-1977

### The Amazing Power of a 'Little' Tongue

W. O. Vaught

*Ouachita Baptist University*

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#### Recommended Citation

Vaught, W. O., "The Amazing Power of a 'Little' Tongue" (1977). *Vaught Sermon Notes: James*. 34.  
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## THE AMAZING POWER OF A "LITTLE" TONGUE

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES  
NUMBER 25  
JAMES 3:3-6

Dr. W. O. Vaught  
Immanuel Baptist Church  
Little Rock, Arkansas

JAMES 3:3-6 "Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell."

The tongue was designed for blessing, but it is often used for cursing. Here we are to study several illustrations on the power of the tongue.

HEBREWS 3:3 "Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body." The word for "bit" is from "chalinós" and it refers to the bit and the bridle together. Instead of the word "Behold" we have the greek word "ei and de" and it should be translated "now, if." The word for "put" is from "ballo" and it means to throw or to thrust. The mouth of the horse is tender and with bit and bridle you are able to control him, even though he is an animal of great power, much more physical power than the rider or driver. In the day when this was written, the horse was the best transportation in the world.

"That" is a preposition of purpose from "eis" and it means for the purpose of obeying us. Obey is a present, middle, infinitive of "peitho". So by having a bit touching one small tender spot, they are forced to obey. The word for "turn" is a present, active, indicative of "metago" and it means "to steer them to guide them."

The horse has a mind and a will. We say someone is "bullheaded" when they are obstinate, but we might say they are "horseheaded." So here we have the picture of a big strong animal having a will to go one way and is really "horseheaded" about it, but with a small bit the horse is turned in the direction you want him to travel. Just as the bit and bridle control the horse, so doctrine controls the whole mind and life of the believer. The horse has great strength but is controlled from one small spot. The believer, like a horse, follows his mouth. What the tongue of the believer says reflects the soul. The eye is not the real window of the soul, but the tongue is the real window to the soul. What a person says reveals the real inner person, whether he is adolescent or mature. This is our first illustration of the power of the tongue.

HEBREWS 3:4 "Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth." Now we go from an animate to an inanimate object, the ship.

Now we have the word "behold" and it is an aorist, middle, imperative of "horao" but it is used as a particle to call special attention to the illustration. "Ploion" is the word for ship. This is the ship of the Roman world, a high bow, a quarter deck and a wheel which was connected to the rudder. They had either rowers or sails to carry them, and often they had both. "Telekoutos" is the word "so large." So we have the phrase "Behold the ship also being so large." Both a horse and a ship is big, but both are controlled by something very small.

The words "and are driven" come from the present, passive, participle of "elauno" and it means propelled. "Of fierce winds" is "upo" plus the genitive of "anemos" and it means "under the influence of strong winds." "Turned about" is a present, passive, indicative of "metago." The word for "very small helm" is "pedalion" and means small rudder. The little rudder can control the direction of the very large ship.

A man's body may be very strong, but the thing that controls the body is the soul. Bible doctrine in the soul controls the direction of the believer. The ship represents the body in this illustration. The winds in the illustration represent environment, training, and education. The rudder illustrated the tongue and the helmsman is the rudder. In this illustration the rudder represents the tongue and the tongue is controlled by doctrine in the soul.

Then we have the word "whithersoever" and it is from "hopou" and it means "in what direction." The word "governor" here comes from several greek words and it refers to the will of the one who does the steering. In our language today we call it the "quartermaster" who guides the ship. Another word for him would be an helmsman. The word here translated "listeth" is a present, middle, indicative of "boulomai" and really means "to determine." So this should read "To whatever direction the will of the helmsman determines." The one big lesson here is that the large powerful horse and the large powerful ship are both controlled by a very small object. The same is true with us. In us the soul and the tongue which is the spokesman for the soul, are very small in comparison with the size of the human body. But here is the point. Take all the damage you are able to do with your whole body, the little member called the tongue is the most destructive member of your whole body. The tongue, though small, is by far the most powerful weapon you have. With the tongue, you can completely destroy the innocent. With your small tongue, you can start a rumor that can bring utter destruction to an individual or to a business or to an organization. The tongue can bring great blessing, or it can also bring great destruction. It all depends on what you have in your soul. If the soul is not controlled by God, then watch out. Out of the same mouth come both cursings and blessings. Every person in this room is a potential monster. You have in your mouth a small tongue, but its potential for good or bad is unlimited.

#### The Tongue--A Monster

All of you have seen movies that presented pre-historic monsters that flop all over the place and scatter devastation everywhere they move. Well, your tongue is far more devastating than any pre-historic monster you have ever seen or imagined. Every person who has a vocabulary of as many as 200 words has a tongue that is a potential monster. I don't know whether you have ever approached this problem from this standpoint or not, but I want you to think about this idea. One of the reasons you need to develop an Edification Complex in your soul just as rapidly as possible is so you can control that monster called the tongue. Stop killing people with your tongue! Stop destroying others with your tongue! The closest you can get to perfect environment today is to be around people who have mastered the sins of the tongue. If you are out of fellowship, in reversionism, then what you say is going to be a curse to others. But if your soul is saturated with doctrine, then what you say will be a blessing to others. No matter how big your muscles may be as a man, or how loud you can shriek as a woman, you can't do as much damage with your whole body in an hour as you

can do in twenty seconds with your tongue. James is going to give great emphasis to the sins of the tongue, simply because these sins of the tongue are so devastating.

So get a corrected translation of verses 3 and 4--

"Now, if we thrust bits into the horses mouths so that they obey us, and in this way are able to direct their entire bodies; Behold, the ships also being so large and are propelled under the influence of strong winds, yet they are directed under the influence of a very small rudder, into what ever direction the will of the helmsman determines."

#### Summary

1. The rudder illustrates the tongue of the believer.
2. The helmsman is an illustration of the believer's soul.
3. The ship is the body of the believer.
4. The winds that propel the ship is a picture of environment, training, and education of the believer.
5. The mature believer is able to control the tongue by having doctrine stored up in the spirit. This is the true function of the Edification Complex.
6. The reversionistic believer is guilty of the sins of the tongue. This comes out in gossip, maligning others, judging others and lying about others.

So the tongue can be one of two things--it can be a cursing or it can be a blessing.

Now in verses 5 and 6 we will get some interpretation of this idea and then some additional illustrations of this truth.

JAMES 3:5 "Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" "Even so is from "houtos" and means "In this way." The word translated tongue is "he glossa" and this is our main instrument of speech. The word "is" is the present, active, indicative of "eimi." "Little Member" comes from "mikros" and from this word we get microscope and microscopic. The tongue is a small member of the body.

The word translated "boasteth" is a present, active, indicative of "aucheo" and it really means "loud boasting." "Auche" is a noun and means a noisy bragger. "Great things" is from "megala." So a person can brag and boast and thereby cause a lot of trouble.

Instead of "Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth" the greek actually says, "Behold how little a fire burns up such a large forest."

JAMES 3:6 "And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell." "And the tongue is a fire." The word for fire is "pur." This explains the previous verse. The tongue is small but it controls large objects. When kept under control, the tongue is a very worthwhile instrument, but out from under control it is a den of iniquity. This word for iniquity is "adikias" and means injustice, deceitfulness, wickedness. This describes the tongue as a double monster. If the tongue is not controlled, it can contaminate the entire body. The word for "defile" is from "spiloo" and is a picture of a garment splattered with garbage

Summary.

1. In this verse the tongue is linked to the mentality of the soul.
2. The tongue is that little member which expresses the content of the soul.
3. If the soul is filled with mental attitude sins and lust, then the tongue picks these things up and expresses them. Thus the body of the speaker is contaminated as well as the bodies of many others.
4. The human body is like a horse or a ship, large in size, but controlled by a small object.
5. The tongue is a very small member of the body but controls the whole body as a link with the soul. The tongue expresses what the soul says.
6. The tongue is like a small flame expressing the evil that resides in the soul, thereby, igniting the entire body.

This verse goes on to say "and setting on fire" and this is a present, active, participle of "phlogizo." This is a combination of "phlox" meaning "flame" and "logizo" meaning "to burn." The word for "course of nature" here refers to the whole cycle of living. So the tongue is pictured here as setting of fire the whole course of existence.

1. The cycle of existence is the pattern of action and reaction in life.
2. The tongue is the meeting place or the crossroads of the cycle of evil in the soul and that cycle which enflames the body.
3. This cycle includes evil thoughts, evil expressions and evil deeds. So, you see, this is mental attitude sins, sins of the tongue and overt sins.
4. Evil deeds produce more evil thoughts which lead to evil expressions. This is what we call evil reactions.
5. With the tongue in the middle of the cycle of evil thoughts and evil expressions, evil deeds become a vicious circle, constantly ignited by the tongue.
6. The tongue expresses mental attitude sins, which produce a reaction in the body--such as violence, murder, drug addiction.
7. The tongue will express mental attitude sins--jealousy, hatred, bitterness, vindictiveness, which leads to unfaithfulness both social and sexual.

Thus the cycle goes--thought--tongue--deed--tongue--thought--and over and over it goes.

This verse says "being set on fire of hell" and the words for hell here are "hupo gehenna." Now what does this mean?

1. "Gehenna" refers to the Valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem, where Jews dumped their garbage and burned it. It is also the place where they burned their children in Baal worship. 2 Kings 23:10, Jer 7:31 and 19:2-6.
2. Being a garbage dump for many centuries, there was always a fire burning there.
3. Therefore "gehenna" became a popular word in the Jewish language for hell. Matthew 5:22, 29 and 30. Also in Matthew 10:28, 18:9, 23:15 and 23:33.
4. The Jewish word is brought over into the greek language as "Gehenna" and is equivalent to the lake of fire as described in Revelation 19:20 and 20:10.

5. The Lake of Fire or Gehenna or hell is not a place of annihilation, since both the Beast and The False Prophet will live there a thousand years without being annihilated.
6. Comparing this phrase with Matthew 25:41, it can be concluded that the cycle of evil has its origin in Satan himself.  
MATTHEW 25:41 "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels;"  
It is here linked with the "Kosmos" because Satan is at present the ruler of the world.  
Satan is described as the ruler of the world in passages like Luke 4:5-7, John 12:31 and 14:30 and 16:11.  
This phrase identifies the acts of the old sin nature with their origin and final destiny.

We will continue James' description of the power and subtilty of the tongue in our next study.