

How You Can Prevent Forest Fires

Intro:

1. You've seen posters of Smokey the Bear warning you not to cause sparks that could burn down our forests.
2. The Southern California fires a few years ago nearly destroyed our city!
3. **Jam 3:5** says your tongue can be like that spark.
4. Sparks that cause forest fires & tongues are wide ranging, fast spreading & uncontrolled.
5. **ILL: Saying things that you are ashamed of immediately after it comes out of your mouth.** You can't take it back even if you tried!
6. **Curbing your tongue** = thinking about what you are going to say before you say it.
7. Recommendations in God's word:
 - a. **Prov 17:27-28** - A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even tempered. Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.
 - b. Our Lord said, Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one. - **Matt 5:37.**
 - c. **Col 4:6** - Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.
8. You know how you can prevent forest fires? Curb your tongue!
9. This passage tells you why you should think about what you say before you say it.

James 3:1-12

I. v1-2 - Teachers are Judged More Harshly

- A. **v1 - Teacher** (διδάσκαλος) = probably here refers to anyone quick to give advise or tell someone what to do.
 1. Teachers of the Bible are usually given more trust, honor & respect than most.
 2. A popular phrase in the Army, "If you can't trust the chaplain, who can you trust?"
 3. There's an aspect of expected integrity: the expectation that the preacher will exhibit more Christian virtues than normal people.
- B. Then what happens when the local pastor runs off with the church secretary?
 1. This is why it's even more tragic when a Christian leader falls into sin & public ridicule like the Fall of the Great TV Evangelists a few years ago.
 2. These men had become idols of truth for many people.
 3. I think that because there is more damage done for the cause of Christ, Christian teachers who stumble will be judged more strictly.
 4. Lord Jesus said, **But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.**" - **Matt 12:36-37.**
- C. **v2** - You are going to stumble because you're not perfect.

II. v3-5 - Words Spoken are More Influential Than You Think

- A. **ILL: The freeloader who told me once, "Do me a favor & leave the ministry".**
 1. Background: I realized after helping him financially for awhile he was just going to mooch off of me as much as he could; so I began to make myself more scarce.
 2. Even though I knew what can of character he was, those words stung!
- B. The power of words:
 1. **v3** - Like bits that control a whole horse. **ILL: My experience on an Arabian Stallion.**
 2. **v4** - Like rudders that control a whole ship. **ILL: The small rudder on the Kitty Hawk (85,000 tons).**
 3. **v5** - Like a spark that burns down a whole forest.
 4. The power of words have encouraged young men & women to become ministers & missionaries!
 5. The power of words have ordered the execution of millions of innocent people.

III. v6 - Words Can Determine the Orientation of Your Whole Life

A. The tongue is an organ of evil within the body.

1. **World** (κόσμος) = world, universe, organized society. We get our word “cosmetics” from it. Here it probably means a structured system which produces speech.
2. More harm can be done by words than just about any other method.
3. **Prov 15:1 - A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.**
4. It can be safely said, “If you have a corrupt mouth, you’re corrupt!”

B. Your speech can determine your whole future.

1. If your tongue gets you in trouble a lot, it can keep you from many opportunities.
2. How many people have been fired from jobs because they couldn’t control their temper?
3. Would you confide in someone you knew was prone to blab?

IV. v7-8 - You Can’t Control Your Speech Like You Think You Can

A. v7 - Your tongue isn’t like other things you can control.

1. Animals - elephants at a circus.
2. Birds - parrots that can talk.
3. Reptiles - the snake charmers in India.
4. Creatures of the sea - Shamo at Sea World.

B. v8 - The tongue is . . .

1. **Restless** (ἀκατάστατος) = unstable. Nitroglycerin is an unstable compound; shake it & it could blow off your hand.
2. **Poison** (ιός) = rust, poison; that which corrodes what it touches. The following word (not in the translation) is **Death Producing** (θανατηφόρος).

V. v9-12 - Your Speech is Inconsistent

A. Most things were created for one purpose & fulfill that purpose.

1. v11 - Fresh water springs spew out fresh water, suitable for drinking! You won’t get salt water out of it.
2. v12 - Even through grafting you can’t get a completely different fruit from a tree - you’ll always get a hybrid graft.

B. The tongue was created for blessings & praise - but an uncontrolled tongue can utter curses & other foul words.

Prevent your forest fires! Curb your tongue!

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