

Diagnosis or Cure?

- Snippet from a Radio or TV programme, some while ago:
 - there are difference in emphasis in the medical training that people receive in different countries;
 - apparently, British medical education is (was?) biased towards **diagnosis**, on the basis that if you have experience of knowing what is wrong then its "easy" to **treat it!**
 - other countries spend more time on things like how different drugs interact during treatment, on strategies for managing patients
- Differences aren't great; lot of cross-fertilisation!
- Don't want to make too much of that:
 - **but it is a reminder that diagnosis and cure are not the same thing!**

Actual Reality and Aspiration

- This passage does two things:
 - **first** it sets out the **actual reality** of how seriously we need to take the words we use, because they have vast consequences
 - *(if you like, it **diagnoses** the problems we have with our words)*
 - and **second** it also opens up an **aspiration**, a hope of how things might if our tongues were able to be used as our maker intended
 - *(**treatment** comes in form of goal, vision, aim, rather than notes on behaviour change!)*
- There is particular mention of **teachers (of God's Word)**:
 - to presume to tell others what the Bible says is a weighty responsibility
 - *will be judged more strictly* - words will have wider ramifications!
 - this isn't meant to be disabling - **such a serious thing you don't start** - but sobering
- But his teaching has much broader applicability

Actual Reality

- The actual reality of the situation is that **our tongues let us down** and get us into trouble!
- (v.2) *"We all stumble in many ways", we ain't perfect, least of all in our speaking*
- (v.6) *"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", potent, inflammatory*
- (v.8) *"... no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison"*
- The actual reality of the situation is that we don't speak aright!
 - and worse, when we sin in this area, it has profound and wide ranging consequences
- One of the **saddest funerals** I ever had to do was when I was covering for another minister while in Motherwell:
 - went and spent time with the relatives the undertaker put me in touch with;
 - **I felt I was sinking in a pool mud, clinging, cloying, foul**
 - why? because of the **hatreds and misunderstandings and feuds** that members of the family had perpetrated **through their words** - shouting matches over their dying parent
 - it was a **horrible experience!**
- Its an extreme example, but words (or even the lack of them) have the potential to destroy lives, snuff out relationships, kill off friendships, break-up families
- *The old rhyme "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me" is a lie!*
- **Boat on Camperdown boating pond** - sore legs - small lever, small paddle, wild

changes in direction!

- Examples of life-changing words:
 - "I love you"
 - "Will you marry me"... yes/no!
 - "You'll never be good enough"
 - "I'm sorry", "I forgive you"
- All this reflects the fact that the tongue is directly connected to the control centre of our selves:
 - what comes out of our mouths reflects the truly sinful reality of our hearts
 - because our words can have such a direct and instant effect on those around us we need to be particularly careful to stop the filth of our sinful hearts spilling out and making too many bush-fires!

Aspiration

- James responds to the bleakness of the situation not by giving a detailed plan for respond, a 12-step programme for getting the tongue under control:
 - rather he hints at a way of speaking and using our tongues that is wonderfully worthy of aspiring to!
- vs.3,4 compare tongue to large things steered by small things:
 - boat, horse
 - that, in turn, implies the the possibility of our lives (and our words) being steered well as well as badly
 - in other words, though "no man can tame the tongue"... God can...!!
- James says that cursing (eg lacking respect for God's precious children!) and praising shouldn't come from same mouth:
 - "it should not be" implies the aspiration that one day it will not be
- Rather James invites us to imagine what it will be like (in heaven) and could begin to be like now...
 - if the tongue were used to genuinely and fully praise God
 - if the tongue were a source of real, succulent, life-bringing fruit
 - if the tongue were a spring of water, refreshing, life-giving
- Indeed, that the tongue is so all of life encompassing suggests that here is a way to have a big effect on our growth and maturity in faith by controlling (through HS) a small part of the body!

Grow through obedience

- All of this is in the context of book that says obedience, doing is key to growing in likeness to Christ
 - so start with particular areas of life where we are conscious of sin in our speaking...
 - angry words, lies, exaggerations ("I'm just coming!"), boasting, taking people for granted (exasperated "yes dear"?)
- Give them to God and ask him to pick out one to begin to deal with:
 - in the light of realising the seriousness or the current reality, and in the hope that James' aspiration should leave us, chart a path to obedience