

MY TONGUE TO BLESS

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.” [Prov. 18:21]

Bill Clinton was the President of the United States of America for eight years (January 1993- January 2001). During that period, the country enjoyed an unprecedented economic boom in spite of the numerous scandals, which dogged his administration. He was always known to focus on his commitment to making Americans of every race, creed and class better off, and he refused to be distracted. But in January 2001, George Bush succeeded him. During the campaigns leading up to the Elections in November 2000, Mr. Bush was known to have stuck to the campaign theme that the economy was ailing and that the country’s military capability was suspect. His ploy was apparently to be able to sell his campaign promises of a significant tax cut and increased military spending. What followed soon after he assumed office? The economy suddenly began to ail. Avoidable military accidents [in the Navy, Airforce, etc] have accelerated. Today, relations with China have worsened over seized American planes alleged to have violated that country’s airspace. Nobody can pinpoint exactly what happened but George Bush’s political opponents are blaming him for “talking down the economy.”

Most of us suffer from self-inflicted injuries by what we say. When you ask some people how they are doing, they are likely to reply “life is hard,” or “it isn’t easy.” In anger, we curse our children with “you are a failure,” “you’ll never make it,” “you are stupid,” etc. With the mouth, we pronounce our jobs “boring.” In the end, when things turn out that way, we turn around and blame our enemies, the devil, or even God!

Ordinarily, the tongue is that small piece of boneless meat in the mouth region of the body that is encased by a set of bite-loving carnivores called teeth! Yet, according to James, that little member of the body “boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!” [Jam. 3:5]. He adds that the tongue cannot be tamed, “it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” [Jam. 3:8]. These are harsh words for such a harmless and helpless looking thing!

In today’s lesson, we shall study the tongue in some detail so that we can appreciate its spiritual significance. Such knowledge is important if we are to be able to use the tongue to bless God, others and ourselves.

1. Understanding the human tongue

Located on the floor of the mouth, the tongue is capable of various muscular movements. It is an important *accessory* organ for chewing and swallowing, and a major medium for tasting. In human beings, the tongue aids speaking. *Most vertebrates* (that is, creatures with the backbone) *have tongues but only the human tongue can facilitate speech!* Anatomically (i.e., in structure), you can say that it is because only human beings have the larynx which houses vibrating elements called the vocal cords. Spiritually, however, there is much more to it.

The book of **Genesis Chapter 1** tells the story of how God created the world. In **vv. 3-25**, God began creation with “Let there be...” and it was always so.

And God made the beast of the earth after his kind and cattle after their kind; and everything that creepeth upon the earth after his kind; and God saw that it was good [Gen. 1: 25]

However, when it came to creating man, He said:

Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over the cattle and over the earth and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth [Gen. 1:26]

God is Spirit [**Jn 4:24**] and He creates by His word that “goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” [**Is. 55:11**].

We do know that God formed man out of dust from the ground, “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became *a living soul*” [**Gen. 2:7**]. At the point of physical death, “then shall the dust return to the earth as it was and the spirit shall return to God who gave it” [**Eccl. 12:7**]. Therefore, *the human tongue is not only physical (dust), it is also spiritual, being a medium for speaking which makes us the likeness of God who speaks*. It is no wonder that it was Adam who named everything that God created and God did not change any of such names! [**Gen. 2: 19-20**]

It becomes clear to us that the tongue is a powerful weapon, with which we can bless or curse. James calls it “a fire, a world of iniquity” [**Jam. 3: 6**]. Apparently, God gave it to man to speak with or to Him [**1 Chron. 29:10-19**], the basis for speaking in tongues! We are to use it to speak His word [**Ps. 119:72**], or about His righteousness [**Ps. 35:28**], or sing praises to and worship Him [**Ps. 126:2; Rev. 4:11**], or to pray to Him [**Ps. 19:14; Jn 17:1-26**], or to confess Christ [**Phil. 2:11**]. Unfortunately, we do get tempted to use it otherwise!

2. The tongue in action: some Biblical cases

(a) The death of Rachel

Jacob had fled from his father-in-law, Laban, with his two wives, Leah and Rachel, and children. Laban pursued and overtook them, alleging that Jacob had stolen his gods (idols). Not knowing that his favourite wife, Rachel, had stolen her father's images [Gen. 31: 34], Jacob pronounced a curse on the thief, "with whomsoever thou findest thy gods, *let him not live*" [Gen. 31:32]. Laban was not able to recover his idols because Rachel had effectively hidden them from everyone. Nevertheless, the curse remained on her. She died while giving birth to Benjamin on the way to Canaan [Gen. 35: 16-19].

(b) Rebuilding Jericho

After Jericho had been captured and destroyed, Joshua declared: "cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city, Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it" [Josh. 6:26]. Several hundreds of years later, during the reign of Ahab, a man from Bethel, called Hiel, attempted to rebuild Jericho. "He laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son, Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which He spake of Joshua the son of Nun" [1 Kgs 17:34]. A recent visitor to the Holy Land has told of how a tour guard informed his tour group that a Palestinian who tried to rebuild Jericho as a tourist attraction not long ago abandoned the project when his firstborn died suddenly!

(c) Elijah causes a drought

Ahab was a wicked king of Israel. Through his wife, Jezebel, Baal worship had displaced the worship of the true God [1 Kgs 16: 29-31]. Elijah, the prophet of God, came to the king and said, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, *there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word*" [1 Kgs 17:1]. The drought lasted for three-and-a-half years! [Jam. 5:17]

(d) Little children mock Elisha

Elisha had just received a double portion of Elijah's anointing, following the latter's departure to heaven "by a whirlwind" [2 Kgs 2:1-14]. As he was returning to Bethel, a group of spoilt urban kids came out and started to mock him, saying, "go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head." He turned around and cursed them in the name of the Lord. Immediately, two female bears came out of the woods and killed 42 of the children [2 Kgs 2: 23-24]. This is a warning to parents to train their children on how to treat strangers.

(e) Jesus and the fig tree

Jesus had spent the night in Bethany, the home of famous Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary, after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The next day, He returned to Jerusalem, very hungry. On the way, He saw a fig tree but found no fruits on it. He cursed the tree, saying, “let no fruit grow on thee henceforth for ever” [Matt. 21: 17-19]. The next morning, as they were passing by, the disciples noticed that the fig tree had dried up from the roots. Peter drew the Lord’s attention to it, “Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away” and Jesus answered, “have faith in God” [Mk 11:20-22].

(f) Satanic forces are even more active!

In the book of **Numbers, Chapters 22-24**, we read the story of Balak who hired a diviner, Balaam, to curse the children of Israel. Hear Balak’s words:

Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me; per adventure I shall prevail that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed [Num. 22:6]

Balaam’s tongue might have worked but for the fact that God was with the children of Israel. Instead, God put blessings in Balaam’s tongue:

*How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed? Or how shall I defy whom the Lord hath not defied? [Num. 23:8]
God is not a man that He should lie, neither the son of man that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it or hath He spoken, and shall not make it good? [Num. 23:19]*

What this case teaches us is that when we are in good standing with God, no weapon formed against us shall prosper and every tongue that shall rise in judgment against us, we shall condemn [Is. 54: 17]. In other words, a “curse causeless shall not come” [Prov. 26:2].

3. Lessons

- ❑ We are body, soul and spirit, all in one. What differentiates us from the lower animals is that we can speak, a quality that we share with God. Therefore, like God, we can create with our tongues: “thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee” [Job 22:28].
- ❑ God intends that we should use the tongue to praise and worship Him, and to bless. Therefore, once your lips are anointed, be careful what you say because it will come to pass!

- The tongue is only a microphone, for “out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh” [Matt. 12:34]. If the heart has good treasure (the fruits of the Holy Spirit- Gal. 5:22-23), the tongue will bless, praise and worship. But if the heart is not regenerated, the tongue will speak blasphemy [Jam. 3:9], evil [Jam. 4:11], slander and backbiting [Jam. 3:14, 16], or grumbling [Jam. 5:10].

4. Conclusion: my tongue to bless

Since “death and life are in the power of the tongue” [Prov. 18:21], you had better learn to bless yourself or others with your tongue than curse them or invite curses to yourself. A good illustration of this principle can be found in the story of the Shunammite woman [2 Kgs 4: 8-37].

The kind woman had built Elisha an apartment up in their home where she set up a bed, a table, a stool and a candlestick (in other words, a bedroom, a study and a prayer-room, all in one). The prophet and his servant, Gehazi, used the place each time they passed through that place. Of course, the food was always inviting. In appreciation, Elisha was desirous to do something for her. However, she said that she needed nothing but the opportunity to serve. Nevertheless, Gehazi informed the prophet that she was childless and that her husband was getting old. The man of God pronounced that she would have a son within a year [vv. 12-16].

She in deed conceived and bore a son. However, when he had grown up, he suffered sunstroke while working with his father in the farms. The servants took him into the house where he died in his mother’s arms [vv. 17-20]. Did she raise an alarm? Not that lady. She simply put the child on the prophet’s bed and loaded an ass to go and look for him, all by herself! When her husband asked why she was going to look for Elisha, all she answered was, “it shall be well” [vv. 21-23].

When the prophet saw her afar off, he sent his servant to find out if all was well with her or her husband or her son, and she again answered, “it is well” [vv. 25-26]. It was only after she had held on to Elisha that she gave a hint of her situation. Even so, she did not use the word, “death.” All she asked the man of God was: “Did I desire a son of my lord? Did I not say, do not deceive me?” [v.28]. She got her miracle. The prophet prayed to God, and the child came back alive [vv. 33-37]. All became well as she had confessed throughout the crisis. That is what God expects of us always.

Here is my advice: *be conscious every moment in your life that whatever you say might in deed come to pass. Therefore, no matter how angry or offended you may be, don’t ever curse your spouse, friend, child, neighbour, colleague, anybody. Stop being a grumbler or gossip or backbiter or worry-er. Choose life and use your tongue wisely because “pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones” [Prov. 16:24]. The tongue cannot be tamed but with God nothing is impossible.*