

**SEPTEMBER 13, 2009**

**THE TEACHING MOMENTS  
ISAIAH 50:4-9A; JAMES 3:1-12**

**GLENN BECK, THE CONSERVATIVE PUNDIT, CALLS PRESIDENT OBAMA A “RACIST” AND SETS OFF A FIRESTORM AND LOSES SPONSORS. PRESIDENT OBAMA STATES THAT THE CAMBRIDGE POLICE “ACTED STUPIDLY” WHEN THEY ARRESTED A HARVARD PROFESSOR AND SETS OFF A FIRESTORM THAT DISTRACTS THE WHOLE NATION. THE HARVARD PROFESSOR GETS EMOTIONAL AND RANTS AGAINST A POLICEMAN KNOWN NOT TO BE A “RACIST”. WITH THE ADVENT OF YOUTUBE, CELLPHONE CAMERAS AND SUCH, NOT A WEEK GOES BY WITHOUT SOME PUBLIC FIGURE CAPTURED SAYING SOMETHING HURTFUL. WHAT DOES ALL OF THIS HAVE IN COMMON WITH US?**

**AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER, WE ALL SUFFER FROM “FOOT IN MOUTH” DISEASE. WITH THE 24-HOUR NEWS CYCLE TO FILL AND THE INSATIABLE APPETITE FOR CELEBRITY “NEWS” (IF WE CAN CALL IT NEWS), FOOT IN MOUTH HAS BECOME THE REAL PANDEMIC. WORDS HURT. WORDS EMBARRASS. WORDS CAN DERAIL A CHILD’S LIFE. WORDS REVEAL WHAT A PERSON MAY REALLY BE LIKE INSIDE. HOSTILE WORDS COME OUT OF NOWHERE AND ONE CANNOT BELIEVE HE SAID WHAT HE JUST SAID. JAMES IS CORRECT, THE TONGUE IS THE HARDEST ORGAN TO TAME.**

**ANCIENT TEACHINGS, INCLUDING CHRISTIANITY, BELIEVED THAT THE PATH TO WISDOM INVOLVED SILENCE AND LISTENING. CONTROL OF SPEECH WAS THE MARK OF A WISE PERSON. JAMES STATES THAT THE SAME MOUTH THAT PRAISES GOD AND BLESSSES WHAT IS HOLY IS THE SAME MOUTH WITH WHICH WE HURT GOD’S CHILDREN. YEARS AGO WE USED TO SAY TO SOMEONE WHO SWORE ALL THE TIME, “DO YOU KISS YOUR MOTHER WITH THAT MOUTH!” REMEMBER THE THREAT OF GETTING YOUR MOUTH WASHED OUT WITH SOAP! NO ONE DOES THAT ANY MORE. YOU SHOULD HEAR THE MOUTH ON SOME MOMS SWEARING AT THEIR PRESCHOOLERS IN THE MARKET! JAMES STATES UNEQUIVOCALLY, A CHRISTIAN MUST LEARN TO CONTROL HIS TONGUE, SAYING NOTHING BUT POSITIVE AND LOVING WORDS. THAT IS OUR GOAL.**

**THE BASIS OF JAMES’ WISDOM IS NOT THE PETTY MOMENTARY SLANDER, THE OUTBURST, OR EVEN THE OCCASIONAL SWEARING.**

**SOMETIMES WE FOCUS ON THE SMALL NAUGHTY THINGS AND MISS THE BIG PICTURE. WE ARE TO BE TRANSFORMED BY CHRIST'S TEACHINGS. THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING MORE PROFOUND. JAMES' VIEW OF THE TONGUE AND THE WORDS WE USE IS BIBLICAL. REMEMBER IN GENESIS WHEN ADAM WAS GIVEN THE TASK, BY GOD, TO NAME REALITY---REMEMBER THE NAMING OF THE ANIMALS. IN THE BIBLE THERE IS A DIRECT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NAMING THINGS AND CREATING REALITIES. THE POWER TO NAME THINGS, TO USE LANGUAGE, WAS A CONTINUATION OF GOD'S CREATIVE ACTIVITY. WHEN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN OPENS WITH "IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD", IT REFERS TO THE LIFE-CREATING POWER OF GOD NOW FOUND IN JESUS. GOD SPOKE AND REALITIES WERE FORMED. GOD SHARED THAT POWER TO CREATE REALITIES. WORDS AFFECT PEOPLE. WORDS CAN SAVE. WORDS CAN HURT. WORDS CAN INDOCTRINATE. WORDS CAN MANIPULATE. WORDS CAN FREE PEOPLE FROM MANIPULATION.**

**THE ABUSE OF THE TONGUE IS RAMPANT IN OUR MASS COMMUNICATION ERA. THERE IS THE SPIN. THERE IS THE ADVERTISEMENT. ALL AIMED AT MAKING US BELIEVE OR DO SOMETHING, OFTEN PAINTING A ROSIER PICTURE THAN THE REALITY. HOW IRONIC THAT WHEN THE CHRISTIAN INJECTS HER UNDERSTANDING OF CHRIST'S WORDS INTO THE ISSUES OF THE DAY, WE ARE TOLD THAT WE ARE JUDGING OTHERS AND TRYING TO USE RELIGION TO MANIPULATE PEOPLE! HOWEVER, WE ARE ABOUT REFASHIONING THE WORLD TO LOOK LIKE CHRIST'S KINGDOM OF LOVE. WE BELIEVE IT IS FOR THE BETTERMENT OF THE WHOLE WORLD. HOWEVER IT IS, AT TIMES, A WAR OF WORDS. FOR EXAMPLE, A COMPANY, THAT DEPENDS ON USING WORDS TO BREAK DOWN SOMEONE'S WILL TO BUY SOMETHING, DOESN'T LIKE A MESSAGE THAT SAYS: BE STRONG IN YOUR WILL. DON'T BUY WHAT YOU DON'T NEED. USE WHAT YOU SAVE TO HELP THE POOR.**

**WE LIVE IN A TIME WHEN HALF TRUTHS ARE ACCEPTABLE. WE ALL KNOW WHEN WE SEE A MUD-SLINGING POLITICAL COMMERCIAL THAT SOME MANIPULATION EXPERTS ARE PICKING THE WORST LOOKING PHOTOS AND MOMENTS. ITS LIKE THOSE GOSSIP RAGS THAT LOVE TO CAPTURE THE CELEBRITIES WHEN THEY LOOK TERRIBLE OR FORGOT THEIR MAKE-UP. THEY WANT US TO FEEL EQUAL TO OR SUPERIOR TO OUR IDOLS. WE ARE NOW BOMBARDED FROM CRADLE TO THE GRAVE WITH MANY TRYING TO RESTRUCTURE OUR REALITIES WITH THEIR VOICES. PERHAPS THE STRANGEST RESTRUCTURING OF ALL IS THIS: THERE ARE THOSE WHO USE THE REALITY-CREATING POWER OF WORDS, GIVEN BY GOD**

**AT CREATION, AS A WAY TO PROVE THAT THERE IS NO GOD. BELIEVERS SHOULD FIND THIS VERY IRONIC.**

**WE MUST BELIEVE THAT CHRISTIAN PREACHING AND TEACHING, THE CHRISTIAN WORD IS THE COUNTERMESSAGE TO WHAT IS TEARING PEOPLE AWAY FROM GOD AND A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY TO FIND THE BEST OF WHO WE ARE. OUR MESSAGE DOES INDEED BATTLE WHAT IS NOT HEALTHY OR HELPFUL IN THE WORLD AND SUPPORTS WHAT HELPS HUMANITY TO THRIVE AND GROW. YES, THERE ARE TIMES WHEN RELIGIOUS WORDS DO DAMAGE IN LIFE. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN WE MISSPOKE AND HURT OTHERS. STILL OUR AIM IS TO TRANSFORM OUR TOUNGUES INTO NURTURING, LOVING, CARING ORGANS OF SPREADING CHRIST'S LOVE.**

**AND HERE IS WHERE THE TEACHING RESPONSIBILITY COMES IN. WE NEED TO TAKE CARE OF WHAT WE SAY TO OTHERS, ESPECIALLY CHILDREN AND YOUTH. CHRISTIAN TEACHING IS FOR CREATING REAL MEANING IN ANOTHER PERSON'S LIFE. THESE ARE THE TEACHING MOMENTS. OFTEN, THEY ARE NOT ABOUT THE TRANSFER OF INFORMATION LIKE A LOT OF SCHOOLING. WE ARE ABOUT PASSING ON A BELIEF, A TRADITION, A LIFESTYLE THAT POSES AN ALTERNATIVE TO A LOT OF WHAT IS GOING ON AROUND US.**

**WE DO IT BY NOT ONLY SPEAKING THE FAITH, BUT LIVING IT, MODELLING IT. PEOPLE TODAY ACT OUT OF IMPULSE. THE FLOODGATES ARE OPEN OR IS IT PANDORA'S BOX OF ILLS? WHATEVER IT IS PEOPLE FEEL FREE TO BLURT OUT ANYTHING, EVEN DISRESPECT THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT ON PRIMETIME TV. WE DON'T WATCH OUR WORDS. WE DON'T THINK ABOUT HOW WHAT WE ARE SAYING AND DOING AFFECTS OTHERS. THE DISEASE OF SELF-INTEREST IS WORSE THAN THE FLU.**

**TODAY WE ARE REMINDED THAT WE HAVE RESPONSIBILITY TOWARD GOD'S CREATURES AND CREATION. TODAY WE RECALL THAT OUR THOUGHTS WHICH MIRACULOUSLY BECOME WORDS, WHICH REALLY DO AFFECT AND RESHAPE LIFE, COME FROM GOD. THAT'S ALL JAMES WANTS US TO REMEMBER. WE ARE HERE TO PUT ALL OUR GIFTS IN SERVICE TO GOD AND GOD'S CREATURES AND GOD'S CREATION. THE NEW REALITIES THAT ARE SHAPED BY WHAT WE PUT OUT THERE, NEED TO BE MOTIVATED BY CHRIST'S LOVE AND LITTLE ELSE. AMEN.**