

Words

Proverbs 4:20-24, 12:18-19, 17:28, 18:21, 25:11, 26:4-5, 27:14

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Good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. If we haven't met, my name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here, and it is good to be with you. If you are a guest or a visitor, welcome. It is great for us to gather together, and I recognize that if you are new here, maybe if this is your first Sunday, it can sometimes feel a little strange, a little awkward, maybe a little intimidating, right, to walk into a new place, to not know the people around you, to not know, should I sit or stand? Am I supposed to sing or be quiet, right? Like, it can be a little disorienting, a little confusing, and so we recognize that. We acknowledge that, but our hope is that in the midst of that, what you would experience is the hospitality of Jesus, that you would experience the grace of the Lord and the kindness of His people, because the truth is, is that all of us are in need of that. We're in need of God's kindness. We're in need of His grace. Whether this is your first Sunday or you've been coming since the doors were first opened, we are all in need of the same thing, and that is the kindness of Jesus, and so we pray that that's what you would know and experience this morning.

So, if you are new with us, then you are joining us at the end of a series in the book of Proverbs, so this morning is going to end our summer series in Proverbs, and next week, for those of you who like to plan and would like to know, every once in a while, I don't want to tell you to just leave you kind of lingering, but I'm like you. I want to know and plan, but anyway, we're going to start a new series next week in the book of Colossians, in the book of Colossians, so you can be reading ahead if you'd like, but this morning, we're ending our series in Proverbs, and as we've been doing week after week, we haven't been going chapter by chapter and verse by verse through Proverbs. We've been looking at themes and topics, and if you're like me, then maybe some of these topics, some of these themes have hit kind of close to home, you know, maybe kind of pierced the heart a little bit. Maybe they function like a mirror, and when you look in the mirror, you maybe don't love everything that you're seeing, right? As we've talked about envy, as we've talked about wealth, as we've talked about friends and family, right? Maybe we've seen ways that we need to actually depend more upon the Lord, and ways that we need to turn from our ways and turn back to the Lord. Well, if that's the case, then this morning has the possibility of doing it yet again, because we are going to be talking about our words, about our language, about our tongues, about the things that we say, and the things that we type, and the ways that we use our words to promote good, but also to promote wickedness. And so with that in mind, let's go ahead and read Proverbs. We're going to begin our reading in chapter 4, verse 20.

“My son, be attentive to my words, incline your ear to my sayings, let them not escape from your sight, keep them within your heart, for they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk from you.

Chapter 12:18-19: “There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment.”

Chapter 17: 28, “Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise. When he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.”

Chapter 18:21: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit."

Chapter 25:11: "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver."

Chapter 26:4-5: "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes."

Chapter 27:14, "Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing."

Friends, this is the Word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your Word, and we ask that you would meet with us now, that your Word would ring loudly in our ears, and that we would see it as beautiful and true. Help us, Father, to turn to you, to rest in you, to depend upon you, and allow my words to honor you, and the attention of your people to give you glory. And we pray all this in Christ's name, amen.

So, recently, Mead, Cole, and I went to see *The Odyssey*. And don't worry, I'm not going to give it away, though I do believe, you know, the story's been out for thousands of years, so the statute of limitations, right? Like, if you don't know what happens by now. But anyway, instead of talking about *The Odyssey*, it made me start to think about all those other epic movies that are out there, and all those great stories that we love, right? Those speeches, often, that appear in wonderful movies like *The Odyssey*, or other movies, epic tales, these speeches that we remember long after the movie is done. So, think about words that are spoken to strengthen warriors before they go into battle, or to fill them with courage, or to motivate them into battle, right? Words like in *The Odyssey*, but words also like in *Braveheart*, right? "They can take our lives, but they can't take our freedom." Or *Gladiator*, "what we do in life echoes for eternity." Or *Spartacus*, "I am Spartacus," right? These words, they stay with us. We hold on to them long after we've witnessed the movie. Or not just in movies, but think about the strength and the power of historical speeches, right? The power of a timely speech, the turn of a phrase, how it sticks with us, how we ponder it, how it endures, and it stirs us to be resolved. Words like FDR, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Or King's, "I have a dream". Or Churchill when he claimed, "We shall fight them on the beaches. We shall fight them on the landing grounds. We shall fight them in the fields and in the streets. We shall fight them in the hills. We shall never surrender." These words have power.

They stir the hearer. They motivate us. They affect us. And we know this, don't we? We know this not because of the words spoken in movies. We know this not because of speeches given by great leaders. No, we know this personally because we've experienced the power of words. Words, simple ones that can build us up. Words like "I love you," "You're beautiful," "You're so talented". But then we've heard words that tear us down, right? Like "you're stupid," "You're ugly," "You don't belong." And when we hear those sorts of words that children's retort runs through our heads, right? *Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words, names will never hurt me.* And we want that song to be true. But we know it's not. Because names and words, they can hurt. And they do. And they can heal.

The Power of Words

And that's actually what we see, the power of words on display in Proverbs, right? We heard it in chapter 12, verse 18: "There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the

tongue of the wise brings healing.” Or in 18:21, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.” Now listen, the author of Proverbs isn't making mountains out of molehills. He's not speaking hyperbolically for the sake of effect. No, we know that in extreme and even rare cases, that death and the preservation of life can come from a mere word, right? A word of judgment or a word of acquittal could mean death or life. But even apart from those rare and extreme circumstances, we know that words can cause us anguish and joy. I mean, just think about gossip. Gossip kills the reputation of another. And after the fact, we may regret what we've said, and we might ask for forgiveness, and we might try to take back those words. But once they have been said, and once our words have been heard, they can never be unheard. And so a little bit of gossip, a little bit of dish, a little bit of news, and how a person is viewed is now affected. How a person views themselves is now affected.

Words have great power. And so because they have great power, this means that we have to be very careful with our words, careful that our words are both truthful and timely, that they're both truthful and timely. Now, when I say truthful, that should go without saying, right? It should go without saying. But we live in a time and in an age where the truth is a rare commodity. And not just out there, but we experience it to some degree as well, don't we? That the truth can at times be hard for us. Now, I know most of you, and I know you to be honest people, trustworthy people, people who love the truth. And yet, even for us, isn't it easy to stretch the truth just a little bit, to embellish just a tad? Like on a resume, that we want to embellish what we've done. We want to make more of what we've done so we can get the job. Or when we're telling a story amongst friends, right, don't we like couch the story and we frame it in such a way so that people will think we're interesting and funny. Or in the midst of a conversation, we withhold certain information so people will think well of us. And maybe it's not really a lie, right, in the strictest definition of the word, but it's not the truth either.

Now, some of you might be sitting there and going, well, that's not a problem for me because I love to tell people the truth. In fact, I can't wait to give people the truth. I am a truth teller. And maybe that is you. But then what's the problem? Then we end up saying and using the truth to bring pain and to do unnecessary harm, even using God's truth to do damage to others. And so this is why as we speak the truth, we actually need to speak it in a timely fashion. That's what we see in 26:4-5: “Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.” I love this passage. I love this passage because I always want to go, “well, which one,” right? And that's the point. That's the point because we've all experienced that conversation with that person who no matter how patient we are, no matter how truthful we are, no matter how much we engage with their questions and concerns, it just keeps going round and round and round because they have no interest in the truth. They only have interest in us telling them they are right. Have y'all had that conversation? Yes, you have had that conversation. And in that moment we know I shouldn't have entered into it. I'm answering a fool according to their folly. And so sometimes a timely word is no word at all.

But other times a timely word is correcting someone, is showing them where they may be off base, where they may be going astray. I mean, listen to what Proverbs says in 25:11: “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver. A timely word, saying what needs to be heard, like an apple of gold in a setting of silver, it is helpful and beautiful and good. The timeliness of a word is oftentimes what we are in need of. And Jesus demonstrates this perfectly. Jesus demonstrates this perfectly in John chapter 11. So you remember in John 11, this is the story of the resurrection of Lazarus. So Jesus' friend Lazarus has died and he's been

in the grave for days. And he comes to the town of Bethany and he comes to see Martha and Mary, right, who are Lazarus' sisters. And they're Jesus' friends.

And so as Jesus comes to the town, each one of them comes out one at a time. He has a conversation with Martha and then he has a conversation with Mary. And what's fascinating about this is that as he comes into the town, Martha and Mary both, separately from one another, say the exact same thing to him. They both come, Martha first, and says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." And then Martha actually goes on and says something about how God will give Jesus whatever he asks. But then when Mary comes out, she says the same thing. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Okay, so think about this. We have two sisters in the same town, experiencing the exact same thing, talking to the exact same Lord with the exact same words, and Jesus responds differently to them both. To Martha, he assures her of Lazarus' resurrection and who Jesus is. This is where he says, "I am the resurrection and the life." But to Mary, he doesn't speak at all. We're actually told that he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. Same statement by the sisters, different responses, and why? Because Jesus knew what each one needed. One needed the assurance of the theological realities that were about to play out, and the other didn't need words at all. She simply needed compassion and presence.

You see, the power of our words, it's found not just in speaking truthful words, but timely words, words that are needed for the moment, words sometimes that are not needed at all. So that's easy, right? Now, this is where we need wisdom. This is where we need prayer. This is where we need the help of the Lord to know in those moments, what are the words we need? What is the truth that needs to be spoken? What is the timely word in this moment? What are the words that I need to withhold? And so we pray, and we depend upon the Lord, and we ask for his spirit to lead us and direct us in what we are to say, to use our words powerfully. And where will these words come from?

The Source of Words

Well, that's the second thing I want us to look at, is not just the power of our words, but the source of our words. And we see this in chapter 4, verses 20-24. The writer says, "My son, be attentive to my words. Incline your ear to my sayings. Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you." So where's the source of our words? It's the heart. It's the heart, right? That's what he said. From it flows the springs of life. And then he says, "put away crooked speech. Put away devious talk. It comes from our heart." And this is exactly what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 5. Do you remember? When he said what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart. And this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and slander. Out of the heart, out of our mouths is the reflection of our hearts.

Now, I've had conversations at times with people who they are describing a disorienting experience that they've had. When they've interacted with one person, one-on-one, and they are great, and they're fun, and they're easy to be around. And then they see that person online, and they're angry, and they're mean, and they're hurtful. And sometimes what people will say to me is, "Well, you just don't know. You know, you see that online, but you just don't know him. He's not really like that. He's really like this one-on-one, and that's who he is." And I want to say to them, "no, that's who he is." Out of the heart come the words. Not just words that we speak, but words we type. Words that we hide behind a screen with. That if we want

to know what's in the internal life of a person, if we want to know what their heart is like, we listen to their words. Now, I don't doubt that person is fun to be around one-on-one. It's really engaging, right? It's the life of the party. And they may be cruel at the same time.

And so this means we have to guard our words. We have to be cognizant of not just the words we speak, but the words that we write, the words that we type. Proverbs is telling us we must be vigilant with the state of our heart. So how do we do this? I wonder if any of you have seen that commercial for the ladder strength training app, right? Maybe some of you have. I mean, it is all over my algorithms right now, and on my television. I don't know if, you know, AI is trying to tell me I need to work out more, but it's there, okay? I'm seeing it everywhere. And in this commercial, Hillary Duff, she's the spokesperson for ladder strength training, and she's putting weights on the bar, and she's checking her app for the next exercise, and she's lifting, and she's stretching, and she's doing all these different things. We hear this word come over the screen: "Motivation is a lie. The plan is the truth." And to some extent, that's true. It's right. Because motivation comes, right? And then it goes. It ebbs, and it flows. And we feel this not just with our exercise. We feel this in following Jesus, in pursuing truthful and timely speech, right? Because think about it. We may say something we regret. We say we're sorry. We maybe hear a sermon about the tongue, and we leave, and we feel motivated to change, right? *I'm never going to say those things again. I'm going to be less critical. I'm going to be more positive. I'm going to guard my tongue.* And then that desire and motivation and resolve, well, Tuesday comes. And like Kierkegaard said, resolve is like skipping stones.

The stone will sink. We had the motivation. We had the desire. We had the resolve, but it wasn't enough. It was a lie. But so is the plan. The plan isn't enough either. Because we can guard our tongues today, but tomorrow will come. And we can so flippantly use our tongues in the days that follow. You see, because the source of our words is our hearts, and it's coming from what's in our hearts, we need more than motivation. We need more than resolve. We need more than a plan. What we need is transformation. And that only comes through the Word of Christ and the work of His Spirit. We need the transformation of hearing Jesus' words spoken over us. His words that say things like, because of the cross, you are beloved. Words that tell us you don't have to embellish or protect your image because you're children of the Father. You are brothers and sisters of the King. Words that say you may have used your words to bring damage, but my words say I love you. You are, I will not forsake and you are mine. Those are the words that Jesus says to His people. When we hear words like that from a parent or from a child or from a friend, those words that are compassionate and gracious, they affect us. But when we hear those words spoken from God the Father, spoken by our Savior Jesus, when those words are impressed on our hearts by the work of the Spirit, well, those words, they transform us. They transform our hearts and they change our words so that our words are full of truth and they are timely and they are powerful. Amen. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you.

Thank you that you have spoken words of truth over us. That our sin is great, but your grace is greater than all of our sin. That yes, we have used our words for harm, but you are using words for our good. And so, Father, we pray that you would transform our hearts, that you would change our spirits, that you would guard our tongues so that what comes out of our mouths would reflect the work that you are doing in our hearts. And so, we ask, transform us, change us, make us more and more like Jesus so that in everything that we think, everything that we do, with every word that we speak, we would honor and exalt you. And we pray all this in the name of Jesus and God's people said together, amen.