

Speech

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[0:00] All right, good morning, everybody. As was said, my name is Elliot.

Feel a little bit like breaking open, you know, 15 fortune cookies in a row and seeing what they have inside of them. And so we're trying to group some of that into topics that Proverbs talks about.

And this week we're going to look at one of the topics that the book frankly spends a lot of time on, which is what we do with our tongues. Because there is no doubt that words, speech, the tongue has power.

However, when the framers of the U.S. Constitution produced the first version that didn't explicitly have, you know, explicitly enumerated civil liberties, it was really quick that a call came forth to put those in there.

And every school-age child who's read the Bill of Rights quickly realizes that apparently protecting speech was really important to them because they put it in the very First Amendment.

[1:26] they believed that there was power and importance in the people of a nation being able to freely speak. It was right there in our laws. But the truth is, for most of us, the use of our speech is much more than just a political or civil exercise because what you do with your tongue can literally change the course of your life.

A word well-spoken, a blessing given to someone, can be the very thing that's just the nugget they need to get through a hard time.

A careless or hurtful word can feel like it ruins everything. It can sever friendships and families. I mean, all of us know that the words we receive from our parents and loved ones across the course of our childhood hold enormous sway on how we feel about ourselves and whether we enter life with a full heart or a broken one.

And the book of Proverbs confirms what I think everybody in this world has felt and known for most of their lives. There is life-changing power in the tongue.

Proverbs 18, 21 says, death and life are in the power of the tongue and those who love it will eat its fruits. You know, there are lots of things in life like that that are good and useful, but they demand respect.

[3:01] When you're teaching your children how to use a sharp knife, like to chop vegetables or something, you don't want them to be scared to use it.

I mean, using and knowing how to use a knife is a good thing, but you also want them to learn respect this. It can cut you. Don't run around or be silly with it.

It's a good thing, but there's power in it. Fire is like that. It's one of the most crucial and life-giving things humans can utilize.

We so take it for granted, but if you've ever been out in the wild and don't have it, you realize how important it is. But it can also be terrifying. If it gets out of hand, if you've ever been around like a major wildfire or a forest fire, it feels unstoppable.

And if you get burnt, it is one of the most painful wounds you can take to your body. A fire is meant to be a place of warmth and light and friends and s'mores and all that.

[4:06] But if you're careless, burn your whole life down. The Bible is pretty clear. How you use your tongue, how you use your speech, deserves the same respect.

It actually says in that verse we just read, those who love it will eat its fruits. If you cherish it, if you take care of it, if you nourish it, it actually doesn't have to be something you're afraid of.

It can bring life and blessing. But if you don't, you'll do great damage to yourself and those around you. Proverbs 10, 21 says, The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of sense.

And then in verse 31, And then in Proverbs 12, 18, There is one whose rash words are like sword thrust, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Kind of seeing the picture there, right? Speech and what you do with it is one of the key ways you decide if you are going to bring blessing or pain to the world around you.

[5:34] So how do we use our tongue rightly? That's the goal of the book of Proverbs and Scripture in general. How do we use it rightly? Well, the first thing that Proverbs tells you is probably both the easiest and the hardest thing to do because Proverbs makes it clear a wise person knows how to restrain their tongue.

The easiest thing you can do is accept the fact that sometimes keeping a lid on it is really the best course. Like less really can be more.

Proverbs 13, 3 says, Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life, and he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.

Proverbs 10, 19, When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.

Like have you ever just been talking and talking about a situation and somewhere in the back of your mind you realize, man, I really need to stop talking. Like this is not going well. But then the crazy part of you takes over and is like, nah, I can save it.

[6:46] And it's like you are just shoveling like a hole you're in. Just stop. Proverbs 17, 27, Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, but he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.

A cool spirit is exactly the opposite of a hot-headed impulse. It's the opposite of when you get irritated or angry or something boils up inside of you instead of saying, maybe I should take a beat, take a minute.

Nah, I'm just going to let this come out. I'm going to let them know how I feel about this right now.

And the very next verse says, Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise.

When he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent. That is the 3,000-year-old version of better to remain silent and risk people thinking you're a fool than opening your mouth and removing all doubt of it.

Proverbs says, You have to get a grip on your tongue. You have to let God teach you how to control it.

[8:03] And then, as to make sure we don't have to guess or we miss the specifics, Proverbs has many verses also to help you understand, yes, that includes gossip.

Gossip. Proverbs 11, 13. Whoever, in some versions a gossip, goes around slandering, revealing secrets, but he who is trustworthy keeps a thing covered.

Proverbs 16, 28. A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer, sometimes rendered a gossip, separates close friends.

Proverbs 18, 8. The words of a whisperer. In some versions it says, Rumors are like delicious morsels. They go down into the inner parts of the body.

Man, what a descriptive verse. Why do people gossip? Like, why do we want to know the scuttlebutt? Why is it so interesting to us?

[9:05] Proverbs says, because it's delicious. God said, it makes you feel like an insider. We don't want to admit it, but nobody likes to feel like they're the only one in the room that doesn't know something.

You want to be savvy. You want to be in the know. It actually builds false intimacy when people, when you're like, hey, did you know that you're talking? Like, you feel like you're being brought into a secret that only you two know.

It makes you feel superior because though you know in your heart there's many things about you you don't want everybody to know either, now you know something about them.

And just frankly, it's interesting. It's different than talking about the boring things of life. How was your week? Blah, blah, blah. It's like, ooh, here's something spicy. But it destroys.

Now look, there are obviously, if you're walking in wisdom, valid times to share something bad you've learned about a situation because you're actually trying to help.

[10:15] I mean, there are some things that frankly I'm not going to be able to keep secret because I know you're about to hurt yourself or you're going to go hurt someone else. But intentionally sharing rumors or embarrassing information or just being nosy because you don't like feeling like you don't know the know or because it spices up life and conversations or maybe worst of all because it compromises somebody you don't like and you like having that leverage over them,

any of that is a sin.

It destroys. And Proverbs not only says you have to cut that out. It gives you two very simple antidotes. Proverbs 20, 19, whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets.

Therefore, do not associate with a simple babbler. If you don't want to be a gossip, you don't hang out with gossips. The quickest way for, if that's a problem for you to get it out of your life is when someone else brings it to you you refuse to receive it.

And that'll kind of end, it'll be awkward and it ends the whole thing and nobody will ever bring anything because you're not interesting. Like you made them feel bad about bringing them gossip. Proverbs 26, 20 says, For lack of wood, the fire goes out and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases.

Resolve in your heart to be a peacemaker like your Father in Heaven is a peacemaker.

[11:57] And you can't make peace throwing logs on the fire of gossip. Yes, guarding your tongue includes gossip and also, yes, that includes the internet.

Proverbs 18, 2 A fool takes no pleasure in understanding but only in expressing his opinion.

Everything Proverbs says about your tongue applies to your keyboard. And honestly, probably more so. See, here's the thing. All of us in this world, both in our daily interactions and digitally, like we're trying to navigate how to use our voice in a noble way.

Like how do I stand up for things that I believe are righteous? How do I, you know, not remain silent? The goal of Proverbs is not to say just be quiet about everything, never say anything, never take a stand.

But I'll be honest, for me personally, I have a very, very small digital profile and presence. And it's not because I don't have anything to say. I mean, I'm standing here on a stage on a Sunday because I think God has partly given to me to say something.

[13:17] And nor am I trying to claim this isn't like a polemic against anyone who would ever try to use digital media to honor Jesus. I'm not their judge, okay?

But I will tell you, I have personally never, and I mean never, in any digital context, seen any fruit for trying to discuss a controversial or difficult or intimate or painful topic with somebody on social media.

Like no one has ever gone, yeah, man, that was life-giving and my life has changed. It just doesn't happen. I have seen fruit in sitting down with somebody like a person and talking and saying, I want to gain understanding to build a bridge of that.

And then, not to be a coward, like if you want to say something or say something that makes you feel weird or like it's different or I don't agree with that, you're allowed to challenge. But it is a totally different thing to do that, to be moving towards somebody in love because you care about them and to stand up for what you believe in than to just think that the world needs to hear your opinion on every matter.

It does not. Guard your tongue. Now, when I'm going to use my tongue, how should I do it?

[14:45] Because guard your tongue doesn't mean never use it. We've already seen that it contains the power to bring death or life. How do I bring life?

Proverbs tells us a righteous person uses their tongue for blessing. We've already seen in Proverbs, we've talked about this blessing, how the lips can literally hold life in them.

Proverbs 16, 24 says, gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body. Proverbs 10, 20 and 21 says, the tongue of the righteous is choice silver, the heart of the wicked is of little worth, the lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of sense.

I would argue that one of the hallmarks of any good relationship, a marriage, a family, a friendship, a church body, is how you talk to each other.

is it a regular and natural practice to just be a blessing, to just praise each other? There is never really a bad time to use your tongue to bless someone and frankly, we have all these dumb things in our head that keep us from just saying things to people like, oh, it'll be kind of awkward or maybe they don't have time or want to hear it.

[16:15] Man, there is never a wrong time to say to someone, look, I just want you to know you are such a blessing to this church. Like, you make this place better. I am so grateful that you are in my life.

I am so grateful you use your gifts to be a blessing to me and others. There's never a bad time to do that. You won't ever regret telling somebody that they're a blessing.

You will regret missing the opportunity. A righteous person uses their tongue for blessing. Also, a righteous person uses their tongue only for truth.

It is almost impossible to state how deadly lying is. Proverbs 12, 22 says, lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, Lord, but those who act faithfully are His delight.

Proverbs 21, 6 says, the getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a snare of death. Again, there's that strong language.

[17 : 31] Proverbs 25, 18, a man who bears false witness against his neighbor is like a war club or a sword or a sharp arrow.

The Bible doesn't consider lying like some low-level offense. Like there's bad sins and you go down like you get the lying. Lying lips are called an abomination.

In Proverbs chapter 6, there's actually this kind of section where it says, you know, six things I hate, seven, indeed, lying lips are listed as one of the things that God hates.

These Proverbs equate lying with a deadly weapon, with death. And if that seems kind of hyperbolic to you, like the best way I know to show you how big a deal this is from the Bible is the weapon that Satan chooses to use in the beginning, literally, the weapon that is responsible for the breaking of the world is a lie.

Not fear, not violence, not like some army of demons. Did God really say that? Come on.

[18 : 49] You're not going to die. Like that, come on. You're not going to die. I have found over the years that a lot of the battle against darkness in the Christian life can really be boiled down to.

Are you going to believe the truth that God spoke to you? Are you going to believe the lie that Satan gave you? And whatever you do there will determine the course of your life.

Lying to yourself and to others is so, so, so deadly because it puts up a wall to the things, the very things that might actually bring you healing.

Becoming a person of truth, it's a humbling experience because the truth is not always flattering but it is also freeing and empowering as some of you know well because if you have spun or been caught in a web of lies, there is almost always a tangible freedom in watching them fall away even if you're mortified at what people know now.

At least I don't have to pretend. I'm not trapped. And honestly, if you take a step towards being that kind of person, I think when you move from lying to truth, you can actually see in yourself becoming more of the person you always hoped you would be.

[20 : 13] Proverbs 24, 26 says, whoever gives an honest answer kisses the lips. That's not supposed to be awkward. It's in that culture, that signified respect, friendship, loyalty.

I mean, how much of a blessing is it in your workplace or in your church or in a friendship when you know, I don't have to search out is this a lie or not?

I know they tell the truth. Sometimes maybe I don't want to hear the truth, but I know it's not a lie. It makes life so much simpler. If there was anything I could encourage you from this message, even beg you to do with your tongue, it's take steps towards becoming a person of truth.

If you do that, and become a person of truth, as a follower of Jesus, I would say, funny enough, there will be one very specific truth that your lips will want to speak because a righteous person uses their tongue to glorify God.

God. All right, so let's try to put some of these things together, right? There's power in the tongue, in our speech, in using it.

[21 : 34] It's not an incidental thing. There's power in it. And also, we're meant to use it for blessing, not for cursing, not for lying.

And so that means, when we gather together, how we use our tongue matters. And so you can think about this in so many things of what we try to do each week when we gather.

You think about the worship that we do at the beginning. Our speech, it's not just, we don't do worship at the beginning just to kind of set the mood.

You know, there's probably a cynical way to look at it to say like, yeah, you're trying to like establish an emotional connection. So, no, it's like, that can happen. You can have an emotional experience through music and through what you say, but we do it because we believe that when we say words of blessing to God, there is power in that.

When we use our words to glorify God, it matters. It's not just an exercise. The Bible even tells us when we do that, we actually join all creation in what we were made to be doing.

[22:47] Luke 19 says, as Jesus kind of drawing near the end of his life, and he's heading towards Jerusalem, and it says, as he was drawing near already on the way down the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, saying, blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord, peace in heaven and glory in the highest.

And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, teacher, rebuke your disciples, and he said, I tell you, if they were silent, the very stones would cry out.

Glorifying God with your tongue is something you were uniquely made to do. It's a privilege that no animal, no rock, no tree, all of which can testify to the glory of God, but none of them have that privilege.

Only you, as someone created in God's image, can do that. It's also how we shine the light of the gospel, because sharing good news is what our lips are meant to do.

Romans 10, 13 through 15 says, for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him and who they have not believed?

[24:17] And how are they believing him of who they have not heard? And how would they hear without someone preaching to them? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?

As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news. It's a phrase that gets used a lot in Christendom, often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, though we really don't have any good evidence that he said it, but it's a popular phrase and it goes something like this.

Preach the gospel and if necessary use words. Now look, I am not trying to make you feel some kind of way about that because if what you mean by that is I want the whole of my life, how I do little things, how I do big things, how I use my words, I want all of it to testify to the goodness of God revealed in Jesus then well.

But I'll tell you, the way I have most often seen that used, including by me, is more in a fashion of saying, you know what, I really don't like talking to people that much anyway, and talking about Jesus stuff can be awkward, so I'm just going to like, just live a good life and be nice and I'll just let my light shine that way, right?

Look, if I may, and not sound like, you know, condescending, use your words. I am not saying go inject a canned gospel presentation in the first five minutes of meeting anybody, probably won't go well, like, and, you know, I'm not saying you have to walk around with like, this sales pitch I'm going to give, but look, in any friendship where you've known somebody for a while, the things that are really important in your life just come up.

[26:07] Like, if you like a sports team, you're not going to go a year without them knowing who that is, right? Like, if you have things you're passionate about, if you really love a restaurant, like, that stuff comes up. It is anticipated that you will use your mouth to tell people around you, Jesus means something to me.

And not, again, to make them a mission, like a sales pitch, because that's how the gospel goes forth. And Romans tells us it's imperative that you live like that because you didn't know who Jesus was until someone told you.

Might have been your mom, might have been a friend, or a coach, might have been Billy Graham on the radio, but someone used their tongue that God gave them to tell you about Jesus.

Jesus. There's power in the tongue, and there's power in the gospel. Don't waste the opportunity God gives you to put those two together.

Amen? As the band comes up today, a couple ways we can respond. You know, if you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus, honestly, one of the things I've been thinking about this week, and I'll be straight up, this is not tied to the sermon at all.

[27:23] Like, I don't have a nice thread to tie it together. I was just thinking about what would I want to tell you? And I would say, you know, honestly, the only thing I have to give you is hope. Like, if you opened up my life, you would see a life not unlike what is common to people.

You'd find disappointments and brokenness and beauty and pain and questions and everything in all of that. And if I was like, what am I even offering? It's just the only thing I can really tell you is that I have an unshakable and I didn't get all at once.

It was a thousand people telling me about Jesus. And because of that, I think if you want hope, if you want to draw near to your maker, you don't have to make this complicated.

Jesus, save me. I need hope is a perfectly acceptable prayer. That's really all we have to hold out. We don't have some magic thing to tell you how to fix all the little details of your life. We have the hope of Jesus and his good news. If you want to talk about that, we'd love to talk with you after the service. There'll be some people down front. If you are a follower of Jesus, every week we end our service by speaking a blessing over the church.

[28:46] It's not accidental. It is a blessing that reflects the very heart of our good father from scripture. true. So I think the simple takeaway for us today is make it your business to have a tongue that is full of blessing like your father.

If you're a follower of Jesus, we then have a moment of communion. You can go to the tables when you're ready and take that back to your seat and partake of it. just a reminder every week of how far Jesus went that we could be with him to be part of that blessing.

Father, we give you this moment. God, I just pray that you will help us to be a people of tongues that are a blessing.

God, let this world know that we love you and that you love us and that we love each other by how we talk to each other. God, help us to say truth.

Help us to have grace. When we have to say hard things, let us say them but only alone, seasoned with your grace and your mercy. Father, make us like you.

[30:06] We ask in Jesus' name.