

Just Words

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[0 : 00] The subject this morning is called Just Words. and I'm really feeling for the international students here! because you spend a lot of your week,! if you're in language school, thinking about words, grammar, punctuation.

And here you come to church and you're going to hear more about words today. That's the subject matter. We're going to be thinking about words that are spoken and words that are written.

And Just Words? It's only words. What does a word cost? I don't think anybody's ever charged people for words, except if it's in some sort of clever digital way.

Words are cheap in a way, aren't they? So many words are spoken. How many words are there in the world? How many words are spoken every day? People have actually done a study on this to find out how many words people speak every day.

The average person speaks every day. Have you got a clue how many words you might speak every day? Put your hand up and just give me a sort of a...

[1 : 13] What have I got here? I thought there'd be somebody.

Did you have 10,000? 10,000. Not bad. Any other guesses? 5,000. 5,000. 7,000.

Okay, well, this could go on for a very long time. In actual fact, there are about 16,000 words. Per person, per day. And of course, there are exceptions.

And some people do talk more, and some people do talk very less. And of course, if you're in a lonely situation, you may not talk much at all. So I did a little bit of calculation.

I thought, well, there's 7 billion people in the world, but lots of them don't speak very much, maybe, for various reasons. So if I was to multiply 5 billion by 16,000, that's 80 trillion words a day.

[2 : 11] I think that's the American use of the word trillion. 80 trillion words a day. That's a lot, isn't it? That is amazing. You go on and on and on with this sort of arithmetic.

And it's just to say, words are so easy. I'm speaking words now. And they come out. Gone, gone, gone, gone. They're just sort of lost, aren't they?

There. So there's a thought. Thinking about the value or otherwise of words. And there's another way we could take this phrase, just words, to say words that are right or correct and upright.

There's a moral dimension to words as well. That's the subject matter today. And I put a poster up here.

In fact, I was quite amazed just how many different sorts of posters were done within the second war on this very subject. So there was great concern, the government in this country, that careless talk between people could really cost the lives of soldiers.

[3 : 27] So plans would be revealed. The enemy would find out. Careless talk costs lives. I'd like to suggest that careless talk actually does cost lives.

Not in a military sense. But certainly in terms of harm and damage that careless talk can create off our guard.

The world we live in. I was prompted into this message by a particular Friday when just two or three things happened in sequence to do with words.

It's like a London bus system, isn't it? Two or three things come along and you just feel, hmm, this is rather significant. And there was an actress who was speaking.

And she's, I won't tell you her name, but she's very sort of prominent and is often in the sort of costume drama type things and speaks very nicely and so forth.

[4 : 29] All your costume dramas, everyone speaks nicely, don't they? Speak carefully and well.

And she was just using foul language. And I found it so upsetting and disappointing because it gave me a very different view of that person.

I thought, is that what she's really like? That she should speak in that sort of a way. And later on on the radio, and it was before a watershed time, someone used an expletive.

And I found that very disappointing as well. And there was some other incident on that day. And you know how you read the papers now. And they're shameless, really, in their use of the foul language. Do, asterisk, asterisk, asterisk, and something else. So you know when you read it. You know what the word is. I just felt soiled and dirtied by that process.

I'm not trying to be prissy or anything like that. I'm just saying, language matters. We can be degraded by the way people speak. What's happening with words?

[5 : 41] What's happening since that rather quaint poster of the 1940s? Well, one thing I've really noticed is films. If any of you go to see films today, it's extremely rare to be able to see a modern film this day without strong language.

Extremely rare. And yet the films that were done in the 40s and 50s didn't have that at all. You know, we've just accepted it. Hollywood has just gone lock, stock, and barrel.

I wonder, do really people speak like this? Is that the way it really is? Well, that's the way the film's set. Communication overload.

I remember the first time I saw a girl on a train and she had three mobile phones with her. And she was looking at them all in turn.

Just sort of keeping up and thinking, how on earth do you know who you are talking to at any one time? She probably had a different network for different kinds of friends. Very complicated.

[6 : 46] Exhausting. Communication overload. We are bombarded with information, aren't we? We are overwhelmed with information. You can't take it all in. Email burnout.

One of the client's offices I visited a few years ago in Canary Wharf was dead quiet. Everybody was working away at their screens and there wasn't a murmur.

And I'll tell you why. Because the instruction is, if you communicate with everybody, you do it by email. Even though they might be sitting next to you. You do it by email.

Interesting to see that the chief rabbi, this week, has encouraged Jewish people and everyone else to have a Sabbath. And the Sabbath is digital detox.

So on the Sabbath, just encouraging people to actually sit down and have a conversation with somebody else. You know how it is as you go around Brighton.

[7 : 53] You keep bumping into people because they're using their mobile phones. And because you are as well. Email burnout.

Now, one of my colleagues gets about 120 emails a day. There's absolutely no way he answers all of that. No way.

So he doesn't. So what's the point? Do you know who's listening? Do you know who's listening? Well, apparently, many people say things and they haven't a clue who's listening. There was an unfortunate case of the minister in the House of Lords on the issue of disability. Who?

Who just happened to be overheard saying something which she shouldn't have said in quite that way. Although put into context, it had a different meaning to it. Do you know who's listening when you inadvertently press your send button?

[9 : 05] There we go. Who is this going to? It's a world of soundbites out there.

Everybody wants to know your opinion but only very briefly. Do we use the right media for the job? I'm not a great fan of this but there are 500 million users in the world. In 2012, there were 100 million tweets every day.

140 characters long. What can you say in 140 characters? It might not be a very good medium for trying to build a bridge with somebody that you've had a rocky relationship with for a few years. Text messaging, which I do use, has great pitfalls. especially when everything's abbreviated and there's no punctuation.

[10 : 19] not difficult for communication to be misunderstood. Not difficult for communication to go to the wrong person.

What's happening? I just want to make this point this morning that it's never just words. Proverbs 18, 21 says, the tongue has the power of life and death.

Your little message has the power of life and death. We see the chaos of cross communication, cross wires, cross lines all over this world.

Our technology is a wonderful servant but a lousy master. Who has the discipline to use technology in a wise way?

In a thoughtful way, in a careful way. Careless talk costs lives. Why this matters for every Christian. [11:41] And when you think of it, this becomes such a challenging and exciting subject for the Christian. We're people of the book. God speaks to us by his word.

He uses words to speak to the whole of his world. He did not need to have done that but that is the way he has done it.

The Bible takes a very serious view of words. There are 90 references in the book of Proverbs. There is more in the book of Proverbs which is the book about wisdom than any other subject. The Bible overflows with examples of words that cause blessing or disaster. I think of that incident where Nabal, David, Abigail, thank you.

All of that words isn't it? Gosh, how near things came to a disastrous point through words. Words misunderstood.

[13:01] Words said in the heat of the moment. It needed calm words brought in at a certain point to bring about a peaceful resolution.

I think of the closing hours of the Lord Jesus' life. What amazing words he spoke to his disciples and what foolish words were heard in response.

What distressing and discouraging words from the Apostle Peter betrays the Lord three times with his words. We think of all the false charges that are made against the Lord Jesus at his trial.

None of them could stick. The stories didn't hang on, hang together. You read the account in the Gospels of Pilate and the way he deals with that process of justice.

As you read it, you can't help willing him, willing him to actually say different words, to say the right words, but he doesn't. He takes the coward's way out.

[14:16] And through it all, you see the Lord Jesus Christ, perfect in his words and perfect in his non-words, in his silence. It's an amazing picture.

And on the cross, forgive them father for they know not what they do. And those two thieves at the moment of their own death, one choosing life and one choosing death by their words.

Jesus has an extremely strong warning. Please look with me at Matthew 12, 36. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.

I just pause at this moment and say doesn't this put all of us under judgment?

Can anybody stand up and say they've never spoken a careless word? And here is the Lord Jesus Christ who sees into the depths of our hearts as a reckoning going to take place for every careless word spoken.

[16:09] If you somehow thought that you didn't need forgiveness for sin, a word like this puts you into a place where you have to say to the holy God, please forgive me.

And how can that be done? Except through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. And we see the example of Jesus in Luke chapter 4 verse 22.

He's in the synagogue and he reads the words from Isaiah that speak of him. Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips.

It is an astonishing thought. There's only one man who's walked this earth, who's lived a perfect life, and has had perfect language. And that's Jesus Christ.

What a privilege to be close to such a one. And to be able to read the gospel accounts and to recognize there that here is utter purity, not a careless word spoken, and in his silence.

[17:31] An example for us, an example for every one of his followers. Jesus died because of and for word sins. The cross is not only a place where wrong deeds are paid for, but every careless word costs the blood of the eternal son of God.

God. The problems of words are found in the early churches. It's really very striking to read in most of the letters and to see the way in which the apostles and the writers of the letters address this matter of language in the churches.

report on the church in Corinth. I wonder what it would be like if the apostle Paul, as was his custom, sought information about a church, a church that he'd known and spent time in and so forth.

We know there are two letters that he wrote to the church in Corinth. The city of Corinth had a population at that time of about 250,000 free people.

That's about the same size as Brighton and Hove. And apparently 400,000 slaves. Incredible. Massive, massive issue.

[19 : 00] The problems of words. So I imagine what a report on the church in Corinth might say. And I'm giving you this report now. Based upon the textual evidence we have in the two letters.

So a brother writes to Paul and he says, in response to your request I spent time with the Christians who gather in Corinth. It's a remarkable cross-section of people of widely different ethnic background and past lives.

I'm told that some came from lives of adultery and prostitution. Others used to thieve and to defraud. They certainly heard the gospel. There's a lot of energy in the church.

The church has been blessed with Bible understanding and spiritual gifts. They're eagerly awaiting the return of our Lord Jesus. Meanwhile, there are some problems. There seem to be cliques, too much concentration on personalities, and people getting rather over-impressed with eloquent preaching rather than Christian character.

Many are swayed by human wisdom rather than God's truth. It's disappointing that some have taken a dismissive view of the people who first brought them the gospel.

[20 : 12] people. There's sexual immorality in the church, and amazingly, the people seem quite unconcerned, actually suggesting that it's okay because we've got freedom in Christ to live how we like, unlike the Jews with all their laws.

Talking of laws, another disappointment is that when disputes happen between Christians, rather than trying to deal with things quickly and carefully within the church, these issues are going to civil courts, not good PR for the church, and a bad testimony as well as wasted money on solicitors.

It's also a shame to see how some of the new Christians are upset by the so-called free living of older Christians. Some of the Christians are sailing very close to the wind in terms of their lifestyles, and it's hard to distinguish who's a Christian and who isn't by the way they live and talk.

Another thing which I found upsetting was what happened on the Lord's Day when the Christians meet up. They've all got something to say, which could be a blessing, but they're all trying to talk at once.

Not much courtesy, and pretty thoughtless when there are people who aren't yet Christians coming to these meetings. In summary, there's so much potential in this church, but it's undermined by selfishness and pride.

[21 : 31] If only they could be of one mind, live in peace, and listen to and obey the words of the Lord Jesus. That was a picture of Corinth.

I wonder what report the Lord Jesus Christ might want to make of us. The problem with this kind of approach, in a way, is that we could say, well, we're not guilty of that, but we're probably struggling in another area.

we'll be hearing tonight from Aaron on a couple of churches in the book of Revelation. I think they were rather surprised at what the Lord Jesus had to say to them.

They didn't think that this was their problem, but it was. And if it was a problem for the church in Ephesus and in Colossae, and a strong word given to Timothy on this subject, and especially to the church in Corinth, I think it's pretty likely that the Lord Jesus Christ has something to say to the church at Calvary on the matter of words and language.

This matters for every Christian because we are called by God to be different and to please God with all our words. Colossians 3.17 says, and whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

[23 : 08] What a challenge, and what an encouragement. What an opportunity for us to please God by the way that we speak and communicate.

And the Bible is very straightforward about this, and says for a start, there are things that we have to stop doing. This is addressed to everybody. And I draw attention to these verses, and the ones in red I suggest that we look at together.

So Ephesians chapter 4, verses 25 to 27. I'm going to read a little bit selectively, because this is about the things that we need to stop doing.

Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood. In your anger, don't sin. Don't let the sun go down while you're still angry.

Do not give the devil a foothold. Verse 29, do not let any unwholesome, unclean talk come out of your mouths.

[24 : 43] Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling, and slander, along with every form of malice.

Strong words. Where are we on the spectrum of all that? you may not have a problem with unclean language, but you might have a problem with slander.

You might not have a problem with rage, but you might have a problem with bitterness. Colossians 3, verses 8 and 9.

Colossians 3, Now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these, anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.

Do not lie to each other. 1 Timothy 5, 13. He's talking about the younger widows.

[26 : 00] He says to Timothy, gives some guidance as to how they should be encouraged, worried about them because verse 13, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house.

Not only do so, do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies saying things they ought not to. Not just younger widows.

Gossip equals sharing. I share for prayer. But maybe you're just enjoying the moment as well. a couple more verses there you could look at.

Things to start doing. Ephesians 4, we go back on that passage that we looked at just now. 29. Not unwholesome talk, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

verse 32. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

[27 : 28] In the book of Philippians chapter 2 verse 14, in the midst of this mighty chapter about the humility and the glory of Jesus Christ, Paul slots in this thought, do everything without complaining or arguing.

Do everything without complaining or arguing so that you may become blameless and pure children of God without fault shining like stars in the universe.

Where does that start? By avoiding complaining or arguing. we've all fallen into that trap.

If you're in any sort of an organization where there's a hierarchy of any sort at all, normally workplaces, in churches, there's little complaints.

Everybody complains. Everybody moans. That's just the way it is. that's the culture around here. Paul says, no.

[28 : 51] The Christian culture is actually not that. But I'm a slave. I am really a slave. Shouldn't I be allowed to complain?

Paul says, no. you shine by showing another life, by being a different person, by not complaining or arguing.

That's really powerful in this world. Colossians 4.6. let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

I like this verse. I don't really understand it, but I like it. I like it because it seems to have potential. There's something here which is very special and helpful.

I think it's about this. I think that if we become people who are bitually gracious in our speech, careful in our language, appropriate in what we say, when those little pressure points come, when those little challenges come to us, we won't fly off the handle in the way that people normally do when they're put under pressure and just say anything, but we'll say something appropriate and gracious, really apt.

[30 : 28] Wouldn't that be a blessing? As I look back on the past week, I can think of moments where I wish I hadn't said that.

I was in a meeting on Friday and we were just having a bit of a joke and at some point I said something and I thought, that's not quite right. I had to say I'm being a bit facetious here. And no one took it the wrong way but I just felt, could have done better there, could have done better. Not easy, is it? I was in a two and a half hour meeting a week ago and the agenda for that meeting was the fact that the client had a problem with something we'd done. there were five or six of us in the room.

That meeting could have gone in all kinds of different ways but I had to say praise God and they weren't Christian people but everybody worked extremely hard with their language.

There was only one moment in that meeting where you just felt this can go badly wrong and everybody just held back and was just very careful with their language.

[31 : 43] We came to the end of that meeting and it was exhausting frankly. It was exhausting to actually be in control of your words rather than just saying what you want to say. It could have ended with a shouting match.

It could have ended with slam doors instead of which it was actually a very productive meeting and what was a recipe for a big bust up turned out to be a strengthening of a relationship.

I really want to encourage that thought for you in your workplaces wherever you are. Be careful with your language.

I just want to slot this little example in to help you in your families, your family situations. Families, children. Not really tying in particularly with anything here apart from the fact of being very careful with what you say, not in front of the children.

You know what I mean? Not in front of the children. I had a really happy childhood and my parents were extremely careful in the way that they protected us from certain sorts of conversation.

[32 : 57] But I do remember one day when my mother lost it with her mother because her mother lived with us. And I just remember how searing that was upon me to hear the upset, to see the tears going on in that house.

It was completely honest. You know, it was all sorted. But it really hurt me very deeply because it was so unusual. And it was just at that moment that something had happened which it should not have happened.

I shouldn't have seen that. Be careful in the family. Be so careful in the workplace about this culture of complaint.

Be careful in the church, in your relationships with people. We know each other very well. If you're in a church like this for any period of time, you get used to yourself.

Completely comfortable. But it's interesting that I think it's in Romans where Paul says, respect one another and recognize that these are brothers and sisters for whom Jesus Christ died.

[34 : 16] They're not just so and so. They're people for whom Jesus Christ died. To have that high respect and honor for one another.

So we're not careless in our relationships with each other at all. Even though we've got so used to one another and all our little ways. And we're all on a journey.

And this is the encouragement of these challenges here in scripture. This is a journey of putting off and putting on. Putting aside and embracing. Not being content with where we're at, but saying, yeah, there are things that I need to address by the help of God's spirit.

If I've had a language problem in the past, if I've got a temper problem, I need by God's spirit to be able to deal with that. You must deal with it.

And equally, how can I positively build one other up? How can I positively do this? What can I say to someone? What email, Twitter, text message can I send to someone that will encourage them at this point?

[35 : 30] In the church family, God by his spirit puts those prompts upon our hearts and helps us to do exactly that. And as we come together and we can relate to each other, we build one another up.

We change someone's day. I still remember in my last church, busy pastor, and he just scribbled a note to me one day.

It was just a couple of lines, but it meant an enormous amount to me. It really did. It actually changed my attitude towards him in some ways. He'd actually been gracious enough to actually do that particular little task.

He'd done it. In these ways, the kingdom of God grows. In these ways, God is pleased. In these ways, he is glorified.

In these ways, the world is rebuked. There's enormous help from the book of Proverbs. I've given you those pink sheets so you can look at it.

[36 : 40] I've had a lot of help here from a book which that's referring to there. I can't remember what it says now, what the title of the book is. If you get hold of it, you'll be blessed by it. Just good to read those ones.

Let's just look at the question of few words. Proverbs 10 verse 19. Proverbs 10 verse 19. When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.

It's a kind of law of statistics, isn't it?

If you talk a lot, something's bound to leak out sometime. How about calmness, calm words?

Proverbs 25 verse 15.

15. 15. 15. 15. Through patience, a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone. [37 : 57] It's a fantastic picture, isn't it? Through patience, a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone.

suggestion here that you can achieve a great deal more in life, not by thumping tables, kicking people, but actually just sowing a very powerful thought.

Let's look at the last one there, Proverbs 16 verse 24, words to be sweet. Proverbs 16, 24. pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and healing to the bones.

You can bypass the national health. I really think there is a big direct relationship between healthy language and healing of the whole person.

when you think about it, this is a great subject, isn't it? The passage in James is rather frightening, but this is a great subject, not to be avoided, to be embraced, because you can start right away.

[39 : 27] You can start right away. There's maybe apologies you need to make to somebody. You may need to apologize to somebody, which is good. If you've hurt somebody by your words, well, you should apologize to that.

This isn't easy, as we know. In fact, nothing but the supernatural power of God can make us different, but he can. But he can. And this is to be our aspiration, our joy and delight, to be the people of God who please him.

By our words, let's pray. So our Father, please speak to us, put upon our hearts the things that you want us especially to note.

May we be able to put off what is wrong, and to put on what is right. May we please you in everything. May we marvel at the Lord Jesus Christ, who always spoke rightly. May we want to be his followers, and to shine like him.

Help us, Father, in the particular challenged areas of our lives, the areas where we perhaps fail more frequently. Help us when we're outside of these four walls, and we're in situations which can annoy us and frustrate us.

[41 : 00] help us to be strong in the Lord and the power of his might. Give us grace. We pray all this for the glory of the name of Jesus.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.