

Worshipping Inspires Our Everyday Lives

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[0 : 00] Well, I wanted to do something this morning I've been thinking about doing for ages. I've been thinking about getting my tongue pierced.

And I thought, I'm never going to have the confidence to do that on my own. So if I did it when I've got a few friends around me, that's probably better. So poke your tongue out at me. Go like this.

You might want to look away if you're squeamish.

Keep your tongue poked up. Relax, it's not real.

What is genuinely shocking is the real tongue.

Seriously. It's a tiny part of the body, but the impact it can have is shocking. And that's why James wrote what he said.

[1 : 00] He said, if you imagine like a ship, think of the size of a ship and how that can be turned, the direction of that ship can be determined by just a tiny rudder. Or think of an enormous fire in a forest that starts off with just the tiniest spark.

So it is that this seemingly small, insignificant, most of the time we don't even see it, part of the body in our mouths can cause so much destruction, but also it can change so many people's lives for the better.

So we've got it. And with it goes responsibility. Now we're thinking about worship in a series at the moment, and we're thinking particularly then this morning about, well, what might the connection be between how we worship God, and remember, we're not just talking about Sundays here, we're talking about whole life worship, the way in which we use our speech, the way we talk in worship, in prayer.

It's the link between that and all the talking that we do the rest of the time. Several years ago, the writer Selwyn Hughes said this.

I was going to try and paraphrase it, but I think he puts it so well, I'm just going to read it to you. He said this, we become what we say. Why is the tongue so important?

[2 : 28] Because the expression of a thing deepens the impression. A word uttered becomes a word made flesh in us.

We become the incarnation of what we express. Jesus said, for by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

After I saw that a person becomes what he or she says, I have looked at this verse in a different light. If you tell a lie, you become a lie.

The deepest punishment of a lie is to be the one who tells that lie. That person has to live with someone that they cannot trust.

Now look at what I'm saying from the opposite perspective. When we express good things, positive things, loving things, biblical things, these things go deeper into us.

[3 : 36] clear expression deepens impression. There's a story of a brilliant young physicist who tells how he often would discuss complex issues relating to physics with his wife, who was not a physicist and who doesn't know the first thing about the subject.

He said, I describe in detail to her what I am doing and she doesn't understand a word. But sometimes when I'm through, I do.

If it is true that we become the incarnation of what we express, then how careful we ought to be to ensure that what we say is guarded and governed by truth, integrity and kindness.

Always remember, every word you utter becomes flesh in you. In all frankness, how do you feel inwardly after you've said something negative about somebody?

Or maybe after you've had an argument with them? If you get a bad feeling inside, I think that only goes to demonstrate something of what Selwyn Hughes was saying there.

[5 : 13] I'm going to think firstly of the impact of negative speech and then think of the impact of positive speech. And there's two things that come to mind. The positive is kind of the mirror image, if you like, of the negative or the other way around, whichever you want to look at it.

But there's two expressions of negative speech that I want to suggest. But they can be damaging not only to others but also to ourselves. And these two expressions of negative speech are firstly gossip and second criticism.

Let's just think about those. Think firstly about gossip. Let's be really, really honest about this. If we overhear a conversation in which gossip is taking place, who among us doesn't really honestly feel attracted and drawn in to that conversation at some level?

There's something intriguing about it. Somebody is talking about someone else. We know that's someone else and we want to know what's being said about them. There's just something inside us that finds that really, really hard not to be drawn into the conversation.

And if it happens to be negative things about that person and particularly if it's somebody that has, we've been on the receiving end of their negativity before, we kind of feel this sense of wanting to know a little bit more, a sense of reassurance that someone else has noticed that negative thing about them as well.

[6 : 46] And perhaps there's something deep down in us that when we hear gossip, one of the things we find strangely and weirdly comforting about it is that it detracts us for a moment from the realities of our own broken characters.

We like to think about and focus in on someone else's weaknesses because for a few moments at least, our own weaknesses of character are off radar.

But the consequences of talking about others in that kind of way can be so destructive, not only for them, not only for others, but for ourselves.

There's a Jewish story that is told about a man who was always bad-mouthing his rabbi and he had had a particular episode where he'd been spreading really quite malicious gossip about this man behind his back and eventually came to his senses.

He had this bad feeling welling up inside and he just felt he had to do something. In the end he decided to go and see the rabbi and he told him what he'd done and he confessed and he said, I've been bad-mouthing you, I've been saying really bad things about you and I know they're not actually completely true and I'm sorry.

[8 : 05] The rabbi said, I forgive you. He said, yeah, but I want to learn from this. I don't want to be sent away, teach me something, what can I learn from this? The rabbi said, okay, I want you to do this and it's going to sound weird.

I want you to go and find a really sharp knife and I want you to go and get two of the plumpest feather-filled pillows that you can find.

And then I want you to take the two feather pillows and the knife into the town square. And then when you get there, I want you to slit open those pillows and wave them around as hard as you can. The man thinks this is a little bit weird, but he decides to do what the rabbi has told him. So he goes off, he gets these two really plump feather-filled pillows and a knife. He goes into the town square, there's loads of people around, people start to look thinking, what is this bloke doing?

As he slices open these pillows and he flaps them as hard as he can, there's feathers everywhere. He goes back to the rabbi, he tells him that he's done what he asked, he said, now what am I to learn from that?

[9 : 17] The rabbi looks at him, he says, I want you to go back to the square now and I want you to retrieve every last feather and put them back in the pillows.

See, that's what happens with words when we start to talk loosely about others. It gets out there, whether we mean it or not, it does, it's how it works.

I'm rather like trying to go around and pick up feathers afterwards, be sure it will make your own life hard work as well. It's not good. The other form of expression of negative talking that comes to mind is criticism.

I'm a great believer in that old proverb that before you criticise somebody else, you should walk a mile in their shoes. Now, there's two reasons why I believe that is so powerfully true.

You see, if they get to find out that you've been criticising them, firstly, you've walked a mile away from them, secondly, you've got their shoes.

[10 : 33] Seriously, criticism, criticism can be destructive, but there's something deep within us that thinks, but is there a place for positive criticism?

perhaps there is, particularly when we read in the Bible in Leviticus chapter 19 in the Old Testament where it says, you shall rebuke your neighbour and not allow sin upon them.

In other words, perhaps we've got a responsibility to point out something in somebody else that's not right. It would be wrong to not point that out, so where do we go with that? Number of thoughts, firstly, we need to remember that in Leviticus, when we read those very verses that I have just read to you just then, those verses are immediately preceded with warnings against spreading slander and warnings against nursing inner hatred.

That's really important stuff because we can get the wrong end of the picture. I want to read to you another quote, it comes from one of my favourite books in the last few years called Sacred Cows Make Great Barbecues.

It challenges some of what we think is popular wisdom among Christians and one of them, the bit I want to read to you now, in this book the author, Dave Gilpin, talks about how in recent years we've had this idea that we've got to be real, we've got to be real and authentic with each other, which there's a truth in that, but that gets translated to mean the moment you think it, you've got to go and say it.

[12 : 19] He says this, when someone comes up to me and says, can I be honest with you, I fear the worst.

I figure that I'm about to have a truckload of disappointment, discontentment and general disarray tipped all over my lap. It may be honest with how the person feels.

It's often not honest with the real state of what their new hearts should be in Christ and the transforming and active work of the Holy Spirit. Being sincere to emotion is okay.

Being sincere to circumstances is okay. But it's not the basis of a powerful life of an overcomer who draws strength down from heaven and breaks through to new levels of success and victory.

That comes from sincerity to faith and the word of God. Emotional sincerity must be tempered by real truth. There's a time for a healthy disclosure of pent-up emotion, but it should be kept in the private place of either your personal devotion or, on rare occasions, your inner circle of loved ones who are not offended by your general rattiness.

[13 : 45] Usually, your emotions never carry with them the whole truth or the right truth, and that's why, when flaunted under the guise of sincerity, they become detrimental and often destructive.

It only takes a few seconds of vindictive honesty to cut someone's head off. It takes a lot longer, however, to sew it back on again, and even then, it doesn't quite swivel the way it used to.

Now, let's just come back to this theme of, is there a time when it is right to speak to others?

Because there it is. Being a Christian is not about just going through life, never saying an uncritical word about anything or anyone, there's a sense in which, of course, we have a responsibility to one another.

If somebody you truly love, you're looking out for them, they're going wrong, there is a responsibility to point that out. So how can we somehow put a brake on that human instinct to talk negatively in a way that can do the very best that we can to ensure that if we're going to be critical, it's done in a genuinely, and I mean that genuinely loving way?

How can we speak the truth, but speak it in love? Well, there's no easy, straightforward answer to that question, but I'll just share with you my own personal thoughts on that, which I try my very best to apply, and I don't always get this right.

[15 : 21] But the first principle, I think, is to slam brakes on. So if you've got it inside you and you're just bursting to get those words out, just try and put the brake on.

And by that, I don't mean just a few seconds, it may be a few days. Genuinely. If you can, take it away, think about it, and pray about it, and as you do so, ask the following questions.

First, what's your motivation for bringing a word of criticism, or what could be construed as criticism, to another human being? What is your motivation?

Is your desire to point out the problem motivated by a genuine, genuine concern for them?

Secondly, ask the question, how would you feel if you were to be on the receiving end of the words of advice or counsel that you are thinking to share with them?

If it was reversed, how would you feel? And third, and this is going to sound like I'm being facetious, but it's a genuinely serious question.

[16:38] Ask yourself, am I deep, deep within me, am I secretly getting pleasure out of this? negative thinking, negative talking nurtures and nurses negative thinking within us.

It's as simple as that. So when it comes to the call to be worshipping Christians, not just as an activity that we engage with on a Sunday, but something that should infiltrate our entire lives, what might we say then about the more positive dimension of the way we talk?

What might we say about positive speech? Well, whereas we've just been thinking of the danger of gossip and the danger of criticism, let's think now about the power of encouragement and the power of being thankful.

See, encouragement, bringing words of encouragement to a human being, may not seem like a big deal to us as the person saying it to the other, but it can make all the difference.

I had a story about a minister. He'd served quite a few years in a church and he was moving on to a new appointment. The church was having a send-off due for him and his family and there was a bit of a bun fight afterwards and they were serving tea and a lady came up to this minister over a cup of tea and said, you know, your successor, the next minister that's coming, you know, I know, I just know he's never going to be as good as you.

[18:18] Looking rather embarrassed but also slightly flattered, the minister sort of said, well, you know. But before he could say anything, the lady continued. She said, I know he won't be as good as you because I've been in this place now for several decades.

I've seen seven ministers come and go and every one of them has been worse than the previous one. The power of positive speech, bringing encouragement to somebody else, actually not only encourages them, it encourages us.

When we speak positively to somebody else, it makes us feel good. If you say something to somebody else that is a positive word, I can guarantee you will come away from it feeling better.

The other thing, the last thing, is thankfulness. You see, thankfulness and positive talking and positive thinking go hand in hand.

I'll share with you what coincidentally happens to be another Jewish story, if I like it. It's a story that's told about a woman called Anna Kebich.

[19:43] And Anna Kebich was known to be somebody who was always, always complaining. And she used to use the most rich imagery to describe her problems.

All day long she would be talking about, you know, I have so little money, my clothes are like rags. She would say, my back is so stiff, it's as stiff as the walls of Jericho.

My house is so small I can hardly move around in it. I have to walk so far every day to draw water that my feet are swollen like melons.

My children, they never ever come and see me. Well, she was known for this. She would always, always complain, never say anything positive. And one day she was in the middle of complaining to herself and feeling sorry for herself, saying, I've so little money, my clothes are like rags, my back is as stiff as the walls of Jericho.

My house is so small, I cannot move around inside. I have to walk so far that my feet swell up, that my feet are like watermelons, and my children never come and see me. And on top of all that, she noticed that her nose was itching.

[20:51] It was itching, and no matter how hard she scratched at her nose, it would not stop itching. So she went to her rabbi. She said, Rabbi, rabbi, everything is going wrong.

The rabbi looked at her and said, I suppose you're going to tell me all about it. She said, too right, I'm going to tell you all about it. My back is as stiff as the walls of Jericho. My house is so small, I cannot move around inside it.

I have no money. I live in rags for clothes. My children never come and see me. I have to walk so far every day to draw water that my feet are swollen like melons. And to top it all, I woke up this morning morning and my nose is itching and it won't stop.

Rabbi, what am I to do? The rabbi said, Anna Kebich, you have what is known as the Kebich itch. The complainer's itch. And its meaning is this. And I want you to think about it every time you scratch your nose. However you consider yourself, so you shall be.

[22:00] Well, she wasn't really that satisfied with that advice, but she knew it was as good as it was going to get, so off she went. She went to bed that night. The next day she woke up and to her astonishment, she noticed that there had been several changes overnight.

She had radically increased in size, such that her arms were poking out of the windows of her house and her legs were jutting out through the door. She literally could not move inside. She was dressed in rags, not clothes.

Her back, she turned around, seemed to be rather solid. She noticed it had turned into the walls of Jericho. She looked down to the end of her legs and she saw two melons rather than feet.

And her nose was itchy. She scratched away at that nose and as she did so, she remembered the words of her rabbi. However you consider yourself, so you shall be.

As she scratched away, she thought about her life and she thought about the lives of several other people that she knew for the first time. She thought to herself, you know, okay, I don't have a lot of money but I get by.

[23 : 07] I know a lot of people who have a lot less than me. She thought, you know, my house is small. But actually it's quite cozy.

I don't know I'd manage anything that much bigger. She thought to herself, you know, my back is stiff at times but I'm a lot healthier than a lot of people are at my age in life.

She thought about that walk that she took every day to draw water and she said, sometimes I feel tired but I guess there are things about that walk that I enjoy and if I didn't take that walk each day, I'd never see the sunshine, I'd probably stay indoors feeling even more sorry for myself.

And as for my children, well, I wish I did see them more but I suppose there's something inside of me that at least makes me thankful that they are independent enough to take care of themselves.

And she thought of these things and as she scratched away at her nose, so things began to change again. She came back to normal sides.

[24 : 17] The rags went and were replaced with clothes. The wool turned into a back. The melons were gone. Howsoever you consider yourself, so you shall be.

Whenever the rabbis tell that story, they always finish by saying this, may your noses itch

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