

Proverbs A La Carte: Speech

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[0:00] wise and righteous speech using my own speech. And so, Father, one thing that I do know is that nobody here today needs to hear my words.

They don't need to hear my thoughts or what I have to say about speech. But they do need to hear yours. They need to hear your word and what you have to say about it.

So, Lord, I pray that you would use this very flawed vessel to speak your word and that you would give us eyes and ears to hear your word. In Jesus' name, amen. You guys may be seated.

Good morning. I was thinking this morning that today was supposed to be our last day at Abiding Acres, and yet now next week is, and yet here we find ourselves today.

We make plans, but we do what the Lord wills, and the Lord wills that we are here today. So, today we're continuing our series in Proverbs and looking at what it has to say about speech.

[1:04] Now, over this past week, I've been thinking and trying to come up with some sort of illustration or story about why speech is important.

And in fact, it's actually been pretty hard for me, actually.

It was actually the very last thing that I put together for this sermon because I couldn't come up with a story. I came up with a few things initially, and I was working on them and mulling them over, and eventually I tossed them out.

And so, I kind of went back to the drawing board, and I thought a little bit more, and I came up with a few more ideas, and I was working on them, and I eventually tossed those out as well. And so, yesterday I was thinking and praying about it and, quite honest, feeling pretty nervous because I still had nothing, and I realized something.

I'm not sure that I need a story or illustration to make us understand the importance of speech. And the reason is because we have a lot of experience with it.

There's no story that I can give that can capture the importance of speech because we live it every day. All of us have experience of bad speech.

[2:17] We have the experience when somebody speaks a word to us, and it wounds us deeply. We all have the experience when a particular comment someone might make to us might shape the way that we think or feel about ourselves for years to come.

Or, we've all had the experience in which someone's tone of voice might tell us everything we need to know about how they feel about us.

And we've had good experiences too, haven't we? We have experience when a kind word might brighten our day. Or maybe a particular encouragement from a teacher or a mentor completely changes the direction of our life.

Or, we've had the experience in the blessing of when a prayer or a particular scripture is given to us from a brother and sister in Christ in a time of need.

I know that Mike, Eric, and I experienced that last week. So we've had experiences. We all had a lot of experience with good and bad speech.

[3:22] And yet, with all that experience, don't you think we would be good at it? Especially us as Christians, don't you think this should be an area that we are knocking out of the park?

But we don't, do we? Our tongues seem to be a particularly difficult area to handle. And this has been true for Christians of every age, but it seems particularly true for us, doesn't it?

And if the tongue is naturally difficult to tame, the internet sure doesn't make it any easier, does it? So, I don't think I really need an illustration, because we all understand the importance of speech.

We live it. You only have to live so long to understand it. So, before we get into it, let me help us kind of orient ourselves just a little bit. Maybe you're watching online or here, and this is the first time you're joining us.

And so, let me just kind of frame our time together this morning. We've spent the last several weeks going through the first nine chapters of Proverbs, verse by verse.

[4:33] And in these chapters, we have a father who's writing to a son. And if we could kind of summarize what the father's saying. He's basically saying this. The father is calling the son to leave his youthful life behind and choose the righteous wise and not the path of the wicked fool.

So, after those first kind of eight, nine chapters, we've got a huge chunk of Proverbs. Chapters 10 through 29. And it's a collection of these kind of hundreds of different Proverbs.

And they kind of discuss how we apply wisdom to our life. And because this section of Proverbs is kind of somewhat randomly put together, it doesn't really lend itself to go verse by verse.

And so, we've been looking at these areas topically. And so far, we've looked at self-control and anger. Today, we're looking at speech. In the future, we're going to look at justice and diligence. So, our goal this morning is pretty simple. We're going to investigate what God's Word has to say about speech. And then we're going to try to apply that wisdom to our lives.

[5:43] And that last part's really important. Because typically, when we use the word wisdom, we typically use it to mean that someone who's collected a lot of knowledge.

But that's not quite what the Hebrew word means. It means a little bit more than that. It's not just a collection of knowledge. It's an applied application of that knowledge.

So, you can think about a craftsman. A craftsman not only has the knowledge how to build a house, but he actually has the skill to build it.

So, we don't want to just collect information about speech today. We also want to see how to skillfully apply it. So, I've got three simple points here this morning.

One, the first point is, what does Proverbs have to say about the characteristics of foolish speech?

Two, what does Proverbs have to say about the characteristics of righteous speech?

[6:48] And three, how do we skillfully apply it to our lives? So, let's jump in. First, foolish speech. Proverbs has a lot to say about foolish speech, and not surprisingly, it usually says foolish speech comes from the wicked or fools.

And when we study the foolish speech, we can start to see some characteristics of it. And so, the first characteristic of foolish speech is that it's violent and destructive.

Listen to how Proverbs describes foolish speech. Proverbs 12, 6. And I'll be giving a lot of verses. It's probably best just to write the verse, or write the verse, chapter and verse down, and not trying to write the whole thing.

So, Proverbs 12, 6. The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood. Proverbs 11, 11. By the blessing of the upright, a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked, it's overthrown.

Proverbs 16, 27. A worthless man plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire. So, foolish speech is when we have a particular intention to injure.

[8:07] It's the type of speech that's looking for an opportunity to strike and draw blood. It's when we make a particular response or have a tone or an attitude that's crafted in a way that it can inflict the most damage to the other person.

Foolish speech has the intention of destruction always kind of lurking beneath the surface. So, this isn't just a random misplaced word.

It's not a slip of the tongue. It's speech that has a mission. And in Proverbs 16, it says that the mission is to function like a scorching fire.

Some of the most common language that Proverbs uses to describe the effects of foolish speech is the destruction of a city.

And I don't think I have to provide any examples for us at what the damage a scorching fire can do to a city. Fire devours.

[9:09] It consumes. It takes a once whole structure and leaves it rubble. We understand this imagery, don't we? We've seen it.

We've seen the effects of fire on a city. It destroys. It burns. It tears down. Foolish speech functions in the same way.

It leaves a wake of destruction in its path. But that's not all it does. The destruction not only affects those around the foolish speaker, it actually affects the foolish speaker himself.

Proverbs 18, 7 says, A fool's mouth is his ruin, and his lips are a snare to his soul. Foolish speech not only consumes like fire those on the receiving end, but it also burns up the fool themselves.

It's like a cancer that's breaking you down inside. And the stakes are high. Proverbs 18 says that the foolish speech is a snare to his soul.

[10:17] This is much bigger than just hurt feelings. This has spiritual consequences. In fact, Proverbs 11, 19 says, Now, the Hebrew word for destroy here in this Proverbs, it's interesting because it's used elsewhere in the Bible.

And if we look where that other word is used, it kind of gives us an idea of what type of destruction is talking about in this Proverbs. So the word used for destruction here is the same word used for the destruction of the world in the flood.

It's the same word that is used for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis chapter 18 and 19. So this isn't just bumps and bruises.

This is decimation. It's not just about wounding and hurting each other. It's about a spiritual laying waste of each other.

Foolish speech is destructive and violent, destroying like a fire those around you as well as the fool himself. Well, you might be saying to yourself right now, Well, I'm glad that's not me.

[11:36] I don't have any intentions like that, right? When I talk to people, I don't want to destroy them. I don't have violent intentions. Well, maybe those aren't always our intentions, but those are the consequences of foolish speech.

And let's not be so fast to give ourselves the benefit of the doubt. But Proverbs also talks about foolish speech not being blatantly destructive or violent.

So our second characteristic of foolish speech is that it's deceptive. Listen to Proverbs 26, verses 24 through 26.

Whoever hates disguises himself with his lips and harbors deceit in his heart. When he speaks graciously, believe him not, for there are seven abominations in his heart.

Though his hatred be covered with deception, his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly.

Sometimes foolish speech is spoken in a way that can disguise the hate and deceit that's hiding in someone's heart.

[12:49] Where sometimes foolish speech might be flowing from our lips, or sorry, gracious speech might be flowing from our lips when sinful motives are sitting in our hearts.

The point is, let's not be so quick to rule ourselves out of the category of the foolish speaker because we don't have what we would consider blatantly violent or destructive speech.

We need to do some heart work. Each of us needs to check inside of ourself and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to us.

Is there any time that our speech is just fancy decoration that is hiding a heart that actually wants some destruction for the other person? I mean, think about Jonah.

Jonah was a guy who went to Nineveh, Nineveh, and he is preaching repentance to the Ninevites. He's preaching, you need to repent.

[13:51] You need to give in to your sin. You need to repent from your sin. All the while, he doesn't want God to show them mercy at all. Does that describe us?

Does that describe me? We need to ask deep down, do we actually want to see people broken when we speak? And I'm not talking about a holy brokenness when the Spirit convicts us.

I'm talking about, do we want to be in a Hollywood movie scene where we get to kind of charge into the room and we tell it like it is and then we slow motion walk out of there while the room explodes

behind us?

Do we want to bring destruction? We have to ask the Holy Spirit to search our soul because foolish speech is violent and destructive and sometimes its intentions can be deceptively hidden, not only from ourselves, but from others.

So, I think there's a question we can be asking ourselves. We can use our fellow brothers and sisters to help us with this question. What effect do you see my speech having on other people?

[15:07] Maybe we don't see the destructive nature of our speech so we can use the help of our brothers and sisters and we need the help of the Spirit.

This is something that can be difficult and hard and without the Spirit opening your eyes to your destructive speech, if you have any, you won't be able to see it.

So, the third characteristic of foolish speech is that it is constant. Now, before you start nudging your spouse or person next to you because they're a consistent talker, Proverbs is not talking about the person who just likes to talk a lot or maybe an extrovert.

This is talking about someone who is constantly arguing. They never stop. They keep speaking and speaking and speaking and they never let it go because they have to be right.

So, this isn't talking about someone who's just talkative. This is a perpetual, argumentative manner in which they speak with others.

[16:22] Proverbs 20, verse 3 says, It is to one's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel. So, the foolish speaker is one who is not looking for resolution in their discussion.

They're looking for submission. They want the other person to wave the white flag and they're doing that not because they've been convinced of the person's argument, but because they just want it to stop.

The unrelenting, argumentative speech does not flow out of a conviction to hear gospel truths proclaimed, but simply because they want their own opinion heard.

Proverbs 18, 2 says, A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion. Sometimes we use the modern phrase, Boy, that person sure likes to hear himself talk.

And that's kind of what this proverb is getting at here. It describes the foolish speaker as one who enjoys expressing his own opinion, but has absolutely no humble intention of actually hearing the other person and engaging with them.

[17:50] And by humbly listening, I don't mean that we are agreeing or validating everything the other person says. There are some absolute truths that we as believers will not compromise on.

However, we do take pleasure in understanding people so that we can preach the gospel to them. But the fool is only interested in expressing his own opinion.

Proverbs 29, 9 expresses this a little bit more vividly. It says, A wise man has an argument with a fool and only rages and laughs and there is no quiet.

Can you guys see how it's describing the constant nature of foolish speech? It's not aiming at anything specific. One moment it rages, the next moment it laughs, and all the time it never stops because it has no righteous end.

So again, let's not be so quick to dismiss ourselves from that category of speech. This constant argumentative speech may take on some subtle forms.

[19:16] Maybe it looks like gossip. Instead of speaking directly to the other person, in order to gain understanding and reconciliation, do we talk behind their backs, criticizing and belittling them?

Or maybe when we speak, we're constantly spinning the information to make ourselves look better. If we're constantly spinning to make ourselves look better, we're not looking for understanding and reconciliation, let alone we're not speaking the truth.

Or maybe we're constantly condemning others without the corresponding reconciliation. Are we constantly pointing out the wrong, pointing out the wrong, pointing out the wrong, and never pointing that person to the reconciling power of Christ?

We are absolutely called to condemn sin. But foolish speech does this without the larger context of speech that points a sinner towards their need of a Savior.

In the same manner that I am a sinner in need of a Savior. So foolish speech is destructive, it is deceptive, it is constant, it wrecks havoc wherever it goes, and it eventually consumes the one who spews it.

[20:49] So church, I spent a little time on this area because this isn't a game. Our speech is not a game. Sinful speech is real sin and it carries with it the devastating effects of real sin.

And we need to take it seriously. So let's move on to righteous speech. The first characteristic of righteous speech is that it is humble and gentle.

And when you look at Proverbs, Proverbs has a very poetic nature to it. A lot of times in Hebrew poetry, you've got comparison type sentences. So the first sentence is compared to the second sentence, and sometimes those comparisons are similarities, and sometimes those comparisons are opposites.

And Proverbs use a lot of those opposite comparison ways. So listen to Proverbs 15.1. A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Righteous speech is gentle. Or Proverbs, this particular proverb uses the word soft instead of gentle.

Now if you're like me, the first thing that pops into your head when you hear soft answer is Mr.

[22:14] Rogers. Hello boys and girls, would you like to be my friend? That's not what soft answer is talking about.

Proverbs is not encouraging us to walk around speaking to each other in these gentle whispers.

Soft answer does not necessarily indicate volume, but it indicates control and effectiveness.

A soft answer is one that is spoken in a manner that will quench another person's anger. Water. It's like putting water on a fire to suffocate it.

Righteous speech is gentle in the way that it is direct, but loving. It's humble in the way that it is bold, but not arrogant.

I can't help but think of the way that Jesus speaks in Matthew 22. And this is when the Pharisees are coming to him and they're asking him about paying taxes.

[23:23] And in Matthew 22. 15, it says, the Pharisees came to entangle him in his words. So you see those deceptive intentions?

They came to entangle him. And when you hear they came to entangle him, you should think they came with foolish speech. And they asked him, they said, is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?

And what they were really trying to do is they were trying to put him into a no-win situation. They really didn't care what his answer was. They just wanted an answer that would get him in trouble.

And so you can also think they spoke without wanting to understand. More foolish speech. So what did Jesus do? He didn't just roast him on the spot for their deceptiveness.

He didn't kind of timidly say, well, you know, that's not really a fair question. He gave them a soft answer. He said, give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's.

[24:29] Do you remember what a soft answer produces? It turns away wrath. And so in verse 22 it says, when they heard it, they marveled and they left him and went away.

Jesus gave a soft answer that turned away the wrath of the Pharisees. His answer wasn't weak. It wasn't timid. It wasn't shy.

It wasn't unrealistically bubbly. It was controlled. It was direct. It was gracious and gentle. Jesus could have absolutely lit them up for their deceptiveness.

He would have been right in doing that. But he gave an answer that was filled with truth given in love. It was direct and loving.

It was bold but not arrogant. And did you notice the power of a soft answer? Look at the effect it had. They walked away and they marveled.

[25:30] Humble and gentle answers are powerful. They carry weight.

Proverbs 25 15 tells us, with patience a ruler may be persuaded and a soft tongue will break a bone.

I see a lot of broken bones. It's kind of hard to break bones. A soft tongue has the power to break bones. But did you notice something in the beginning of that proverb?

With patience. Righteous speech is humble, gentle, and powerful but it requires patience. And to be quite frank, this is the complete opposite of our hot take society.

A hot take is when you kind of give your opinion and typically it's a pretty strong opinion and you give it as fast as you can. Someone asks you and you just shoot off the cuff. You want to be the first to say it.

Hot takes are the absolute opposite of a soft answer. Yet righteous speech is characterized as humble and gentle and powerful.

[26:38] our second characteristic of righteous speech. It is restrained. So if foolish speech is constant and Proverbs then portrays righteous speech as extremely cautious and restrained.

Proverbs 10 19 Sin is not ended by multiplying words but the prudent hold their tongue. To be quite honest, this can be really difficult, can't it?

Holding our tongues and not speaking might be one of the hardest things we have to do in life. I don't think that's an exaggeration. Proverbs though has a lot to say about restrained speech.

Proverbs 17 10 It tells us not to rehash old events. Be restrained. Whoever covers an offense seeks love but he who repeats a matter separates close friends.

sometimes the wisest thing we can do is not say anything and that's hard. Our restrained speech might also be in the sense of who we speak to.

[27:51] Do we gossip or do we speak to the person directly? Proverbs 25 9-10 Argue your case with your neighbor himself. Do not reveal another secret.

secrets. But it's not only who we talk to that the restraint of our speech might be connected to it's also the where and the when do we speak.

Do we speak to a person now in the moment or do we show some restraint and speak to them later? Do we speak to the person over social media or should we be restrained and speak to them in person?

Where and when matters and it takes restraint. It's easy to open the mouth and let it fly but it's hard to be restrained.

But Proverbs tells us that righteous speech is restrained. Third characteristic of righteous speech and church this is I think the biggest point. This is the defining characteristic I think of righteous speech.

[29:00] when we speak it should be giving life to those who hear it. Righteous speech is life giving. Proverbs uses some of its most vivid language when speaking of righteous speech.

And Proverbs 10 11 compares righteous speech to a well of life. Proverbs 15 4 it compares it to a tree of life.

life. So in both images we have this idea of something that sustains life. It would be absolutely necessary for a well to be around in order to sustain life for a family and its livestock.

A tree would provide shelter, shade, a source of food. These images were used because it would be understood by the original readers that life flourishes around wells that give water and trees that give fruit.

And so in a similar way life flourishes around the life giving words of the righteous speaker. So you may be asking yourself well how does righteous speaking give life?

[30:20] How does that actually work? that's a good question. Is it because it's just nice and warm and gentle and doesn't hurt people's feelings? Is it because that positivity is just kind of better than negativity?

No, it's not any of those. Righteous speech gives life because it points us to the source of life, Jesus. The moment we start hearing well of life or tree of life, we should start thinking about the gospel of John.

John is constantly speaking of Jesus as the source of life. In fact, in the gospel of John, we get Jesus as famous as I am, several of which speak about him being the source of life.

Jesus says in John 6, I am the bread of life. He says in John 11, I am the resurrection and the life.

He says in John 14, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

He says in John 10, I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. So how does righteous speech give life? Because wise speech springs forth from and points to the giver of life, Jesus.

[31:39] Church, if Jesus is the source of life and he has redeemed us back, unifying himself with us, God, then how could our words not be coated with life?

Scripture tells us that out of the heart the mouth speaks. Luke 6, 45 says, the good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good.

The evil person out of the evil treasure produces evil. For it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. The mouth is an indicator of the heart.

The mouth reveals the heart. The mouth can make visible the unseen heart. So if our mouths spew forth foolish speech, what does that say about our hearts?

Brothers and sisters, based on God's word given to us in Proverbs, I would plead to you that if our hearts have been raised from death to life by the blood of the Lamb, then out of these newly raised hearts must flow life-giving speech.

[32:47] We must take the path of the righteous speaker, which is humble, gentle, restrained, and life-giving. And we are to avoid foolish speech, which is deceptive, constant, and eventually a ruin to all.

So we've taken some time to look at the various characteristics of foolish speech and wise speech, but that's not good enough. It's not good enough just to have the knowledge of righteous speech and foolish speech.

As I mentioned earlier, we want to be able to skillfully apply that knowledge. So how should we let this knowledge function in our lives?

How do we skillfully apply it? Well, since there's an innumerable amount of scenarios we could go over, I don't want to pick some random scenarios.

What I want to do is I want to look at a proverb and see how it skillfully applies how to live a righteous speech out.

[33:58] So in order to do this, we're going to use Proverbs 26, 45, kind of as our framed example. So Proverbs 26, 4 through 5 says, 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. So this proverb is telling us in one instance to answer a fool and in another instance it's telling us not to answer the fool.

And so what's the deal? Should we answer? Should we not answer? When should we do it? Well, let's take a look. We'll go through this quickly. The key phrase comes in answer the fool according to his folly, which is in both of the sentences.

But the difference is that in each sentence the way in which we answer the fool is different. In the first situation, if we answer the fool using the same speech and tactics they do, we become like the fool ourselves.

Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Yet in the second one, according to his folly, it's saying that we actually give an answer to the foolish things that are being said.

[35:21] So in other words, we name and point out the foolish speech and the destruction that it's causing. We answer the fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

So when we answer a fool, we do so in a way that exposes their foolish speech. But we never answer in a way that makes us become a fool like them.

Therefore, there's a skill in how we answer the fool. So how do we do this practically? So if you're going to answer the fool, or if you're going to answer someone, we might have to ask ourselves a question.

Is my answer going to show the fool his folly, or is my answer acting in the same manner as the fool? And the answer to that will give us whether we should answer them or not.

And guess what? This isn't easy to figure out. It's hard. We can't always do it by ourselves. We need help from faithful brothers and sisters to help us decipher should we answer.

[36:28] So do you have any brothers and sisters you can go to and ask them, should I answer? How is my answer? How is my speech in this situation? Do you have a life group that can support you that you can go to?

Sometimes we don't have the time to do that. And so more importantly, are we praying about these things? Are we asking the Holy Spirit to help us when it comes to righteous speech?

Help us know when we should speak. Help us know when we should hold our tongues. If we're not praying about these things, we need to be. So I think what we can gather from this proverb is that when we speak or when we don't speak, it requires a skillful application.

It requires us to know first what wise speech looks like. It requires us to know what foolish speech looked like. And then knowing those two things helps us to know what path to go to so we can pursue that.

We can take that and apply it to a lot of situations. We can ask ourselves, what does wise speech look like in this situation? What does foolish speech look like in this situation?

[37:38] Am I exhibiting the characteristics of any of those in this situation? I just want to give a word of caution and a word of encouragement as we close when it comes to speaking and when we don't speak.

If we do decide to answer, I just want to give us a quick caution. When we lovingly show the fool their folly, we must be ready to give up our desire to be seen as right in the fool's eyes because it's not going to happen.

We speak truth not because we want to be justified in their eyes, but because we're being faithful to the one who is the ultimate standard of truth. And how about when we don't answer the fool?

Well, to be frank, on the whole, Proverb actually presents arguing with the fool as an unprofitable use of our time, even when our argument or cause is entirely justified.

But I want to encourage you in those times when we don't answer. You might be thinking, well, if we don't answer, don't they win? Well, no, not ultimately. Because God is a righteous and holy God, and he will judge not only the actions of the wicked, but the speech of the wicked as well.

[39:06] When we don't answer, what we're doing is we are trusting in the Lord to intervene by silencing and stopping the foolish speech and vindicating those who have spoken wisely.

God is a righteous judge who will make all things right, if not now and the last day. God will judge not only the actions of the fool, but also the speech of the fool so we can trust him to handle it.

It's not our job to put the fool in their place. That will be accomplished by the risen and reigning king. We must leave it to the Lord to trust in him as he is a righteous judge.

And in fact, isn't this a great summary of what the father is telling the son in the beginning of Proverbs? Basically, the father is telling the son, the Lord is worth trusting even when the way of wisdom doesn't seem the most attractive.

Or even when we can't see the Lord's actions in this world. This is what the fear of the Lord is the beginning of the wisdom looks like. putting our trust in him when we speak or when we don't speak.

[40:18] So before I close and pray, I just wanted to say something quickly. If God's used this time to convict you about your manner of speech and you've already put your faith in Christ, then praise God for his graciousness towards you.

Run to him, confidently confess your sinful speech, and because his mercy is more than your foolish speech. By God's goodness and mercy, he will continue to do a good work conforming your speech to a manner worthy of the gospel.

But if you haven't yet put your faith in Christ, I wanted to be very clear about something. I don't want something to be mistaken. Being more wise in your speech will not save you.

Better speech will not earn you the gift of salvation. It is only by trusting in Jesus and what he did for you on the cross that will save you.

And when God has changed your heart from a heart of stone to a heart of flesh, it is only then that we can have truly righteous speech. So if you want to know more about that, please come down after service and talk to myself or one of the other pastors.

[41:35] We'll be down here. If you're online, contact the church. We'd love to be able to talk to you about that. Let's pray. Father, we are thankful that we have your word that talks to many different areas of our lives.

Father, I pray that your spirit does a work in us, in our hearts, in our bodies, that we are speakers of life.

That when we speak, it doesn't tear down, but it builds up. And ultimately, it points to Jesus and all the glory is given to him. Lord, thank you for your word.

Thank you for the direction that it gives us. In your name, amen.