

Is your mouth a fountain of life?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 April 2021

Preacher: Dave Bott

[0 : 00] Will you pray with me as we come to God's word? Father, we know that we don't live off bread alone, but we live off every word that comes from your mouth.

I pray, Lord, that you would be speaking to us today, and I pray that you'd be transforming our mouths so that we might better reflect you and better at being a source of your life to others around us.

So I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, think back on the last week. Were you in a situation where your words had the potential to do damage to a relationship?

Or the potential to do a lot of good? To relationship. Not a week goes by where we're not in a situation where we have to choose our words carefully, don't we?

We can do a lot of damage or a lot of good. I don't think I've got to convince you of that. But it's complex, isn't it? Do you find it hard, choosing the right words? You say things accidentally sometimes or quite intentionally other times.

[1 : 24] It can be quite complex, choosing the right words. By nature, I know I'm up front now, but by nature I'm on the quieter end personality spectrum.

But I've been learning recently that even silence communicates. It's so complex. You think, just be silent and you can get through life. You can't.

Even silence communicates. It's complex. Choosing words, when to speak, when to be silent. The Bible is a very simple but profound explanation for why our words are so central to our life.

It's because God is a speaking God. He guides and instructs us. He reassures and comforts us. He warns and rebukes us.

He makes promises and covenants. We encounter the living, relational God by his words to us. And when God speaks, he brings forth life.

[2 : 25] We see in Genesis 1, creating this marvellous world by his words. We see it in his promises to us, like John 3, 16. Whoever believes will not perish but have eternal life.

That word, if we believe it, gives us eternal life. God's words are a fountain of life.

Our words matter because we are made in the likeness of this speaking God. Our words are meant to be a fountain of life.

See, I don't think I've got to convince you of the power of words. We've all experienced it. If we've stopped and thought about words that have damaged us, we could all think of some very quickly.

But I wonder if we take full responsibility for our words. Like, have you ever been on the receiving end of a harsh comment, quickly followed by, oh, just joking? Really? Are you just joking?

[3 : 37] Or when you've lost control of your tongue and your words cut the person closest to you, and later you try and make it right, I'm just tired and stressed. I didn't mean that.

I don't think those excuses cut it. I don't think they cut it because those words came from somewhere. Where did they come from?

Why did you say that? You said it for a reason. Now, sometimes we accidentally pick the wrong words and we need to clarify what we mean. It's very good to clarify what we mean.

I'm not talking about that. But where do the words come from? Do we take responsibility for them? It's not like it's like Scrabble, where we've got these tiles of words and the wise person just picks the right ones.

They don't just come to us by chance. And our words don't come to us by our circumstances. I think we love blaming others. I snapped at you only because you're frustrating me.

[4 : 38] I yelled because you're not listening to me. You're just blaming the circumstance. Blaming others has been the excuse since the first human beings and God sees right through it.

So where do our words come from? Where's the source? Who or what's responsible? Jesus tells us in Luke 6.45. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil.

For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. My true inner self, the place of my desires and decisions, wells up and my mouth just lets it fly, either for good or evil.

I must take responsibility for every word I speak. We all must take responsibility for our words.

And the goodness or evil of our words depends on the treasure in our heart. So how do we navigate this complex life where we need to speak but our words have the power to do good or a lot of damage?

[6 : 04] Well, the Lord's given us Proverbs, God's applied wisdom, very specific. How do you live wisely in God's world? Before we jump in and treat these Proverbs as a self-help, quick fix, moralisms to get us through life, we've got to remember the first nine chapters of Proverbs.

We've got to remember the context of this coming to us. The nine chapters implore us, choose the path of life. Don't choose the path of death. Embrace woman wisdom.

Don't be seduced by lady folly. It's the choice between fearing the Lord or giving yourself to some created thing, living for idols.

So Bo took us through last week with how we relate to family. We can see wisdom or folly in how we relate to family. Today we see wisdom or folly on our lips, fearing the Lord or loving idols.

And I think the two lines in these Proverbs, they're opposites, where there's clearly a right choice and clearly a wrong choice. I think in this section there's opposites put together.

[7 : 20] I think that helps us see the choice before us, choosing wisdom or folly. Will we be wise or a fool, righteous or wicked, fear the Lord or love idols?

In every conversation, we're expressing one or the other. Proverbs doesn't give us a middle ground. So let's take a look.

What do your words say about the condition of your heart? Let's just reflect on a few of these Proverbs this morning. The theme of words is just massive, isn't it?

The Bible has a lot to say on it. We're just going to look at a few things. Let's have a look at verse 11. The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence. Some people are like walking, drinking fountains. You encounter them and you go away feeling impacted for the better. Words, they give you words that sympathise with your pain.

[8 : 32] They calm your fears. They correct your misunderstanding. Words that give direction when you just don't know what to do. Words that warn you when you're choosing something that's going to destroy you.

Words that express deep relational connection and commitment to you. Words that advocate for you when you're vulnerable. Words that bring your needs before the throne of grace.

Some people are just a fountain of life. You come into contact with them and you receive life through their words. Do you remember who has helped you understand the grace of God in Jesus? Their words to you. Our words have the power to give life, even eternal life. Obviously through God's words. But we can be a fountain of life.

I was shocked a little by the description of our words doing violence. I got into fisticuffs when I was in grade 9.

[9 : 44] I don't think I won. That's not really the point, is it? I don't consider myself a violent person. But what about my tongue?

It may not be obvious, like swearing at people or threatening or blatant lies, but it can be concealed. It can be hidden. Words that on face value seem fine, but they're hiding knives that want to cut to that person's soul.

If I take an honest look at myself, I have to admit that I have been violent. And often. I want to focus on a particular way we do violence, even within the church.

Jerry Bridges puts this among the group he calls acceptable sins. We accept it, even endorse it. Listen to the damage done in Proverbs 16, 28.

A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends. A whisperer separates close friends.

[11 : 05] Even the closest of relationships, with years of trust built up, can be separated by gossip. So are you a gossip? I really don't want that label to sit on me.

I doubt you want that label either. So I'm just going to rephrase the question. Do you consistently speak to the person you ought to be speaking to, and no one else?

Are you careful with confidential information? If you're critical of what someone else is doing, do you talk to that person, and don't talk to anyone else, try and protect their reputation, or do you share your critical opinion with others?

When you're in conflict with a person, do you try and rally other people to your side to sympathise with you, and in so doing, you poison the reputation of your enemy in the minds of your allies?

Do you consistently speak to the person you ought to be speaking to, and no one else? If not, whatever socially acceptable packaging you put on it, we're doing violence.

[12 : 21] Gossip is like a cancer in the body of the local church. The antidote I found most helpful, personally, is to regularly bring to mind Ephesians 4.29, at least the gist of it.

I don't know it off by heart, but the gist of it I bring to mind all the time. I need to. It says this, So, is your mouth a fountain of life?

People are impacted for the better every time they encounter you, or is it doing violence? Another way our mouths can be a fountain of life or do violence is by what we praise.

Now, in a sense, I'm just bringing this in because today is focused on praise, and singing in particular, but in another sense, it's really close to the heart of being renewed in Christ, in Colossians 3.

So, to be renewed in the image of our Creator, to no longer lie to one another, but speak the truth, is what we've heard right out. This is the instruction of how we can do that.

[13 : 51] Let the word of Christ dwell in us richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

God commands us to praise him. Have you noticed that people love talking about what they're passionate about? You can be in a conversation, and it is dead boring.

It's just really hard to get anywhere in the conversation, and then you land on a topic that the person is actually interested, and boom, you're off and racing, and you can't shut the person up then.

Have you ever been in that kind of situation? People love... We just talk about what we enjoy. It's very natural, isn't it? I'm indebted to C.S. Lewis for understanding why we praise, why we just can't help talk about what we're passionate about.

I'm going to share four of his observations, which I think are true. So first he says this, I think it's true.

[15 : 22] Praise is just everywhere. It's just... It's like we're made for it or something. Obviously we are. We all praise what we enjoy. We just can't help it.

It's very human to do that. His second observation is praise doesn't just express our enjoyment. It completes our enjoyment. So he gives the example...

So he believes that it's not out of... This is his words. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are. The delight is incomplete till it is expressed.

I think that seems to fit. Seems to make sense. Praise completes the enjoyment. His third observation is implication when it comes to God.

So for God to command us to praise him isn't because he's just craving our praise as if he needs it, as if he needs compliments. He's not insecure.

[16 : 28] What he's doing is he's inviting us, come and enjoy me. Come and complete your enjoyment in praising me. He deserves our praise.

He doesn't need it, but he deserves it. And he's inviting us, come and enjoy me. The last observation is that when we praise something, we are implicitly urging others to join us in delighting in whatever it is we're passionate about.

We're implicitly saying, isn't she lovely? Wasn't it glorious? Don't you think that magnificent?

When we praise stuff, when we're passionate about things, we're inviting others to delight in that same thing. So, what can you not help but speak about?

What topics do you love? Now, I'm not suggesting, I'm not implying here that we should only ever praise God. God has made a marvelously diverse world and very different personalities to enjoy different aspects of it.

[17 : 37] I'm not saying just exclusive praise of God, but surely we should want to praise the most valuable thing in existence. So, let me get specific.

Are you passionate about the Bible? Are you just obsessed with it? It's God speaking to us, revealing his heart to us.

Are you obsessed with the Bible? And if you don't yet know the completion of enjoyment in singing, you might not feel musical.

I was there once. I really urge you to just take steps to learn to. And let's face it, our singing now is, how to put it, our motives are mixed, our quality is mixed.

I'll quote C.S. Lewis here in the sense that, or he makes some comment about, really we're just tuning our instruments, getting ready for heaven. It's not like our singing today is perfect, but we're getting ready for that endless praise when Christ returns.

[18 : 52] What we praise with our lips matters, either urging others to delight in God or else our silence and lack of interest in God is really communicating to others, knowing God, yeah, he's okay, I suppose.

when we sing together, we're completing our enjoyment of God together and we're urging one another and any unbelievers who are listening in, look at Jesus, isn't he lovely?

Isn't he glorious? Don't you think he's magnificent? So singing is really crucial part of our meetings, which I think we lost during COVID, didn't we?

Alright, so if we praise what we enjoy and life or violence comes out of the abundance in our heart, then we might presume that this is all pretty mechanical and transparent, that the literal words on our lips automatically show what's in our heart.

They do show what's in our heart, but it may not be immediately obvious. This is where we come to verses 9 and 10. Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out.

[20 : 22] Whoever winks the eye causes trouble and a babbling fool will come to ruin. Words can either have integrity or be deceptive.

Have a listen to, I found Tim Keller's description of integrity really interesting and exposing, so have a listen to what he says and see where you fit with this.

Integrity means being one and whole, not marked by duplicity. People of integrity are not one way in one setting and completely different in another.

Are you a churchgoer on Sunday but ruthless in business during the week? Do you say conservative-sounding things to traditional people but liberal-sounding things to younger adults? Do you present yourself as one kind of person online but live as a very different person in real life? The wise and upright are driven by integrity, consistency of character.

[21 : 28] They have one real self and it is not hidden. It is on display in every setting, in every role. With them, what you see is what you get. I found that really helpful.

can your words consistently be taken at face value? I think if you're like me, I think most people have learnt how to play the crowd.

Like a teenager telling their parents only the bits of what they got up to with their friends so that they don't get in trouble and so that they can go out with their friends next time. Excuse me.

Still there. Or a business person exaggerating the quality or the timing of a job so that they make a sale. Playing to the crowd.

A spouse who says whatever they need to just to get the outcome they want. Or someone who presents only one side of the argument to win over supporters. I reckon we're pretty good at reading people and knowing what they want to hear and playing to the crowd.

[22 : 38] I think if you stop and think about what we're actually doing when we play to the crowd is we're manipulating others. It's a form of doing violence using people for our own advantage.

And the Lord tells us here it is only those who have integrity who walk securely while playing to the crowd will be found out. I've found in the short term that sometimes it's really risky speaking with integrity.

It can cost you in the short term. So how can being deceptive be found out and come to ruin? What happens when a loved one discovers your deception?

Trust is lost so easily isn't it? Or if you're playing to the crowd to be accepted in the group you can never be sure if you're actually accepted because are they accepting you or just the image you're presenting?

I think we can be found out in these ways but much more than this we can be found out by the Lord and he says he will find each person out in the end. He's warned us in Matthew 12 36 Jesus says I

tell you on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak for by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned.

[24 : 23] It's the person of integrity who is secure in the Lord. so do you take your words seriously?

Is your mouth a fountain of life? Do you want to build up others rather than doing violence? Do you want to praise the Lord rather than urging others to praise idols?

Do you want to say words that can be trusted at face value or are you just deceiving people to manipulate them? Have you noticed the painful thing about taking your words seriously?

I can get through a day feeling like a pretty righteous person if I just look at my deeds some days at least but if you take your words seriously believing that the words come from the heart you start to see the violence you start to see the praise of idols you see the playing to the crowd and suddenly the idols of the heart just become so much more obvious and more often.

I want to give you an illustration of this in my own life even within a church setting of how our heart produces words that either come from the treasure of Christ in our heart or the treasure of idols.

[25 : 55] So at a youth group leaders meeting a few years ago now I was leading the meeting and we were trying to plan what would be teaching the youth in the coming term.

So a very honourable good reason to be meeting and talking the whole purpose was to help the youth come to know Christ better. together. Now I put forward a thought through plan for what we should be teaching and members of the team weren't quite so confident in the plan and they gave an alternative but in that moment I felt threatened, personally threatened.

I felt undermined and unappreciated and the frustration came up. Now I could have welcomed the new idea and the combined wisdom of the team.

I could have given a gentle response that unified the team to help us then come to the best outcome for the sake of the youth. In that moment my heart had a choice of what to cherish.

was I going to cherish Christ for the sake of the youth and my fellow leaders or was I going to try and keep control?

[27 : 19] Was I going to try and keep the authority, protect my authority, try and shut down this threat? And sadly in this case the tension in the room just built.

It was quite an unproductive meeting because I had idols driving me. Our words are always expressing the treasure of Christ or the treasure of something else we just have to have.

So how do we fix our words? More self control can minimise the damage. Proverbs 17 28 is helpful here.

Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent and discerning if they hold their tongues. So putting a plug in it will slow down the damage but what will fix the spring?

What will get deep in our hearts and make our hearts wise so that our lips are wise? wise words require a wise heart.

[28 : 52] whether you're wise or not really comes down fundamentally to this do you listen? Are you teachable or are you a babbling fool?

fool? When I tried to picture a babbling fool I first thought of the folk who walked down Beaumont Street just yelling to themselves not really making any sense but then I thought that's not quite right.

A fool in Proverbs is anyone who doesn't fear the Lord. Anyone who fails to acknowledge Jesus Christ denying their creator who see no problem with their sin who despise God's salvation who have no fear of facing God in judgment I don't care how knowledgeable and intelligent and respectable impressive that person is that person is a fool.

They just listen to themselves they're babbling too much to stop and listen to God. even quiet people can be babbling fools only ever listening to themselves but the wise in heart listen they make a priority of receiving first before speaking.

Now relationally I think this obviously looks like understanding what someone is saying before responding but I think it's more than that because we've got the word commandments here that points us to God's words to us.

[30 : 37] The wise in heart listen to the Lord they depend on the life giving words of God to renew them from the inside out the wise in heart look to God's wisdom in Jesus Christ marveling at the only man who committed no sin Peter says this about him he committed no sin neither was deceit found in his mouth that is only true of one man the wise in heart listen to the person who went to the cross not just to pay for our deeds but to die for our violent careless words who paid for them the wise in heart look to Jesus and think where else have I to go when you alone have the words of

eternal life the wise of heart continually sit and drink from the life giving fountain of God's words to us in

Jesus and then our hearts become wise our hearts become renewed so to finish up as you look to the week ahead what will others see in your heart through your words will your words will your mouth be a fountain of life you