

The Tongue (Evening Service)

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- [0 : 0 0] So it's been a busy weekend, busy weekend for our community. So this weekend we've had a parish retreat, we've had a senior youth retreat, and if you have been to one of those and made it to church tonight, well done, I salute you.
- If you're joining us for the first time, we're looking at a series, so we're looking at Proverbs. And so as you remember, the first nine chapters, okay, so the first nine chapters of Proverbs are these speeches from a parent to a youth about the importance of wisdom, and then the rest of the book is sort of about 370-odd just Proverbs, and just actual little Proverbs.
- And so we've spent about a month talking about the first nine chapters, and now we're right into the guts of the book, into the actual little Proverbs themselves. And so moving forward, what it's going to look like over the next month is basically we're going to hit Proverbs topically, because Proverbs is sort of ingenious.
- It sort of scatters ideas throughout it. So we'll come back to that idea. All right, so wisdom. Wisdom's the main idea in Proverbs, but apart from wisdom, the two big things Proverbs talks about are money, which you heard about last week, and the tongue.
- So this week we're going to talk about the tongue, and we're diving mostly into chapter 12, which has a big chunk about the tongue. Right. You've heard the verses read. What's the big message?
- [1 : 2 5] What's the big idea? The big idea of the verses that we read, well, the first big idea is this. Words are very powerful.
- That's my first point, first little section. Words are very, very powerful. If I said, can you guys think of a time where somebody said something painful to you, something that hurt you, right?
- It probably takes you like half a second to come up with something. Or perhaps you can remember things that you said to people, and afterwards, as soon as it came out of your mouth, you thought, oh, man, that did some damage.
- Verse 18. There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.
- See, notice how it describes the damage that rash words do. It doesn't say rash words bruise. It doesn't say rash words deliver a glancing blow.
- [2 : 3 3] Do you see what it says here? It's like a sword. It's saying words. They are rash words. They don't just do something sort of to us. They do something inside of us.
- When I was 14, I think I was about 14, gym class at school, I was in the weight room. I was trying to lift some weights. I was struggling. And this kid came up to me.
- His name was Fraser, I remember. And he came up to me, and he said, come on, Roberts, you don't want to be a wimp your whole life. And I remember that like it was yesterday. And here's why.
- Up until that point, I just thought of myself as a normal kid. I didn't feel particularly different.

Like, I'm 47. I'm 48. I am 40. I think I'm actually quite sick, and I'm quite heavily medicated. I am 48, right?

[3 : 35] And I've always looked quite young for my age. So if I'm 48 and I look like this, you can imagine what I looked like when I was 14, right? So I was very little. But it just wasn't on my radar that that was like, that it mattered.

It wasn't on my radar that this was a bad thing. But these reckless words from my classmate, who probably forgot them five minutes later, said them, forgot about them a couple of minutes later, those words, they did something inside of me, and they changed the way that I viewed myself.

They kind of like branded me. Because up until then, like I said, I just thought I was just like a normal kid. I was a bit smaller, but I was just a normal kid. But then all of a sudden, I was like, no, oh, goodness, I'm a wimp.

And it was like I was introduced to this sort of taxonomy, if you know that word, like this taxonomy, like these all of a sudden, it became very real to me, this idea of classifying people in high school.

And there were the wimpy kids, and there were the clever kids, and there was the kind of the sporty kids and the super cool kids. And on that kind of ladder, he told me I was way down here.

[4 : 49] And it was news to me. I didn't realize that. Folks, words are very powerful. And many of you have stories like this, right? Now, the flip side, words are powerful for bad.

Words are powerful also for good. It was around this time, like verse 18 says, the tongue of the wise brings healing. It was around this time, and this is a ridiculous example. I may have told you this story before. So I'm a teenager, in the midst of feeling like a wimp, and I think my mother knew this.

And I was at the point in my life where girls were sort of on my radar, and it just sort of happened, and feeling very insecure about doing anything about this. And then out of the blue, and again, this will sound weird, slightly creepy, but my mother said to me, she said, Aaron, you have nice lips.

I know, just stay with me here. This is not like a, no, it is a weird thing, right? She said, Aaron, you have nice lips. Girls will like kissing those lips one day.

I know, I know, I know, I know, I know. I hung onto those words for years. For years.

[6 : 06] For years. Because it took a long time to secure any evidence of the truth of that claim. But honestly, it's just a silly throwaway line.

My mum probably, again, forgot she said it like that afternoon. But they were healing words for me that made this very wimpy, insecure kid actually feel like I was desirable.

I'll give you one more example. Verse 25. A good word makes anxious hearts glad. So I've got this mate of mine back in New Zealand. He met a girl. It was a long time ago.

He met a girl. He fell in love. Got engaged. They're about to get married. And so anyway, 10 days before the wedding, he develops this massive boil on his stomach, right? And painful boil.

Goes to his GP, doctor. The doctor says, you're stressed out about something. What is it? Just knew this was like a stress thing. What is it? What's going on? My friend said, well, next week, I'm getting married to a girl I met two months ago.

[7 : 12] So that's the other, there's a bigger story here. But it was, it was, he met a girl. It all happened very quickly anyway. And he really stressed out about it. So the doctor says, well, tell me, do you have the church booked for the wedding?

And my mate Matt said, yep. So do you have like a minister who's going to like do the thing? Yep, yep, got that. Do you have a reception hall? My mate Matt says, yes. You've invited people, there's like cards have gone out.

Yep. You've got a caterer? Yep. Knives, forks, plates. Have you got that stuff? He goes, yeah, I've got all that stuff. And the doctor said, it sounds like you've got everything under control.

You're going to be fine. It's going to be wonderful. And he tells me he's never forgot this conversation. Boyle went away. Like he just said, it was such a good word for a very anxious heart.

And just this incredibly healing sort of conversation that he had. Words, very powerful, very dark, can damage the inside of you, but can produce healing as well.

[8 : 20] Words are powerful. Now, Proverbs doesn't just end here by saying words can sort of heal and harm.

It steps it up later on in Proverbs 18 by saying words can't just wound, words can kill. Proverbs 18 says this, death and life are in the power of the tongue.

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits. Words can kill. Words can cause suicide.

There's a woman recently, you might have read about her, who was just recently in the States charged with manslaughter for urging her boyfriend to commit suicide. Words can literally kill. They can figuratively kill.

They can kill a community. The passage reminds us about the importance of words and making community function well, even on a judicial level.

[9 : 20] And it gives a couple of examples of a sort of a courtroom sort of situation. Verses 6 and 17, the words of the wicked lie in wait for blood. Verse 17, whoever speaks the truth gives honest evidence, but a false witness utters deceit.

What's that about? There wasn't technically like courtrooms in the ancient areas, but what would happen is like these disputes that people would have, they would gather, the people involved would gather at the big main gate, there was a group of elders, and the plaintiff and the defendant, which each bring at least two witnesses, because there's no DNA evidence in this point, right?

There's no CSI stuff going on. So the whole judicial system fails or works based on the truthfulness of the witnesses. Witnesses can lie and get somebody killed, get somebody put in jail, get somebody beaten, whipped.

The passage reminds us, you can kill that system with dishonesty. Words kill. They kill community. They kill people sociologically.

You know, you tell a kid that they're dumb and they're upbringing their whole life and they'll spend the rest of their life trying to work through that. You can kill somebody by it distorts their self-image, right?

[10 : 34] Words kill relationship, gossip and lying. Proverbs has a lot to say about that. I'll give you an example. Proverbs 16. A dishonest man spreads strife and a whisperer separates close friends.

So a long time ago, I'm flatting, like rooming with a couple, like three other guys. We have this great little community and some mutual friends of ours, as a couple, have a sort of crisis in their relationship.

And so we're in the living room, the lounge room, right? We're chatting about this big crisis and we'll call the woman Sally in the relationship, right? My friend Jean comes into the room and I go, Jean, did you hear about Sally?

Wow. She, and then he stops when he says, he says, Aaron, do I need to know this? Is this any of my business? And I remember thinking, ah, yes, Christianity.

The thing that, what makes this sort of thing so destructive, this lies and gossip and stuff, is it harms, it destroys, it kills what we need most in life.

[11 : 52] We need community. We need to be a fairly functional family. And with our speech, with our words, the passage says, you know, we can make it and we can grow it and it can flourish or we can kill it.

Okay, moving on. Let's look at the character of words. So we've looked at the power of the words, very powerful, can harm, can heal, can kill, can bring life.

Like the best words, gospel words, bring life into people, right? So we've looked at the power of words. Let's look at the character of words. So we need to receive words and we need to give words.

Now what do those words exactly look like? What does the passage tell us about these words? It says this, just from chapter 12 here. It says our words need to be truthful, not deceitful, thoughtful, not reckless, and few, as opposed to abundant.

Right. Truthfulness is something I think we talked about a few weeks ago, so I'm going to skip that. Let's talk about this idea of excessive speech as opposed to economic speech.

[13 : 12] Verse 16 and 23. Let me read those to you. The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult. A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of the fool proclaims folly.

So it's more explicit in other proverbs. Basically, these two proverbs, they identify two significant issues, right? What foolish words look like, that there's too many of them, and they're thoughtless.

Let's talk about too many. I have a friend who, whenever you talk to them, it's an old friend, you don't know them.

You're not here in this room. But if you are sitting here, and as I'm talking about talking too much, if you're sitting here going, is that me? Is that me? Is that totally me? Am I talking too much?

Yeah, that's totally you, right? But I'm not talking about you right now. But, this other friend of mine, when you talk to them, say you're talking, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, something very interesting, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

[14 : 16] When you talk to them, this is what their face does. As you start beginning of the sentence, this is what their face does. They, The only reason you talk in their mind is it gives them time for them to prepare their mouth to talk over you and lots.

So as you're speaking to them, they're getting their sentence ready. They're not listening to you. They just cannot wait to get their words out. And here's one of the major problems.

It's just rude, right? It's just rude. It's just unhelpful, right, in a relationship. But one of the other problems that Proverbs identifies is when you talk too much, you sin more. Proverbs 10, 19.

When words are many, transgression is not lacking. But whoever restrains his lips is prudent. Folks that talk too much, it's...

When they talk too much, they tend to talk recklessly. So it's not just lying. It's when we talk too much, we do things.

[15 : 29] And these are all things Proverbs talks about. We tend to make rash promises we can't keep. Yeah, absolutely, I'll totally pray for you. I'll meet you there. I'll help you do that thing.

We gossip. We betray trusts. We tell other people secrets. Proverbs says, A kiss on the lips.

Now, this really sort of ancient scholar. I can't remember his name. It's like Herodonicus or Herodias. One of these guys that lives in the first few centuries. He wrote about this proverb, actually, this kissing on the lips proverb.

And he said that amongst the Persians in the ancient Near East, when men of equal rank met, they would kiss each other on the lips.

If one person was a slightly lower rank, this person would kiss them on the cheek. And at a significantly lower rank, the person would bow. Now, so this image of kissing on the lips, it suggests this like perfect matching of words to the situation.

[17 : 01] This perfect, wonderful set of words that perfectly matches the situation. There's no condescension. There's no over-the-top flattery.

There's no insincerity. It's beautiful. It's beautiful words to the hearer. And you say those words, you need to ponder them. You don't say these kind of words recklessly. So, in summary, our words. The character of them.

Truthful, not deceitful. Wise, not reckless. And we should be economic with our words. So, it's a question for us, isn't it?

Do we give much attention to our words? I think it's a good question. I think it's a question we should ask ourselves every day. In the area of wisdom. We want to grow in this area, don't we?

So, I've talked about the power of words. We've talked about the character of the words. Now, the last question here, just for a couple of minutes. Why does it seem to matter to God so much?

[18 : 03] See, the issue about words and how we speak to each other, it's not so much... I think it's less about pragmatism in life.

It's just a very serious issue to God, it seems. Verse 22. Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, is what it says. It's a big word, isn't it? Abomination. But those who act faithfully are as delight.

So, when we use our words foolishly, we offend the heart of God. And we use our words wisely, and we speak words of life to people.

We please God. Let's have a look at Proverbs 6. You don't have to turn to it, I'll read it to you. There are six things that the Lord hates.

Seven that are an abomination to Him. Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.

[19 : 09] It's interesting, right? Seven things that God hates. Three of the things that God hates are word sins. Why?

Why is it such a big deal to God? Why is it an abomination to God? Why does God say He hates these things? Because foolish words destroy something God loves. These sins are community-destroying sins, and God loves His family.

God loves His people, and the foolish tongue hurts His people. But healing words, good words, the right words at the right time, the perfect good words, they unite us, they build community, they heal people, they encourage people.

The best words, the gospel words, they change us forever. Now to finish up, what do we do with all this? I mean, I could say to you, okay, this is a really big deal, obviously.

Now go away and try harder. And, you know, maybe you should, but... Proverbs 16 says this.

[20 : 16] It says, The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious. Our heart, our heart, drives our tongue.

So if you're feeling sort of convicted about this stuff, and you want to heal your speech, you want to be more thoughtful, more courageous, and more economic and truthful in your words, pray, Jesus, forgive me.

Don't just try harder. Do that. But pray, Jesus, forgive me. Jesus, change my heart. See, when the gospel, when we take the gospel and we start to...

And it gets into our heart, everything changes, I think. Our words should change. When we're humbled by the gospel, we're less likely to use words to impress other words, to impress other people, you know, like empty flattery and vain boasting.

We're less likely to do that when we've been humbled by the gospel. When we've been healed by the gospel, we're less likely to harm others with our words. When we know the deep, deep love of God, we'll speak less, because we won't speak a million words a day out of this kind of sort of insecure place, because we'll know we're loved by God and we'll be other people focused.

[21 : 30] When we know the holiness of God, we won't dishonor him by lying. There's lots more examples, but we'll finish here. Chapter 12 challenges us with our use of words.

I hope you feel challenged by it. Let's call each other out on it. But mostly, let's apply the gospel to this area of our life. Let's ask God to change our hearts.

That's going to be the secret here. Amen.