

Words: Walking in Wisdom

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0 : 00] Morning. Thanks for your prayers. While Beth and I were on vacation, we had a restful time, but it's good to be back with you all. Some of you are thinking, he was away on vacation? I didn't even know. I was, and it was good. It was restful. Thanks for your prayers.

So this morning, as you'll notice from the sermon card in the pew, we are actually launching into a new section of the book of Proverbs. And let me say just a couple words about that before we get into our main topic this morning. Why don't you turn with me to Proverbs chapter 10? Proverbs chapter 10. Let me just double check what page number that is in the Bible. That's page 533. Proverbs chapter 10. This is where this new section of the book of Proverbs begins. If you've been with us this summer for the past nine weeks, believe it or not, we've really been dealing with introduction. And you think, oh my goodness, a nine-week introduction to the book of Proverbs. When will it end? No, but the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs are mostly, as we've seen, what? They're poems in praise of wisdom. They are meant to sort of serve as an introduction to stoke our desire to want to get wisdom and grow in wisdom and obtain wisdom. But now, starting in chapter 10, we get to the body, we get to the meat of the book. We get to the actual proverbs themselves, these short, memorable, little, powerful sayings that you have to slow down and really ponder in order to let them sink in and do their work of making you wise. But if you were to start reading at chapter 10, one of the things you'd notice is that these proverbs don't seem to be arranged in any particular order. Chapter 10, verse 1, all the way through chapter 22, verse 16, for example, is the first collection of these proverbs, which is from Solomon, we're told. But you know, as you read along through this first collection, one proverb is about hard work and diligence, and then the next one is about pride and humility, and then the next one is about how to treat the poor, and you jump from one thing to the next, to the next, to the next, it can feel a bit like walking through a cocktail party and getting a snippet of 15 conversations all about something different. And you think, what is going on in this book? And then after you finish the collection from Solomon, you find that there are five more collections pretty much all arranged in the same way. A grab bag of proverbs that seem to be arranged almost at random. And again, that makes us ask, why is the book of proverbs put together this way?

Well, actually, I don't think it's a mistake. I don't think the scribes were just lazy and happened to just sort of jumble them all together as quickly as they could. I don't think the Holy Spirit made a mistake when he inspired the book of proverbs this way. I think on the one hand, the way that this book is put together is meant to make a slow down. It's meant, you know, we're not meant to read a proverb the same way that we read a narrative.

You know, if you read a narrative, you can just sort of get caught up in the story and kind of flow along with it. But you know, a proverb, you're supposed to ponder it. You're supposed to turn it over in your mind and think it through in the details of your life. And so, the book of proverbs almost constantly interrupts you. So, you can't just sort of go into cruise control as you read along.

[3 : 45] It sort of interrupts your flow so that you have to stop and be arrested and really think about what's being said. But on the other hand, the fact that all these different proverbs and all these different topics are kind of woven together and all jumbled together, I think is really teaching us a lesson about what it means to be truly wise.

In other words, it's showing us that wisdom is a whole life sort of thing. All of the different virtues, all the different elements of character that make up the life of one who is truly wise, things like honesty and humility and generosity and diligence and discretion.

Proverbs is saying to us they are all inseparable. Yes, you might be honest, but if you're not also generous, then you're not really wise.

We can't think that just because we've mastered one theme in Proverbs that we've arrived. No, they all go together. We don't have an excuse to not grow in the other areas.

They form a whole life. So, in reality, Proverbs presents us not with a random assortment, actually. It's not a grab bag. It's not a jumble. It's more like a tapestry. And each of these threads is woven in and through and back and around with all the other threads so that we never lose sight of the fact that there's a complete picture of wisdom.

[5 : 19] There's a complete life of wisdom towards which God wants to take us. More practically, so that we never forget in our humility to also be truthful, for example.

So that we never forget in our discretion to also be generous. So that we never forget in our hard work to also be humble. And you know, the beautiful thing is that in creating a life of wisdom in this way, it's actually forging us more and more into the image of God.

One of the things that we know is that God's attributes, his characteristics, who God is, they're never inseparable from one another. Has anyone here been attending Mike Bell's Sunday School class?

Mike, are you here this morning? He's here. Hey, Mike. Mike, did you cover the simplicity of God in your Sunday School class? He did. Now that sounds like a strange attribute.

God is simple, but what does that mean? It means that none of the attributes of God can be separated from any other. That God is always one in who he is.

[6 : 23] That in his holiness, he's always loving. That in his truthfulness, he is always jealous for his name. That God is always perfectly consistent with who he is.

And that's the kind of people that God wants to make us to be so that we reflect his image. Now, all this raises the question, of course, of how we should teach this section of Proverbs.

How should we go about listening and learning and instructing ourselves in this section of the book? Now, of course, we could go chapter by chapter and we could hit each thread as it happens to come up every week.

Or we could take one topic and we could go across the chapters and we could gather up as much as we can about what Proverbs has to teach us on that particular theme.

Now, of course, there are pros and cons of each method, right? Of course, the benefit of going along chapter by chapter, verse by verse, is that we'd see again and again how the life of wisdom is a whole life sort of thing.

[7 : 27] We'd see all the interconnections between all these different virtues. And that'd be good.

But, you know, I think the reality is, and as we the pastors have thought about how to teach this book, I think the reality is, is that we'd end up sacrificing some depth if we took that method.

After all, if we had to talk about honesty and diligence and doing justice all in one sermon, we'd only have time to scratch the surface, right? So instead, this summer, we're going to move topically through these last chapters of Proverbs.

Each week, we're going to take up one important theme that Proverbs presents to us, and we're going to try to go deep. But we have to remember as we do so, that all of these topics that we'll hit over the next couple of months aren't standalone topics.

Rather, they all unpack just one interconnected element of what a whole life of wisdom really looks like. They all go together. So that's where we're going to go.

That's where we're going from here on out in our Proverbs series. And this morning, we're going to begin with a topic, with a theme, about which Proverbs has more to say than almost anything else.

[8 : 41] And it might come as a bit of a surprise what that topic is. Think to yourself, what are the marks of someone who is really wise in your mind? What are they particularly known for?

Is it how they manage their money? Is it how they maybe exercise authority and power? Is it how they make decisions? Is that what makes them wise in your mind?

Is it how they cultivate their family or their friendships? Now, Proverbs has a lot to say about all that, and we'll get there. But more than all of those things, more than money, more than power, more than decision-making, more than family and friendships, Proverbs comes back again and again and again to your tongue, to your words.

In fact, there are over 90 individual Proverbs that have to do with your speech. Does that strike you as odd? Of all the things that Proverbs could be so concerned about in making us wise, why is it so concerned with our words?

Well, the first thing that Proverbs teaches us when it comes to our words is their power. This is our first big point this morning, the power of our words.

[9 : 56] Turn with me to Proverbs 18, 21. If you turn to only one verse this morning, and we're going to look at a lot of different verses, just rest on this one. Proverbs 18, 21.

Proverbs 18, 21 says this, Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

You know, we can all remember being on the playground, can't we? Chanting back and forth to one another, sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. How many people have said that at one point in your life, right?

To that nasty so-and-so who is always picking on you. And yet we all know that at a very deep level, that playground taunt couldn't be further from the truth.

Sticks and stones merely bruise us, but words have the power to rip us up inside, don't they? Or in the words of Proverbs, death and life are in the power of the tongue.

[11 : 05] One wise pastor I read recently made the observation that adultery, although considered by most to be a very serious sin, and it certainly is, in his observation, adultery rarely sends a whole church into meltdown among the members.

But then he goes on to say that gossip, however, even though gossip is perceived by many to be just a small little sin, in his experience, gossip has destroyed numerous churches.

Death and life are in the power of the tongue. Now, why is that? Why are words so powerful? Well, on the one hand, words have the power to go deep.

Words don't just hit you, they go in you. Proverbs 12, 18 says, there is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Proverbs says, words can be like the thrust of a sword striking to the very center of your being. Or, they can go down deep like a medicine, healing you from the inside out.

[12 : 25] After all, how many of us replay over and over words or conversations that we've had with parents or friends or loved ones that have wounded us or shaped us in some way and we can't seem to shake it?

I recently saw Cars 3 in the movie theater with my six-year-old son, Jack. Spoiler alert, by the way. I saw Cars 3 in the movie theater and one of the main storylines is just that.

One of the cars, Cruz Ramirez, the yellow, I think it's a Porsche, I don't know. I'm not a car guy.

Anyway, she's been told again and again and again that she isn't cut out to be a racer.

Dream small or not at all is what her parents told her. You don't have what it takes. And that word has gone so deep that it shapes her whole vision of life.

And of course, you guessed it, by the end of the movie, she ends up being a racer. Hooray! She overcomes. But, it takes the whole movie for her to realize that. And it takes a lot of people around her to reprogram her to actually think that she can do it.

[13 : 39] That's a silly example, I know. But more seriously, how many of us are still trying to outlive the damaging sword thrusts of words from our past? But on the flip side, don't we also know the healing power of words?

The power of encouragement or the power of truthful affirmation. Even the healing power of timely correction. And we'll get into that next week. Matt's going to pick up that whole theme in Proverbs. Words have the power to go deep and heal those places where nothing else can reach. So, words are powerful because they go deep. But words are also powerful, according to Proverbs, because they spread wide.

Proverbs 16, 27 says, A worthless man plots evil and his speech is like a scorching fire. His speech is like a scorching fire.

What does fire do naturally? What is it in the nature of fire to do? It spreads, right? It doesn't stay contained.

[14 : 45] It goes wide. And think about that. Think about how quickly a rumor can spread through a high school or a neighborhood or a church. It's almost effortless how quickly it can happen.

Like fire consuming the dry grass. It moves from person to person without anything to stop it. But again, the flip side is also true.

Proverbs 10, 11 says, The mouth of a righteous man is a fountain of life. And in 15, 4, we're told, A gentle tongue is a tree of life.

Like a fountain flowing with water, rushing out for all to drink. Like a tree spreading its branches for all to find shade from the hot sun. Words have the power to spread wide for good.

And don't we see that in the book of Acts, for example? Isn't one of the exciting things about the book of Acts that the word of the gospel, the good news, the good news about Jesus' life and death and resurrections just can't help but spread and grow.

[15:59] And in its wake, it leaves joy and peace like a fountain, like a tree of life. Words are powerful because they go deep and they spread wide.

But you know, the biggest reason why words are so powerful is ultimately theological. God, we see from the very opening chapter of the Bible is a speaking God.

God's words are powerful. He speaks and what happens? Worlds jump into existence out of nothing. His words are creative words, but his words are also covenantal words.

They're words that make not just worlds and planets, but they're words that forge relationships and make promises. They're words that project a future, a hope. They're words that keep and hold.

And as humans, we're made in the image of this speaking God. And so our words, in their own creaturely way, also have a kind of derivative power.

[17:09] Of course, not to literally create worlds from nothing, but still, very powerful. They bear the mark.

Our words bear the mark of the God in whose image we are made. You see, friends, to speak is to participate in the image of the speaking God.

I read this week that the average American speaks about 700 times per day. 700 times! I'm not sure how they managed to count all those, but there you go.

Maybe they had someone following around with a clicker. 700! That's not even counting all your Facebook posts. 700 times a day. 700 small reminders that we are made in the image of the God who speaks and that we have been entrusted with one of the most powerful realities in the universe.

One of the things that characterizes God himself, the power of words. And if words are so powerful, if ultimately they are part of what it means to bear God's image in the world, then of course, we should pay very close attention to how we use our words.

[18:40] Death and life are in the power of the tongue. So first then, we've seen how words are powerful, but Proverbs is also going to describe in more detail what this death and life look like when it comes to our words.

In other words, how can our words be used to bring about death and how can they be used to bring about life? What do foolish and wise speech actually look like? Now let's take the negative first.

What characterizes foolish words that lead to death? What do we need to be on our guard against as this book teaches us how to be wise? Well, as we look across these chapters, we see that there are three big areas that Proverbs highlights.

Three big ways in which our speech leads to death. The first is lying. Proverbs 12, 22 puts it probably as starkly as you can.

Lying lips, it says, are an abomination. To the Lord. But those who act faithfully are His delight. It's easy to think that lying is no big deal.

[19:49] After all, that's how the world works, right? Sometimes you have to lie or bend the truth to get things done. But that's not how God sees it, friends.

God is a truth-speaking God. What He says always matches reality. What God says is reality. And so to misrepresent reality with our words, to lie, to bear false witness, is ultimately kicking against the very grain of the universe.

Pastor Matt talked about this a couple weeks ago when we looked at Proverbs chapter 8. Wisdom is the very groove and grain of the created order. That's why we read in Proverbs 12, 19, truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment.

Lying is ultimately self-defeating. It destroys relationships by eroding the trust and sincerity that real relationships need.

And so it ultimately undoes the liar themselves. It undoes any hope that they have for trust and sincerity and intimacy. And so Proverbs is saying that lying puts you at odds with God, with the world, even with yourself.

[21:07] It's foolish in the extreme, no matter what the short-term payoff might be. But in addition to lying, Proverbs also points to gossip as another prime example of foolish speech.

Proverbs 16, 28 says, A dishonest man spreads strife and a whisperer, that's another word for a gossip. A whisperer, a gossip, separates close friends. What is gossiping?

Gossiping, of course, is spreading information behind people's back, not to help them, but rather to damage their reputations. And unlike lying, the information in gossip might actually be true. You might actually be saying something that's quite in line with reality.

But it's the intention and the timing of the gossip that makes it destructive. And if we're honest, we love gossip, don't we? Come on.

A little dirt on somebody else? Controversy, scandal, the salacious details? I mean, come on. How many magazines at Target are just full, basically, of gossip?

[22 : 12] Some of it might be true. I guess it's not technically behind those people's backs because it's blazing across the front page of a magazine. But I'm pretty sure they weren't in agreement when those publications went to press.

Proverbs puts it this way in chapter 18, verse 8. The words of a whisperer, the words of a gossip, are like delicious morsels. They go down into the inner parts of the body. In other words, Proverbs is saying gossip is dangerous because we love to just gobble it up.

But it's ultimately saying that we are what we eat. Listening to gossip, gobbling it up, will go down into the inner parts of your body and turn you into a gossip yourself.

In fact, Proverbs time and time again holds us responsible not just for speaking foolish words, but also for listening to foolish words. Proverbs 17, verse 4 says, an evildoer listens to wicked lips.

A liar gives ear to a mischievous tongue. I read somewhere that it takes two people to destroy a church. Someone who gossips and someone who listens.

[23 : 34] Rather than listen to gossip or lies, the right response is to say, you know what, I don't want to talk about that person without them being here. Why don't we go get them and continue this conversation or why don't we just change the subject?

How easy is that? You just saved a church. You just saved a relationship. You just saved a reputation by saying those two simple sentences. There's a third way that Proverbs depicts foolish words.

It's not just lying. It's not just gossip that brings death. Those are kind of easy to spot, aren't they? We sort of know going in that like, yeah, lying and gossip, but those are pretty bad. We just stay away from those. But Proverbs highlights another one.

Careless words. We already looked at Proverbs 12, 18, but listen to it again. There is one whose

rash words are like sword thrusts.

Rash words, reckless words, unthinking words, just saying whatever comes to mind in the moment. That can be just as damaging, just as death-dealing as lying and gossip.

[24 : 41] Even if it's not intentionally meant to be so. That's how powerful our words are. So friends, I wonder, as you think about these categories of foolish words, do you see any of it in your life?

Are you bending the truth to cover things up, to get your own way, or to get people's approval? Are you prone to speak about others when they're not around, maybe telling yourself that you're doing so because you're really concerned about the person and want to help them, but deep down, you're just sharing the dirt that you have about others?

Or do you find that you're rash? Do you find yourself saying things often without thinking first? Now, of course, we all put our foot in our mouths at times.

Golly, I've done it. I have to talk a lot as a pastor, so, you know, sometimes my foot has ended up in my mouth many times. And some of us struggle more than others with impulsivity.

I get it. But at the same time, friends, being unfiltered is not a virtue. Just because you're slandering someone on social media doesn't make it any less slander.

[26 : 02] Again and again, Proverbs tells us that these sort of speech habits, they corrode relationships, they fracture communities, and ultimately, they bring death. So what's the alternative?

If those are the kinds of speech that we need to confess, repent of, avoid, help one another to root out of our lives, what sort of speech should we pursue and cultivate? What characterizes wise words, words that lead to life?

And there are four distinguishing marks of life-giving words in Proverbs. Derek Kidner actually points these out in his very excellent short commentary on Proverbs. Here are the four things that wise, life-giving words look like.

First, they're honest. Listen, truthful lips endure forever, 12:19. The righteous hates falsehood, 13:5. A faithful witness does not lie, 14:5. A truthful witness saves lives, 14:25. You don't have to write all those down, but just listen as they roll over. Righteous lips, that is, words that speak what's straight, what's right, honest, integrity.

[27 : 11] Those kinds of words are the delight of the king, and he loves him who speaks what is right. The wise are those whose words reflect reality. They're true and honest.

But, that doesn't mean that the wise will always have to be saying something. Have you ever been around someone like that? I just need to say this because it's true. Well, the next mark of wise words, according to Proverbs, is that there'll be few.

And this point is made with irony in 17:28. Maybe you've heard this proverb before. It's a bit of a popular one. Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise.

When he closes his lips, he's deemed intelligent. There you go. Do you want other people to think you're wise? Stop talking. But what Proverbs sort of says with humor and irony there, it gives a lot of positive examples too.

When words are many, transgression is not lacking. But, whoever restrains his lips is prudent. That's 10:19. Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life.

[28 : 17] He who opens wide his lips comes to ruin. That's 13:3. Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble. 21-23. So, you see, the wise person knows when to speak and when to remain silent.

And the wise person also knows that few words will often have more power than lots and lots of mere talk. So, they're honest.

They're few. The third mark is that wise words will be calm. 17:27 reads, whoever restrains his words has knowledge and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.

Now, we'll get into this in more detail in a few weeks when we talk about the theme of anger in Proverbs. We're going to spend a whole chapter looking at how Proverbs deals with a really important issue of anger because it has a lot to say about that.

But for now, this picture that we have of wise speech, of someone whose life, whose words give life, isn't speech that's ready to just erupt at any moment. It doesn't come gushing forth with frustration or anger.

[29 : 26] It's quick to listen. It's slow to speak. It's slow to become angry. as the epistle of James will say. It weighs its words. It speaks directly. It speaks honestly, but it speaks gently.

Fourth and last mark of life-giving words is that they'll be apt. A-P-T, apt. They'll be fitting words. 25:11 says, A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.

15:23, To make an apt answer is a joy to a man and a word in season how good it is.

So words that give life isn't just about saying something right. But also in the right way and at the right time. Proverbs 27:14 actually gives a funny example of how not to do this.

There's a lot of humor in the book of Proverbs when you start to read it. This is what Proverbs 27:14 says, Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice rising early in the morning will be counted as cursing.

[30 : 43] Do you see the picture? In other words, at 5 a.m., don't shout up at your neighbor's open window, Hey, good morning! Have a great day! Praying for your big meeting today! That's not going to land well.

Just in case you need to know that. What's the point being made? Truly wise words are spoken in the right way at the right time. That same thing said maybe at 8:30 as you guys are pulling out of the driveway together might have been the best thing that your neighbor could have heard all day. The New Testament counterpart to all of this is found in Ephesians 4:29. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up as fits the occasion that it may give grace to those who hear.

And I think that verse is the Apostle Paul boiling down a lifetime of meditation on the Proverbs. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up as fits the occasion that it may give grace to those who hear.

And that's the promise of Proverbs as well. That our words can actually be instruments of grace and healing. Not just death, but life is in the power of the tongue.

[32 : 06] The tongue of the wise brings healing, 12:18 says. And this is a great one. Proverbs 16:24. Gracious words are like a honeycomb. Sweetness to the soul and health to the body.

There is power in our words to do much good. Friends, can you imagine if our church, if our homes, if our friendships were characterized by that sort of speech?

What if we, our local church, what if all the local churches in New Haven, what if we were all colonies of wise, life-giving speech in the midst of the world?

What if the way we speak here is very different than the way speech happens outside the church?

Would we not be if our words were honest and apt and few and gentle?

Would we not be the salt and light that Jesus said we would be? And if the way we spoke began to change not just our individual relationships and not just our church, but through those relationships, what if it began to change our broader culture as well?

[33 : 29] What if instead of striving for mere civility in our public discourse, there was actually something greater that God would bring about through our presence of salt and light?

But you and I both know that as awesome of a vision as that is is not easy. Proverbs admits as much. Proverbs 21, 15 says, there is gold an abundance of costly stones, but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel.

In other words, wise speech is precious and very hard to come by. It's more rare than gold. It's harder to find than costly stones.

But if it's so hard to come by, how do we get it? And again, this is where Proverbs is so insightful.

And it's where Proverbs connects with the broader scope of Scripture.

In Proverbs 4, 23, we read, keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

[34 : 44] And in Proverbs, that flowing includes your words. Listen to 10, 20. The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little worth. Do you see what that proverb puts in parallel?

The tongue and the heart. As if to say, what's in your heart is what's going to drive your words.

Jesus himself put it clearly in Matthew 12, 34.

Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. The ability to speak wise, life-giving words is more than just trying hard, practicing, or working on new habits.

Of course, the Bible would have us make every effort to do so, but the solution has to run deeper than that if it's going to work and if it's going to last because ultimately there's a direct line between your tongue and your heart.

And what fills your heart is what's going to come flowing out of your mouth. That's why Jesus can say in the same place in Matthew, on the day of judgment, people will give account for every careless word they speak.

[35 : 50] On the day of judgment, we'll all give an account for every careless word we speak. Why? That seems harsh. Because Jesus is teaching us that our words reveal our hearts.

In other words, our words reveal what's truly important to us, what we value, what we really worship. Think about it.

When you're tempted to lie, for example, what's really driving your heart? I can tell you what it is for me personally.

Nine times out of ten when I'm tempted to bend the truth or to just straight up lie, you know why I want to do it? It's because I'm afraid of losing someone's approval.

So rather than be honest and say the hard thing, the thing that maybe won't make me look so good because I actually forgot that appointment and now I'm sort of making an excuse and lying as to why I didn't show up, or rather saying the thing that will make someone else upset with me, rather than do that, I'm tempted to kind of bend the truth a little bit.

[37 : 06] And you know what's going on in that moment? My heart loves and values human approval more than it loves and values God's approval.

Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. Now maybe it's not approval for you. Maybe you could care less what people think about you.

But maybe for you it's comfort. If lying will just get someone off your back, if they'll stop annoying you and you can get back to the comfortable status quo, that's the time when you'll be tempted to lie.

No, I'm not free tomorrow. I can't make it. I got this really big thing I got to take care of. Really, you're just going to stay home and watch TV and you just don't want to be annoyed by the person that you're talking to. Friends, we could go on and on and think through all the different examples of

wise and foolish speech that we've covered this morning and do the same thing.

Think about it. Why are we tempted to talk and talk and talk rather than just let our words be few? Why do we keep rambling on even after we've made our point? Is it because we're trying to prove to others that we really know what we're talking about and we're trying to get their verdict on our lives? [38 : 23] Or are we really wanting to teach them a lesson after all they've done to us? You see, it all comes out of our heart. It all comes down to the heart. What has taken the place of God in the center of your life in your heart?

Because the truth is, friends, if we cared more about God's approval, if we cared more about God's verdict, if we cared more about God's glory than we did about human approval or some creaturely verdict or our own glory or our own security, if we cared more about God, then more and more and more our speech would be full of wisdom and our words would be honest and few and calm and apt and they'd give grace to those who hear.

But how do we get that? How does God become the overriding center, the thrilling highlight of our hearts again?

How does God come and fill our hearts so that the abundance of our mouth is life and not death? Well, in order to get there, you have to look not just to God's spoken word, but you have to look to His incarnate word.

Earlier in the service, Kelly read for us John 1 where we're told that the word who was with God in the beginning and who was God and through whom everything was made, the eternal word of God became flesh and dwelt among us.

[39 : 56] And throughout Jesus' ministry, you know what would happen? People would marvel at Jesus' words for they were honest and they were fitting.

No one has ever spoke like this man and they were free of guile and they were free of fear and they gave grace to all who heard. But then as His ministry went on, the rumors began to spread and then the slander.

He's demon-possessed, they said. He's out of His mind. He's overstepping His authority. He's a blasphemer. Such were the words that started to surround Jesus' ministry.

And then in the final days of His earthly life, Jesus, the eternal word of God, stood before the court of man and was condemned by their word. And He was mocked and He was denied and He was ridiculed.

And when He was crucified, they hung a sign over His head written in three different languages so that no matter what tongue you spoke, you could understand the mockery.

[41 : 04] There, on the cross, hung up to Guy, the sign said, here is the King of the Jews. But here's the surprising things, friends.

That as Jesus descended down into all of our human words of mockery and condemnation, Jesus' own final words from the cross were not words of retaliation or anger or judgment, though all of those responses would have been totally just.

No, His last word from the cross, according to John's gospel, was, it's finished. It's done. In other words, all the penalty for our sins, every careless word, every self-promoting lie, every salacious piece of gossip and slander, everything that we had said, every careless word that we had spoke for which God would hold us accountable on judgment day, Jesus bore upon His own body on the cross.

And three days later, Jesus rose from the grave, proving that now there's no longer judgment for those who praise their trust in Him.

There's no longer judgment, but acceptance. You see, on the cross, Jesus bore the word of judgment we deserve so that in His resurrection, He might give us the word of acceptance and the word of righteousness that He deserved.

[42 : 34] The whole story of the Bible is a story of words. From the creative word of God that spoke everything into existence to the covenantal word that took Israel to Himself, to the incarnate word that fulfilled all of Israel's hopes, to now the new creative word that comes out with the gospel, causing us to come alive and place our trust in Him so that we can know new life.

It's all about words, friends. Not mere talk, but powerful, life-giving, eternal words. And if you're here this morning and you've placed your trust in Christ, then what we know is that the Holy Spirit has come and given you a new heart.

Do you remember what happened at Pentecost after Jesus rose from the dead, ascended to the Father? What happened at Pentecost? Jesus sends the Spirit down in power like tongues of flame, Luke says.

And what happens? The disciples begin to speak. No longer words of fear, no longer words of self-accusation, but words of praise and words of glory to God.

God was healing their hearts, healing their speech. You see, the words that God had confused at Babel in the Old Testament in judgment, God was now healing and uniting at Pentecost.

[44 : 00] He was bringing our language back into line with His new creative purposes. And even today, friends, the Holy Spirit will continue to do His work in your heart because of what Christ has done.

And as the Holy Spirit takes what Christ has done and makes it a greater and greater reality on your heart, your words will begin to overflow with it. Amen. Amen. And then you won't need to bend the truth to get human approval because now only the approval of God is what matters.

The Holy God who gave His Son in love for you, that's all that matters. So you can speak words that are honest and true.

And now you don't need to talk and talk and talk hoping that someone will recognize you and someone will acknowledge you. You can let your words be few because your Father in heaven and His Son, Jesus Christ, is the only one who really deserves recognition and acknowledgement anyway.

Let all praise be to Him and let your words be few. And the more you keep in step with the Spirit, the more you find that your words will be honest and few and they will be fitting.

[45 : 26] Fitting to the occasion, the right words at the right time, full of grace, full of healing power. This is what God is doing in our midst, friends.

Is that true of you this morning? If not, this offer is free to all who come to Christ in faith.

Forgiveness, a new heart, the Holy Spirit living within you.

Lay down your old way of doing things, the way in which you tried to cover your reputation with your speech and protect yourself and get ahead in the world. Lay it down and entrust yourself to the word of life.

Jesus Christ. And Christians, you see how powerful your words are? If you do, how are we using them for wise, life-giving purposes?

You see what a privilege you have to bring grace to those who hear. God has given you a ministry of speech that will bring life and grace and healing.

[46 : 39] how exciting is that? What a privilege to bring grace to those who hear.

Death and life are in the power of your tongue. And through the Spirit, may your words, may the words that characterize our church and God willing, may the words that characterize our city be more and more by God's grace words that bring life.

And may the word of life, Jesus Christ, be praised. Friends, let's pray. Lord Jesus, word incarnate, we pray that you would come now by your Spirit.

Lord, help us to see ways in which our words have been foolish. Grant us your forgiveness, we pray. And by your Spirit, help us to speak words that are truly life-giving.

Show us, Lord, through the spotlight of your Spirit, those things that are ruling in our hearts and help us to lay them down at your feet.

[48 : 04] Oh Lord, would you reign supreme, would you fill our hearts, we pray, so that our words might overflow with truth and grace. In Jesus' name we pray, Father.

Amen.