

The World's Greatest Weapon

February 25, 2018

This morning I am going to preach about the world's most dangerous weapon. The greatest weapon in the world is not nuclear. It can not be measured in sticks of TNT. It is not dropped from an airplane or launched on a missile. It is something all of us have and use everyday. The Bible describes it this way in the book of James.

James 3:2-8 (NIV) If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

I have gotten myself in more trouble through the things I've said than from the things I've done. I've hurt others, and myself, by saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. If only I had learned the lesson of James 1:19 at an early age. It says...

James 1:19 (NIV) Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

I spoke about anger last Sunday. You can read that sermon on our website. This morning I am addressing the second part of that verse. First, let's look at some important facts about what we say.

Your words cannot be taken back. The other person cannot un-hear your words. You cannot capture your words and put them back into your mouth unspoken. That may seem obvious, but it fails to keep us from saying things we later wish we had not.

Benjamin Franklin I consider to be a man who was wise in many things. **Benjamin Franklin said, "Remember not only to say the right thing in the right place, but far more difficult still, to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment."** Better not to speak a word than to speak it and regret having done so.

Your words have the power to hurt people. You have probably heard the old saying, "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me." It is true that criticisms, put-downs, rebukes, and insults can do no physical damage to others. But they can bring about great emotional damage. Words are powerful. They are powerful because we all want to be accepted by others and liked. The wrong words can do great damage to the listener's self-esteem. This is why it is so important for us to keep in mind these truths about words. Your words have the power to hurt people.

If you say something as a joke, the other person may not hear your words as a joke. They may believe you meant those words, at least in part. They may believe that it reflects what you think or believe in your heart, and that that is why you said them.

Your words can easily be misinterpreted. The person you speak to may hear you correctly, but misinterpret what you mean by your words. They may misinterpret the words, the tone of the words, or the message of the words. They may read some hidden meaning into the words. You have no control over this except to choose your words carefully. How often have you said something jokingly, but the other person did not hear your message that way.

Your words can stick with people forever. Have you ever wondered why two people can have the same experience and one forgets it and the other never does? Part of the answer lies with your emotions. If we experience something that causes us to feel great joy, we are apt to remember it. Likewise, if we experience something that cause us to feel great hurt, we are likely to remember it. Hurtful words are written in permanent ink on our memory banks. They cannot be easily erased. So when you speak hurtful words, the person you speak them to may never forget them.

Your words may hurt, or end, a relationship. There may be some here today who have suffered damage to a relationship with another person because of your ill-chosen words. Your relationship with that person may never be like it was before you spoke. Those words have changed everything. It may even be that some of your words ended a relationship forever.

Solomon gives us good wisdom here from the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 21:23 (NIV) He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.

Jesus was always aware of the danger of the tongue. Jesus always spoke the right words, to the right persons, in the right way, and at the right time. Jesus is our model when it comes to using our mouths well.

Sometimes Jesus spoke to encourage others. Sometimes He spoke to challenge them to greater commitment. Sometimes He told them to stop sinning, but even then He did so in a gentle, caring way. Jesus never sidestepped the fact that His listeners were sinners. But He did not condemn them for sin. Instead, He called them to repent of their sin and turn to God.

This is our message too. God is still inviting people to His salvation through us. Christians, we must learn to use our mouths well for Jesus. We need to learn to say the right things at the right times.

Ephesians 4:29 (NIV) Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

The context of this passage is the church. His intent is that here as the church, more than anywhere, we learn how to use our words well for Jesus. We are to speak to each other words that will build each other up in Christian maturity.

So we need to answer the question, **What builds up?**

Truth builds up.

Ephesians 4:25 (NIV) Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

Some people tell lies to cover their misdeeds. There are many good stories about people getting caught lying. I like the story about the four high school boys who couldn't resist the temptation to skip morning classes. After lunch they showed up at school and reported to the teacher that their car had a flat tire. Much to their relief, she smiled and said, "Well, you missed a quiz this morning, so take your seats and get out a pencil and paper." Still smiling, she waited as they settled down and got ready for her questions. Then she said, "First question--which tire was flat?"

Some people tell lies to cover their misdeeds. Some people tell lies because they get a kick out of fooling others. Speaking the truth to each other means humbling ourselves before each other. This is evidence of relationship. Notice the reason Paul gives for speaking the truth to each other is that we are all members of one body, the church, Christianity. Our individual relationships with Jesus put us into relationships with each other. Jesus sees us as connected to each other. We are to recognize that connection also. And one of the ways we do so is by speaking the truth to each other.

Speaking truth does not mean to always say what you are thinking. The truth, if it is hurtful, often should be left unsaid. Speaking truth means to avoid telling lies to or about others. Strong relationships are based on both truth and caring.

Praise builds up.

In Paul's letters to the churches he most always starts by thanking God for their faith and then praising them for the good he hears of them. We have special thanks at the beginning of our worship services. This is a way to praise others. See an example here:

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 (NIV) We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

I have read books on parenting, teaching, and more that promote this tool of speaking. It is this: **See people doing the right thing and praise them for it.**

Tony Campolo tells the story about how when he was growing up and went to the home of his friend, he noticed something. He said that every time he went over there, his friend's mom was constantly praising her children, uplifting them, saying something good about them. He said that influenced those kids and they became successful in life. You have the ability, with your words, to make a person stronger. Your words can be to their soul what vitamins are to their body.

This skill is not easy. It is not natural. It will take time and effort to learn. It requires us to quit thinking so much about ourselves and to focus on others. But it will grow our church tremendously as it builds others up.

Encouragement builds up.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV) Therefore encourage one another...

Again, this is a focus on the other person. When we come together on Sundays, we should do so ready to focus on each other. That is the purpose of coming together as Christians. You can worship at home. You can worship alone. We come together to build each other up into Christian maturity.

Instruction builds up.

We are told to teach each other. We are to teach each other about living with, and for, Jesus.

Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV) Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Notice the emphasis on teaching in this command. Jesus does not say teach them my commands. He does not say command them to obey me. He says teach them to obey my commands.

That means we must be teaching each other His commands. We must teach each other their meaning, their depth, their width, their application in all the contexts of our daily lives. We must teach about prayer. We must teach about temptation. We must teach about our spiritual armor. We must teach about the Holy Spirit.

Our words matter. What we say matters. Evangelism, sharing the good news of Jesus, is a words thing. And the most powerful evangelism is you sharing your story of conversion in your own words. But you can hinder your own testimony by the careless words you speak.

We must learn to use our mouths well for Jesus. This is part of our worship. This is part of our service to Him, for Him, and with Him in the world.

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Invitation

Jesus is speaking words of forgiveness to you today. Maybe this morning's sermon has brought back bad memories of hurtful words, words you said to others or that others said to you or about you. Maybe you are remembering strained relationships or destroyed relationships because of things you said.

Jesus is offering you forgiveness this morning, based on His death. He died for your sins, all of your sins. He is willing to forgive even if others are not. Today, receive Jesus as your Savior and turn your life over to Him as Lord and you will be forgiven.

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Read more from the Bible on speaking in Psalm 15; Psalm 19:14; Psalm 34:11-14; Psalm 37:28-31; Proverbs 6:16-19; Proverbs 15:4; Proverbs 17:20; Proverbs 18:21; Proverbs 21:23; Proverbs 25:23; Proverbs 26:28; Ephesians 4:25, 5:3-5

Einstein was asked his formula for success. "If A is success, I should say the formula is $A = X + Y + Z$, X being work and Y being play." "And what is Z?" "Keeping your mouth shut."

If your lips would keep from slips,
Five things observe with care:
To whom you speak; of whom you speak;
And how, and when, and where.

--William Norris.

Psalm 141:3 (NIV) Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips.

I'm careful of the words I say
to keep them soft and sweet.
I never know from day to day
which ones I'll have to eat.