

The Truth about Words

The Source of Words

Matthew 12:22-37

I remember a time a few years ago when I was home visiting my mom and my brothers. We were all sitting there at supper one night and someone asked a question. I don't even remember the question - whether it was about some fact or event or opinion. Before I knew it I said out loud, "Why don't we ask _____ [one of my brothers] because he knows everything." There was a moment of awkward silence with eyes darting back and forth between him and me. Then somebody changed the subject; that's how we deal with conflict in my family. . .

What happened there? Why did I say something (seemingly out of the blue) that was unkind and hurtful? Jesus is going to solve that mystery in today's passage, Matthew 12. Beginning this morning we are going to take three weeks to discuss "The Truth about Words." The Scriptures we consider will apply to the words we speak out loud, the words we speak to ourselves, and the words we put out through emails, blogs, social media, etc.

This morning we are going to consider Matthew 12:22-37, a passage that discusses the source of our words (where words come from).

READ Matthew 12:22-37.

As we just read, "a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute" was brought to Jesus. Jesus cast the demon out of the man, healing him so that he could speak and see. The crowd was amazed but the Pharisees felt threatened. They said that Jesus casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons (i.e., Satan). They actually said in words that Jesus was empowered by Satan himself. Jesus responded by saying, "No, I cast out demons by the Spirit of God."

This wasn't a minor theological error. When God Himself showed up in the flesh and displayed his power, they said (in words) that it was really the enemy of God, Satan, who was displaying his power. In verses 31 and 32 Jesus says this:

31 Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. 32 And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Blasphemy basically means "slander" (e.g., Ephesians 4:31, Colossians 3:8). Jesus says that in general blasphemy is forgivable. In 1 Timothy 1 Paul mentioned that before his conversion he was a blasphemer in the sense that he said slanderous things about God. But he was fully forgiven for his blasphemy through Christ. Any sin, even blasphemy, will be forgiven if a person repents of that sin.

“But,” Jesus says, “the blasphemy/slander against the Spirit will **not** be forgiven.” In the context of Matthew 12, blasphemy against the Spirit is what the Pharisees had done when they attributed to Satan something that had been done by the Holy Spirit. Jesus pointed out that their logic was irrational; Satan wouldn’t cast out his own demons. By rejecting (with their words) the irrefutable, obvious evidence that Jesus had acted in the power of the Holy Spirit, they were consciously, willfully rejecting what God was doing in this world. The kingdom of God had “come upon [them]” (v. 28), but they rejected it. Their opposition to God was so steadfast that they would never repent; therefore, their blasphemy was unforgivable.

In our day, blasphemy against the Spirit would be persistent, unrelenting rejection of Jesus Christ. If you fully and finally reject Jesus, you are out of options for forgiveness. Sometimes believers are troubled over some sin they’ve committed and wonder, “Have I committed ‘the unpardonable sin’?” As many have pointed out, if you’re worried about committing that sin you probably haven’t committed it. Those who willfully, persistently reject Jesus are the ones who should be concerned.

Let’s not miss what Jesus has done here. He has established that the Pharisees who stood before him (not all Pharisees) had uttered the worst possible words anybody could say. They had said something that was unforgivable. Beginning in verse 33 Jesus explains the source of their words and the source of everybody’s words.

33 “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit.

Jesus is making the simple point that a tree’s fruit is an accurate indicator of the health of the tree. Good trees produce good fruit and bad trees produce bad fruit. Specifically, the fruit he has in mind is the Pharisees’ words; their words were bad/evil because their hearts were bad/evil. Jesus makes this explicit in verse 34.

34 You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

In the Bible it’s never a good thing when you’re called a snake or a viper. The reason the Pharisees **spoke** evil was because they **were** evil. “For the mouth speaks out of the abundance [or overflow] of the heart.” This is a brutal diagnosis, but it’s true. A person’s words reveal what they have stored up in their heart. In verse 35 Jesus says that this cuts both ways:

35 The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.

Good words come from a good heart; evil words come from an evil heart. Whether good or evil, our mouths speak from the abundance of our hearts. Again, our words are an accurate reflection of our hearts. Therefore, verses 36 and 37 make total sense:

36 I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, 37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

You may remember from 1 John that John said that our actions reflect whether or not we have genuine faith. In the same way, Jesus says that our words reflect whether or not we know God. It's not that our deeds or our words save us; they don't. But our words are such an objective indicator of what is in our hearts that our words can be used to determine our eternal destiny.

Here's the truth about the source of our words: ***Our words flow from our hearts.*** Our words don't lie about the content of our hearts. Our words are an accurate indication of what is in our hearts. Occasionally we misspeak and say things we don't really mean; sometimes we have a hard time communicating what we want to say. But over the course of a week or a month or a year, our words are an accurate indication of what is in our hearts.

Remember the story I told at the beginning of this message? When I said, “Why don't we ask [my brother]? He knows everything.” The mystery is solved. My words weren't out of the blue; they were out of my heart. My mouth spoke from what filled my heart. I don't even remember what had happened leading up to that comment, but I had stored up so much bitterness and anger toward my brother in my heart that when my mouth had the opportunity it spoke unkind and hurtful words. ***Our words flow from our hearts.***

This simple truth has enormous implications. In the rest of our time, I want to suggest three simple ways we can respond to the truth that “our words flow from our hearts.”

Pray. Pray for God to show you the truth about your words, which is also the truth about your heart. Ask God to show you whatever you need to know. In Psalm 139 David rehearses how God knows him exhaustively - his thoughts, his words, his actions, everything. At the very end of the Psalm (in verses 23 and 24) David prays:

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! 24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

David was praying, “God, show me what You know about my heart and my thoughts.” Only a teachable person prays this. Only a person who admits, “I have blindspots (which by definition I cannot see) prays this. Only a person who wants to “love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, and might” would pray this.

I'll pause for a moment here so that you can consider whether or not you're teachable concerning your words (and your heart). Answer within yourself whether or not you actually want God reveal to you the truth about your words. If you don't, it's good to admit it; you can invite God to give you a teachable heart. If you are teachable, pray what David prayed in these verses. And then put on your seatbelt because it could be a rough ride.

Listen. Listen to the words you speak and the words you think (in your mind/heart). We're often very aware of the way **other people** speak; we know whether we experience other people's words as life-giving or death-dealing. But we're often clueless about the way **we** speak. When you walk away from a conversation, evaluate what you've said and how you've said it. Or when you've been alone mulling over something, notice the thoughts you've been thinking. If you've prayed and if you listen, God will show you things you need to know.

God will likely show you both good and bad things about your heart. For example, you might notice:

- * **Self-centeredness.** "I dominate every conversation I have. I could care less what other people are saying; I only want to express myself."
- * **Compassion.** "God has given me a compassionate heart because I often express compassion for people." A couple weeks ago I was talking with one of our middle school students. In the course of that brief conversation, she spontaneously expressed deep concern and compassion about something I said. That doesn't happen by accident. I hope she knows that her compassionate words flow from her compassionate heart.
- * **Contempt.** In Luke 18 Jesus told a parable about a Pharisee who prayed and thanked God that he wasn't sinful like other people (such as that tax collector over there). Luke comments that Jesus told that parable "to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and **treated others with contempt.**" If you listen to yourself talk you might realize that you have contempt in your heart toward other people or toward other categories of people.
- * Listen to what you say about people who disagree with you politically, about masks, about coworkers, etc.

If we listen to ourselves, we'll learn much about our hearts. For extra credit, you could ask a trusted friend what they notice about your words. That would be educational.

Treasure. Treasure up God's word in your heart. Since our mouths speak from the abundance of our hearts, we need to make sure our hearts are full of the right things. God's Word is uniquely profitable for teaching, for correction, for reproof, for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).

The writer of Psalm 119 understood this very well. In verse 11 the psalmist prayed to God (NASB95):

11 Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.

He understood that that if he treasured up God's word in his heart, he would be able to avoid sin. That would certainly include sins of the tongue.

This could be Reason #58 why we need to spend time soaking in God's word. God's word will give us a reservoir of wisdom and virtue. God's word will give us ways of thinking and speaking that we would never otherwise have or want. The Bible is

fundamentally about God. The Bible also talks about people, but it talks about people in relation to God. The Bible has much to say about how God treats us in Christ; he wants us, loves us, and is gracious to us (even when he is correcting/disciplining us). When it comes to our behavior, the New Testament basically tells us to treat each other the way God in Christ has treated us. Unless we saturate our hearts with Scripture, we'll forget how generously God has treated us; and we'll rationalize treating others poorly and speaking to others poorly.

Some people approach the Bible like you would the owner's manual for their car: you only consult it when there's a problem or an issue. But the vision we find in Scripture itself is that we delight in the word so much that we read and think about it all day long. When we do, we experience the new covenant promise found in Jeremiah 31:33 where God says, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts." Instead of the word being "out there," the word is now "in here" - in our hearts. We begin to think the way God thinks and feel the way God feels. With that reservoir of truth in our hearts, we can now speak in ways that please God. There are no shortcuts; think in terms of months and years, not days and weeks when it comes to treasuring up God's word.

This week, I'd challenge you to begin the process of diagnosing what is true about your words. **Ask** God to show you the truth about your words, **listen** to what you speak and how you speak, and **treasure** up God's word in your heart so you can speak in ways that please God.

Next week we'll consider what the book of James has to say about our words. If you have the chance read the book of James before next Sunday.