James 3:1-12; Psalm 19:14; Colossians 4:2-6 September 23, 2018

*Pointers, Part 4*

*Choosing Our Words*

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How do our lives point to Jesus Christ as our Savior and as our Lord? We’ve looked together at how we raise and influence our children & youth points to Jesus as our Savior and Lord. We’ve looked at how we use our time points to Jesus as our Savior and our Lord. And last week, Gary helped us think about how we choose our friends points to Jesus as our Savior and as our Lord. Today we are going to look at how we choose our words, spoken or written (meaning handwritten, texted, posted, or emailed) points to Jesus Christ as our Savior and as our Lord. May God prepare our hearts and minds to hear and receive and apply his teaching consistently and faithfully, in public and in private settings, in response to his call on our lives to be and make disciples of Jesus. Let us pray:

*Holy God, patient God, merciful and mighty God – thank you for helping us. Thank you for teaching us. Open our hearts to receive what you want us to hear and know today. Strengthen our resolve to be not just hearers of the word but doers also. Holy Spirit, come. Speak to us as only you can. This we pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.*

A husband read an article to his wife about how women use 30,000 words a day to a man’s 15,000. The wife replied, “That’s because we have to repeat everything to men.” The husband turned to his wife and said, “What?” (Just a little humor before we get serious here today…)

We all know how words can hurt and words can help. We all have spoken things we know we shouldn’t have, whether we were Christians at the time or not. We all have been witnesses of things people have said to others that we know should not have been spoken. We all have been recipients of words said to us that we know should not have been said. Words can hurt.

On the other hand, hopefully we all have spoken things we knew were the right things to say at the right time to the right person. What a great feeling that is when it happens. Praise God! Hopefully we have also been witnesses of things people have said to others that really made a positive difference in their lives. And hopefully we have all been recipients of words said to us that encouraged us at a time we really needed it. Words can help. Words can heal.

Unfortunately, in the world we live in, it seems like words are more often used to hurt than they are used to help and heal. This should not be the case for followers of Jesus Christ. So, our question for today is, “How do the words we choose to speak and choose not to speak point to Jesus Christ as our Savior and as our Lord?” I’m going to read our main Scripture for today from James 3:1-12.

***“****Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.****2****We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.* ***3****When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal.****4****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.****5****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.****6****The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.* ***7****All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind,****8****but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.* ***9****With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness.****10****Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.****11****Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?****12****My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.”*

James is pointing out to us that if you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, than the words you speak should reflect his character. If we are trying to be like someone, then we do the things they do and we say the things they say. If I’m a follower of Jesus I’m not talking with clean, uplifting words here on Sundays and then talking with filthy, degrading words the rest of the week. “Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters,” James writes, “this should not be.”

In Colossians 4:2-6, Paul writes this, (The Message) *“****2-4****Pray diligently. Stay alert, with your eyes wide open in gratitude. Don’t forget to pray for us, that God will open doors for telling the mystery of Christ, even while I’m locked up in this jail. Pray that every time I open my mouth I’ll be able to make Christ plain as day to them.* ***5-6****Use your heads as you live and work among outsiders. Don’t miss a trick. Make the most of every opportunity. Be gracious in your speech. The goal is to bring out the best in others in a conversation, not put them down, not cut them out.”*

Pray that every time I open my mouth I’ll be able to make Christ plain as day to them. What if we had that as our filter? Is what I want to say or write going to make the one I’m following, Jesus Christ, plain as day to those hearing or reading my words?

Do you remember back in August when I took a ‘staycation?’ Well, during that time I did some cleaning and organizing at my house. One of the things that I found was a letter that my sister Drew had given to me at the time of my ordination. In it she wrote, “You add a calmness and a faithfulness to all our lives that is easy to follow. Thank you.” I’m sure I read that 19 years ago, but wow, it meant a lot to me to read that now. And I held onto those words as John and I traveled the New England for the wedding of Drew’s only daughter, my niece Cicely and Mike. As things went haywire because of the explosions in Lawrence, Massachusetts (where we were supposed to have the wedding), those words that Drew wrote were helping to guide me in my purpose of being there. Let’s just help everyone stay as calm as possible, let’s keep looking for the good things that are happening, let’s remember that ultimately, it’s not about the wedding, it’s about the marriage. Words written 19 years ago, pointed me to Ancient Words spoken by my Lord, calling me to be a dispenser of peace.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in his book Life Together, *“Often we combat our evil thoughts most effectively if we absolutely refuse to allow them to be expressed in words. It is certain that the spirit of self-justification can be overcome only by the Spirit of grace, nevertheless, isolated thoughts of judgment can be curbed and smothered by never allowing them the right to be uttered, except as a confession of sin.”* Ephesians 4:29, *“****29****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.”*

George Whitfield was a famous preacher and evangelist in the 1700s. His ministry sparked revival in England – and then in the 1740’s he came to America. In one year, Whitefield traveled 5,000 miles through America, preaching more than 350 times as he traversed the nation North to South. An estimated 25,000 people gathered on Boston Common to hear him speak. Another 12,000 heard him in Philadelphia and 8,000 in New York City. In 15 months, as much as a quarter of the country had heard his message. Yet for all the good he did, he still had critics. He often received letters of criticism, mockery, or hateful correction. Sometimes he would become discouraged by the letters, but he soon learned that the best response to a critic was openness and honesty. After receiving a letter of personal attack he wrote one simple reply to its sender:

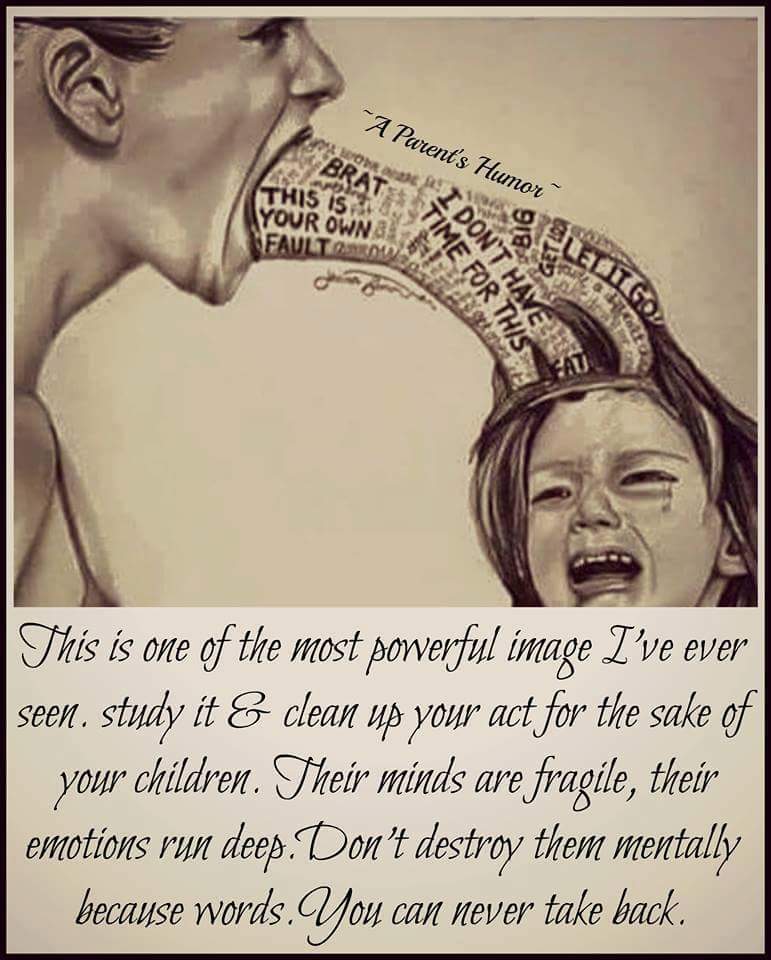
“I thank you heartily for your letter. As for what you and my other enemies are saying against me, I know worse things about myself than you will ever say about me.”

With love in Christ, George Whitfield

Speaking and writing words that honor God all the time is hard at first. It gets easier, it becomes more natural as we mature in our faith. But sometimes it’s still hard. Because people provoke us, poke us, and presume things about us. And we have to set them straight. Right? No. Your example, and my example of holding our tongue until we are sure what the godly response should be, not just saying the first thing that pops into our minds, makes a much bigger and better impression on others than any screaming match or well-placed dig.

I saw this image on facebook last week, and it literally gave me a punch in my stomach.

We have to think before we speak, friends. Whether the person we are speaking to is a child, a youth, or an adult, as followers of Jesus Christ, we need to want our words to point to him as our Savior and as our Lord. As our Savior and as our Lord – meaning we are living with an ever-present sense of gratitude for the gift of our salvation, and we are submitting to Jesus Christ as our final authority, as our Lord.

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Bullying others at home, at school, on the playground, in a text message, on Instagram, snapchat, Facebook, emails, in a note stuck to a locker, a whisper behind the hand, or in a card sent through the mail – using words to intentionally hurt and harm is not God’s design for us.

So, what do we do? James 3:7 said this: ***7****All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind,****8****but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.”* So, what do we do? It seems pretty clear from this verse that WE can’t do anything! No human being can tame the tongue. But God, when we yield our tongues to him, can tame it. The Holy Spirit, who lives inside of all those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, brings to us the same power that raised Jesus from the dead! So, what do we do? Ask God for help, and then do what he says. We can’t ask God for help and then just keep doing what we’ve always done, speaking the way we’ve always spoken, and texting and posting rude or insidious words – and then say, well God didn’t help me. God will help us change anything in our lives when we really, really want to change. How many know this is true?

I say it often: Breathe and pray. Breathe and pray. Breathe and pray before you say something that reveals the sin nature that still has a hold of you as opposed to revealing the character of Christ. Words like, “forgive me.” “I’m sorry.” “I was wrong.” “Thank you, your plan is much better than mine.” Let’s not let cursing and blessing come out of the same mouth. Let’s speak words of grace, words of encouragement, words of truth, and words of love to one another. Not words to manipulate or deceive, or words that tear others down. The sarcastic jokes that are meant to be funny but are actually making fun of someone, what’s the point, really? To become the center of attention? To demean others? Breathe in the presence of the Holy Spirit, who will help you know when to speak and when to be silent. Just think what would happen if politicians waited to speak until God moved them by his Holy Spirit!

I want to close this morning with one of Aesop’s fables called The Tongues. *“Xanthus invited a large company to dinner, and Aesop was ordered to furnish the feast with the choicest dainties that money could procure. The first course consisted of Tongues, cooked in different ways, and served with appropriate sauces. This gave rise to a deal of mirth and witty remarks among the assembled guests. The second course, however, like the first, was also nothing but Tongues, and so the third, and the fourth. The matter seemed to all to have gone beyond a jest, and Xanthus angrily demanded of Aesop, “Did I not tell you, sirrah, to provide the choicest dainties that money could procure?” “And what excels the Tongue?” replied Aesop. “It is the great channel of learning and philosophy. By this noble organ addresses and eulogies a remade, and commerce, contracts, and marriages completely established. Nothing is equal to the Tongue. “The company applauded Aesop’s wit, and good-humour was restored. “Well,” said Xanthus to the guests, “pray do me the favour of dining with me again tomorrow. And if this is your best,” continued he, turning to Aesop, “pray, tomorrow let us have some of the worst meat you can find.” The next day, when dinner-time came, the guests were assembled. Great was their astonishment, and great the anger of Xanthus, at finding that again nothing but Tongues was put upon the table. “How, sir,” said Xanthus, “should Tongues be the best of meat one day and the worst another?” “What,” replied Aesop, “can be worse than the Tongue? What wickedness is there under the sun that it has not a part in? Treasons, violence, injustice, and fraud are debated, resolved upon, and communicated by the Tongue. It is the ruin of empires, cities, and of private friendships.” The company were more than ever struck by Aesop’s ingenuity, and successfully interceded for him with his master.*

As those who are choosing to be disciples of Jesus Christ, the words we say with our mouths and the words we say with our fingers should all be words that come from a heart that exalts Jesus Christ as our Savior and as our Lord. In public and in private. On Sundays and on every other day of the week. At home. At work. On the soccer field, the volleyball court, the football field, on the bus, and in the locker rooms. The words that we say with our mouths and with our fingers should not dishonor others, dishonor ourselves, and most importantly dishonor God. Words can hurt, and words can help and heal. By the power at work within us through the Holy Spirit, let us be those who choose helping and healing words, words of grace, that make Christ as plain as day for all to see.

**"Lord, I Need You"**

Lord, I come, I confess  
Bowing here I find my rest  
Without You I fall apart  
You're the One that guides my heart  
Lord, I need You, oh, I need You  
Every hour I need You  
My one defense, my righteousness  
Oh God, how I need You  
  
Where sin runs deep Your grace is more  
Where grace is found is where You are  
Where You are, Lord, I am free  
Holiness is Christ in me  
Lord, I need You, oh, I need You  
Every hour I need You  
My one defense, my righteousness  
Oh God, how I need You  
  
So teach my words to rise to You  
When temptation comes my way  
When I cannot stand I'll fall on You  
Jesus, You're my hope and stay  
  
Lord, I need You, oh, I need You  
Every hour I need You  
My one defense, my righteousness  
Oh God, how I need You  
  
You're my one defense, my righteousness  
Oh God, how I need You  
My one defense, my righteousness  
Oh God, how I need You

Amen