**THE WORDS WE SPEAK**

**(Matthew 12:33-37)**

Many of you will remember him. He was born in 1912 in Moosejaw, Saskatchewan, Canada. He was abandoned as an infant, but was adopted by an elderly itinerant evangelist and his wife. Their names were Fulton and Mary Linkletter. Many of you remember their adopted boy, Art Linkletter. He was a radio personality who took his show and his talents from radio to TV. Linkletter started a daytime, variety/talk show called House Party. It first aired on radio in 1945. It transitioned to TV in 1952 and ran until 1969.

One of the most popular segments of the show was when Mr. Linkletter would interview kids from all around the greater Los Angeles area. During his many years of work in radio and TV, it is estimated that he interviewed some 20,000 children.

Of the 20 books he wrote in his lifetime, three of them are named, *Kids Say the Darndest Things* (Volumes 1, 2, and 3). The material for those books were drawn straight from those interviews.

Linkletter asked a little boy, “What’s the first thing a fireman does when he hears that fire alarm go off at 4 in the morning?” The boy replied, “He pulls up his pants.”

He asked a little girl, “What’s the first thing you would do if you were the president?” She answered quickly, “Keep my mouth shut.” That’s good advice, by the way.

He asked a boy, “What does your dad do around the house to help your mother?” After a long pause, the boy replied, “He makes cocktails.”

He asked a little girl, “What does your dad do?” She answered, “He raises funds.” He said, “He’s a fund raiser. That’s good. Who does he raise funds for?” She answered, “Himself.”

Linkletter asked another girl, “What’s your favorite story?” She began telling the story of Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding. He asked her, “What do we learn from that story?” She answered, “We learn that the more wine we get the better the wedding is.”

He asked a little boy what he wanted to be when he grew up. The boy said, “Either a bus driver or an airplane pilot.” Linkletter asked, “Let’s say you were the pilot of a big airplane and all four engines suddenly stopped working. What would you say?” The boy bowed his head and said, “Our Father who art in heaven . . .”

Kids do say the darndest things, but I’ve learned that adults also say the darndest things, only the things adults say aren’t always funny, and they aren’t always cute. Sometimes the things adults say are downright **mean,** and **cruel**, and **hurtful,** and **insensitive,** and **wrong.**

Jesus had some things to say about the things we say. Our text today is Matthew 12:33-37. These words that Jesus spoke came on the heels of a warning that Jesus issued to a group who had witnessed Jesus cast out demons from a demon oppressed man and after Jesus healed the man of both his blindness and his inability to speak. There were Pharisees in the crowd who falsely accused Jesus of being able to cast out demons because He was empowered by the Prince of Demons. Let’s read our text.

Based on the verses we just read, I want to identify three things it teaches about “The Words We Speak.”

1. **THE WORDS WE SPEAK REFLECT THE CHARACTER WE HAVE.**

If you want to know what a person is like on the inside, engage him or her in conversation. Just as a tree is known by its fruit, a person is known by the words he or she speaks.

Look at v. 33. What Jesus says here is similar to what He said in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 7:18, Jesus declared, “A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.” In today’s text it seems like Jesus is issuing a command. He says, “Either make the tree good . . . or make the tree bad.”

In his commentary on Matthew, R.T. France says that verse 33 should be understood as a proverbial saying like. “Give him and inch and he’ll take a mile.” Jesus isn’t issuing a command; He is stating a truth. If the tree is bad, its fruit will be bad, and if a tree is good, its fruit will be good.

If all the apples on a tree are bad, the problem doesn’t lie with the apples; the problem lies with the tree. In the context of our passage, the words we speak are like fruit.

Solomon wrote in Proverbs 25:11, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.” In his paraphrase of that verse, Eugene Peterson wrote, “The right word at the right time is like a custom-made piece of jewelry.”

What a succulent apple is to the taste buds and what a beautiful piece of jewelry is to the eye, such is a good word to the ear and the heart of the hearer.

What are the words you speak to those who hear you? Do your spoken words bless and encourage people or do they wound and discourage people?

Our words reflect our thoughts and our thoughts come from what is in our heart. Just as bad fruit comes from bad trees, unhealthy words come from diseased hearts. If people are not blessed and uplifted by what you say, what does that say about you? Our words are a window into our character.

Pastor Levi Lusko claims that it takes the cooperation of 72 different muscles to produce speech. Researchers say that on average, 16,000 words come out of our mouth every day. That adds up to over 860 million words in your lifetime. So, let me ask you, what do all the nouns, verbs, adjectives, and sentences say about your life and the condition of your heart?

Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, author of the book, *Words That Hurt, Words That Heal*, has lectured throughout our country on the powerful, often negative impact of words. He often asks audiences if they can go 24 hours without saying any unkind words about, or to, another person.

Could you do that? Could you go 24 hours without saying something negative or unkind about someone else?

Telushkin says:

[If you] can’t answer “yes” must recognize that you have a serious problem. If you can’t go 24 hours without drinking liquor, you’re addicted to alcohol. If you can’t go 24 hours without smoking, you’re addicted to nicotine. So, if you can't go 24 hours without saying unkind words about others, then you’ve lost control over your tongue.

Jesus says that it is even worse than that. It is not just that you have a bad habit. The problem is that you are the owner of a bad heart; you have a character that isn’t consistent with your Christian convictions.

David’s prayer in Psalm 51 needs to be your prayer, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

There are 12-step programs throughout our country helping people who are addicted, and whether it is alcohol addiction, drug addiction, smoking addiction, or some other kind of addiction, the steps are the same. They begin with recognizing you are powerless over your addiction and you must call upon a Higher Power.

If you are addicted to hurting people with your tongue, you are powerless to change on your own, and you are to call upon the Lord, because only He can change you from the inside out. He can and will make you new and right through His Son, Jesus.

The words we speak reflect the character we have. There is a second truth we find in our passage.

1. **THE WORDS WE SPEAK REVEAL THE TREASURE WE KEEP.**

Look at v. 35. This is not the first time that Jesus has used “treasure” language in Matthew’s gospel. Again, He mentioned this in the Sermon on the Mount. Look back at 6:19-21. The point in our passage is that people naturally talk about what is important to them.

* A sport’s fan will talk about sports and about his team.
* A movie-goer will talk about the latest movie he or she went to see.
* A grandmother is going to talk about her grandchildren and show you pictures while she does so. It will be an audio-visual presentation.

A treasure is kept in a treasury. It is kept in a safe place where it can be accessed when needed. We keep our money in a bank, our important papers in a lock box, our digital photos on the cloud. Likewise, we store up memories and truths in our hearts and minds.

What Jesus says here is similar to what He says later in 13:52. Look at that passage. I like the way Eugene Peterson paraphrased v.52. He wrote, “Every student well-trained in God’s Kingdom is like the owner of a general store who can put his hands on anything you need, old or new, exactly when you need it.”

When I read that verse, I immediately thought of a man named John Baker. For many, many years, there was a building in Perkins, OK that was the home of Baker’s Dry Goods. The building is still there, but the business is long gone. John Baker, a life-long bachelor, ran the store. To the untrained eye there was neither rhyme nor reason as to how items were arranged in Baker’s Store, but just about anything you wanted could be found there. The likelihood of you finding it was slim, but Mr. Baker knew where it was. It seemed that he used the stack method of arranging his goods, and if you asked, he usually knew in which stack to look.

His store was a veritable repository of treasures—old and new. John Baker usually had what you needed, and he knew where to find it. His store was his treasure house, and the goods in his store were the treasures.

Folks, this book is a treasury, and within it are untold treasures. We are to take the treasures within this book and put them in our heart and mind, so that we can give them to those who need them at the time they need them.

The truths of Scripture are sufficient to meet the needs of people, and God calls upon us to be stewards of His truth. When we come across people who have needs, we are to match their need with God’s word and show them how the word of God addresses the particular need in their life.

Some people need **comfort.** Some need **caution.** Some need **correction.** Still others need a word of **challenge.** Whatever the need of the hour is, God’s word addresses it, but there needs to be present a person acquainted with all the treasures of the treasure house to match the need of the person with the word of God. You and I are to be such persons.

Jesus is saying is that the steward of God’s truth can take old truth and apply it the new circumstances of life in which people find themselves. You and I are to be stewards of Kingdom truth. We are to take the unchanging truth of God’s word and the varied experiences of life and bring the two together so that people can see how God’s word addresses where they are in life.

The fact is that everybody speaks from their treasure house, and the words you speak reveal what your treasures are. What do you speak about on a daily basis? Some people are huge sports fans. They watch ESPN. They go online to read the scores. Whether it is football season, basketball season, or baseball season, they can tell you who beat who the day before, who is leading which division and which conference. They make out multiple brackets during March Madness. They have more than one fantasy team going at the same time. Sports is the treasure in the treasury of their heart; so, that is what they talk about.

Others are into pop culture. They know all about the stars in the world of music, TV, and motion pictures. They know who is dating who and who just broke up with who, who is hot and who is not. I can’t carry on a conversation with such people for very long because I know none of that and care even less.

Let me encourage you to fill your heart and mind with the word of God and talk about it whenever you can.

1. **THE WORDS WE SPEAK REQUIRE THE JUDGMENT WE FACE.**

Let’s look at vv. 36-37. These verses begin the same way v. 31 began—with Jesus saying, “I tell you.” Both passages deal with coming judgment, and Jesus is careful to warn His hearers about that judgment. Because He told us, none of us can claim ignorance. If we don’t know, it is because we weren’t paying attention and just didn’t want to know.

According to Jesus, this judgment is occasioned by the words we have spoken. Elsewhere, the Bible teaches that people will have to answer for their deeds, but this passage specifies our words.

You can’t just say whatever you want to say, and then follow it up by adding, “Just kidding” or “Didn’t mean it,” or “Don’t listen to me.”

This past week I visited a lady at her home. The lady’s adult daughter opened the door, and when she did her little dog ran out. She had to go chase her down. I had come to the home to visit her mother. She told me where to find her; so, I went looking for her mom while she went hunting for her dog. I found her mom before she found her dog. Eventually, she retrieved her little dog and returned to the house.

When you open your mouth, words will come rushing out. Once they are out, there is no retrieving them. God records them, but you can’t retrieve them.

In 1881, Will Carleton, published a lengthy poem entitled, “The First Settler’s Story.” It is a long, sad tale of spoken words that did great harm. I won’t retell the story, but I would like to read the last six lines. Some of you may have read them at some point.

Boys flying kites haul in their white-winged birds;You can’t do that when you’re flying words.‘Careful with fire,’ is good advice, we know:‘Careful with words,’ is ten times doubly so.Thoughts unexpressed may sometimes fall back dead;But God Himself can‘t kill them once they’re said.

God can’t make said words unsaid, but He can and will hold us responsible for what we say. Don’t be careless with your words. You will have to give an account for them. The words we speak are every bit as judgment-worthy as the deeds we do.

When a suspect is apprehended, he is read his Miranda Rights. He is told, “You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law.”

In the Kingdom of God, we have the right to remain silent. We need to make full use of that right. In the courtroom of God, anything we say can and will be used against us or anything we say can and will be used for us. It all depends on what we say. If we use our words to speak lies, criticism, gossip, unfair judgment, if our words are used to tear people down, those words will be used against us.

If, however, we use our words to speak encouragement, the truth, the gospel, if are words are used to build people up and promote peace, those words will be used for us.

Our words will either justify or condemn us. Do your words give you a thumbs up or a thumbs down?

The Texas pastor David Dykes shared what the British Pastor, Charles Spurgeon, once said:

More of a man is seen in his words than in anything else belonging to him; you may look into his face and be mistaken, you may visit his house and not discover him, you may scan his business and misunderstand him; but if you hear his daily conversation you shall soon know him. The heart babbles out its secret when the tongue is in motion.

By our words we are known, and by our words we are either justified or condemned. From experience, we know the kinds of words that will get us in trouble. Let me share some words that if we say them in this life, they will definitely help us when we stand before God one day.

* 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” You will not have to give an account to God of sin He has forgiven.
* Romans 10:9-10, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” Here, we again see the connection between what is in the heart and what comes out of the mouth.
* Joel 2:32, “And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” Paul repeats this in Romans 10:13.
* Matthew 10:32, “So everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before My Father who is in heaven.” Use your words to own Jesus before others, and He will own you before God.

My daughter has a rescue dog named Shadow. She loves Shadow, and it appears that Shadow loves her, even though he has never actually said so.

Shadow was rescued by an organization that specializes in rescuing Australian Shepherds. So, this organization rescued Shadow, and my daughter rescued Shadow, so to speak, from the organization. She gave him a home.

The word *saved* that we find in the Bible literally means *rescued.* When God saves people, He rescues them. He rescues them from their past. He parents them in the present helping them to live a meaningful and fulfilling life. Then, He rescues them in the future by giving them eternal life in a glorious place.

Has God rescued you? Unlike Shadow, we have the gift of speech, and we must use it asking God to rescue us. If we will do so, He will. He stands ready to rescue you today, but you have to use your words to call on Him.