

## Slip of the Tongue | The Power of Life... or Death

*Aaron Brockett | Matthew 12:33-37*

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All right, well I want to welcome all of you here today. If you are a guest or if you are visiting with us, we are so thrilled to have you. I want to say hello to our North campus, Downtown, West, and anybody who may be tuning in online. In fact, let's just put our hands together and greet those who are joining us right now. It is so, so good to have you.

Today we are beginning a brand-new series of messages on the power of our words. Did you know that on average we speak about 16,000 words per day? Some of you are skewing that average by the way. You know who you are.

I was thinking about this last week. If you speak that many words per day, then by the end of our lives we will speak somewhere in the ballpark of 525,600,000 words. That's a lot of words.

I look at that and I think, "That is a lot of opportunities to royally slip up and say the wrong thing." When I was a toddler growing up, one of the very first words I learned to speak, at least my parents told me this later in life, was I started to say the word truck. That was the first word I formed.

When they first told me that, I was pretty happy about that. I like trucks. Trucks are tough. I now drive a truck. But they didn't seem all that excited about it. My mom and dad, after they told me, they kind of gave each other that look. You know, the one that says, "Should we tell him?" And I was like, "What's the big deal?"

And my mom said, "You were trying to say the word truck, but that's not how it came out." I was like, "Well how did it come out?" Immediately my mom's face turned beet red, and she didn't want to say. I kept pressing her on it, and finally she said, "Well, you couldn't enunciate your T's and so what you were trying to say rhymes with truck, but it was the granddaddy of all bad words."

And she said, "I was mortified. You would walk around the house saying that word over and over again." She said, "I would take you to the grocery store and you would walk up to complete strangers and just say the word. I couldn't take you to church because I was afraid if I checked you into the kids' ministry you'd say something inappropriate to whomever was teaching you. It was horrible."

I thought, "Wow, you must have been so proud. Your son is definitely going to grow up to be a preacher one day."

You know, we can all hear something like that and we can laugh about it, but I can imagine you maybe have your own story. We have all said some things, and we have all had some things said to us that chances are it just wasn't a laughing matter.

Our tongues can get us into a lot of trouble. Our tongues can cause a lot of pain, a lot of destruction in our lives and our relationships. James puts it so well when he says this, "...no one can tame the tongue."

That's an interesting choice of words to speak about this. I don't know, maybe you or somebody else you know has said something and maybe it was out of line. You just go, "It's only words, what's the big deal?" But James would say it is actually a big deal and then he says, "Nobody can tame it."

What do you tame?

You tame wild animals. You tame beasts that are out in the open somewhere. James is like, "You actually have to tame your tongue." As it turns out, the Bible has a lot to say about this particular subject – the words we speak.

Over the course of the next several weekends together, we're going to unpack much of the Bible's teaching on this important subject. One particular thing I would hope you might come to see is that the Bible's wisdom on this particular subject is just so good.

And I don't know where you're coming from. I don't know where you're at. But if you are here today and you would say, "I'm not quite sure what I believe about God. I certainly don't know that I could trust the Bible or that I understand everything written in the Bible."

If that's the case, I really am so glad you're here. This is the place for you. We're glad you're here.

Maybe you've got some questions about the Bible and what it says about science. Maybe you've got some questions about the Bible and social issues, or the Bible and miracles. I get that. And I would say those things have some good explanations and some good answers. We can talk about that.

However, what I'd ask you to do is I wouldn't ask you to diminish those questions. Those are good questions. But maybe if you could, just kind of take those big issues and set them off to the side just for a moment. In this series just really look at what the Bible says about the importance of our speech.

I think one of the things you'll come to see is that the Bible's wisdom on this subject is incredibly insightful and you can apply it to your life regardless of whether or not you would call yourself a Christian. And if you would apply the Bible's wisdom on this subject to your life, I think you will find that your relationships will benefit from it.

So my prayer over the next several weeks is that in studying this together the Bible might begin to earn your trust as it relates to this subject, and therefore you can trust everything else written in it.

Now when you read passages that deal with this particular subject, one of the things that becomes very, very clear is this.

Words matter.

Words matter. In fact, we've all heard the clichés before. In fact, you can probably say it out loud with me, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." That's just simply not true. That's a lie.

Proverbs would counter that with this statement right here. Proverbs would say, "The tongue can bring **death** or **life**; those who love to talk will reap the consequences."

You know what? You likely know that to be true because we have all been on the giving as well as on the receiving end of words that quite possibly felt like death. Maybe it was the words of a parent, maybe it was the words of a teacher, a coach, or a friend. Hopefully you've been on the receiving end of words that brought life as well.

I think when it comes to that passage in Proverbs, we all know that to be true and intellectually we would agree with it, but most of the time it's not enough for us to keep our tongues bridled. Is it? I can speak for myself when I say I've allowed some things, far too often, to slip out of my mouth that I would later regret.

One unknown author put it this way.

"The tongue has no bones, but is strong enough to break a heart." —*Unknown*

Well, in Matthew 12 Jesus is going to speak to this subject directly. If you have a Bible or a Bible App I would encourage you to meet me there. It's the first book in the New Testament. The context here of what is going on is Jesus is in a public place. There is a group of people who have gathered around him. There is this man who is described, not as demon possessed, but as demon oppressed.

It says that he can't speak. It says he can't see. And Jesus, in an act of mercy and compassion, he heals him. It says the demon leaves him and, not only that, but the man begins to speak. He can see. It is this incredible thing. And people are recognizing this, as they should, and they are celebrating this, as they should.

As is often the case, there is a group of people there who weren't very happy about it. There is always a group of people that when something good happens to someone, they just want to tear them down. In this particular instance it was a group of paranoid Pharisees. And they attack Jesus, but they do not attack him with their fists. They don't attack him with weapons. They attack him with their words.

Check this out in chapter 12, verse 24.

"But when the Pharisees heard about the miracle, they **said**," and notice what came out of their mouths, "'No wonder he can cast out demons. He gets his power from Satan, the prince of demons.'"

All right then. That is a pretty serious accusation, don't you think? And with these words I detect some things here. I detect a fair amount of cynicism, I detect some sarcasm, and I detect just a bold-faced lie.

It would be one thing for them to just ask some questions about this. It would be one thing for them to go, "You know what? We should investigate this. How did Jesus find the power to do this?"

But that's not what they are doing. They are making definitive statements, and the reason why they are making these statements is that they're trying to publicly discredit Jesus with their words. They are seeking to tear him down and get the people around him to lose confidence in him and what he has come to do.

Have you ever had somebody in your life do or say something very similar? Maybe somebody who just cannot bring themselves to be happy for you or to celebrate with you the good things that are going on in your life. So they say things like, "Well, no wonder you got the promotion, your uncle is the VP."

Or they say things like, "No wonder people like you so much. You just tell them what they want to hear." Or, "No wonder you look so good, all you do is go to the gym and work out while the rest of us have to work for a living."

What is that? Those are words that are designed to tear you down. They are designed to push you down so the person who is speaking these words can have a temporary, yet brief feeling of superiority over you. You know what? We've all done it. And we've all been the recipients of it. And it really, really hurts. It's not just words.

What I want you to know is that Jesus was not immune to this. When he became fully God and fully man, he experienced everything we would experience, including the harsh things people would say to him. If you know what that feels like, Jesus knows what that feels like too.

And this is what prompts him to address this subject very specifically on down in verse 33. Read with me.

"A tree is identified by its fruit. If a tree is good, its fruit will be good. If a tree is bad, its fruit will be bad." Now he is addressing the Pharisees. "You brood of snakes! How could evil men like you **speak** what is good and right? **For whatever is in your heart determines what you say.**"

Wow. That is convicting. In other words, Jesus is saying, "Listen, if I come across a tree and it has apples hanging from it, I don't have to wonder what kind of tree it is. I don't have to cut it open. I don't have to cut it down or look at the root system to determine what kind of a tree it is. I know what kind of a tree it is because it has apples hanging off it. I can determine it is an apple tree."

He says, "In the same way, if I want to know what kind of person you are all I need to do is listen to the words coming out of your mouth. That will tell me all I need to know."

And here is the principle we can take away with us.

What goes into the heart will eventually come out of the mouth.

What goes into the heart will eventually come out of the mouth.

Words reveal what is truly going on in here. My guess, if you're anything like me, is I am readily and easily able to get on board with that and agree with it and say, "Amen," and clap my hands as long as we're talking about someone else. I can clearly see it in other people.

Even right now, you came in here and this is the series we are in. As you're sitting here, as you're watching online you are thinking to yourself, "Man, I have a boss, a co-worker, a spouse, an in-law who really, really needs this message series. I'm going to share the link on Facebook because they really need to listen to this."

What ends up happening is that we end up sort of excusing ourselves from the same application and it's difficult to apply this truth to our lives because we so easily let ourselves off the hook. I do it all the time. If I say something that is insensitive to my wife, if I come home after a long day and I'm harsh with my kids, if I snap at a co-worker and then I get called on it, it is really easy to excuse away and minimize it. Isn't it?

And the way I do that is I say things like, "I didn't really mean it," or, "I wasn't thinking in the moment," or, "It was just a slip of the tongue." Or, here is my favorite one. I put the ownership on you. I go, "Well, if you weren't that way, I wouldn't have said what I said." We've all done that.

And yet Jesus, if he were in the room with us, I think he would very quietly but very firmly object. He would say, "No, those words came from somewhere. And that somewhere is your heart." Here's the thing. You may not have intended to say those words. Maybe you didn't really mean it, but it was somewhere inside of you whether you knew it, whether you could see it or not.

Here's the deal. We are oftentimes unaware of what's going on inside our hearts.

The prophet Jeremiah would say it this way, "The human heart is the **most deceitful** of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?"

Now we live in a culture that likes to say things like, "Just follow your heart," and it sounds really, really good. But Jeremiah would say, "You might want to rethink that. Don't follow your heart."

Now don't misunderstand me. Should you have a healthy self-esteem? Absolutely you should. Should you recognize your worth and value as an image bearer of God? Yes, you should. Should you know, and I hope that you know, that you are loved by your heavenly father? Yes. But should you follow your heart wherever it may lead? Absolutely not.

Because Jeremiah says there are some things that are going on in there that can even deceive you. You have some blind spots. You can't even see it.

Say I took a week and I just followed my heart wherever it would lead, I guarantee you that before the week was up my marriage would be trashed, my relationship with my kids would be trashed, and my career would be trashed because my heart is deceitful, and here is the kicker: I am usually the last one in the room to know it.

Now our hearts can be reclaimed by Jesus. They can be redeemed, transformed. In fact that's what it means to put your trust in Jesus and to follow him. That's what he is offering when he offers salvation. And one of the very clear indicators that this has happened is the words that slip from our mouths will change. We will have fewer and fewer slip-ups and our words will bring more life than they do death.

This is what Jesus is getting at on down in verse 35.

"A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. And I tell you this, you must give an account on judgment day for **every idle word you speak**. The words you say will either **acquit** you or **condemn** you."

Now man, that sounds really, really heavy. And it is. So what is Jesus saying? We need to break this down. First of all I want you to know this. Jesus is not suggesting that our salvation is tied to our words. That's not what he is saying. But he is saying that our words reveal our salvation, that our words reveal the condition that our heart is in. It shows others what is truly going on inside of us.

This is why it is so damaging when we say harsh things, especially when we are a follower of Jesus and other people know it. And we say mean, degrading, hateful, and harsh things towards other people. It is one of the top reasons why people say they have given up on God and given up on church. I can't blame them for feeling that way.

The second thing is that in America we have this wonderful thing called free speech. It is wonderful, a right we have. Men and women throughout history have sacrificed their lives so we can have this incredible privilege that not everyone in the world gets to experience. However, what I want you to consider is there is a shady side to this, especially when it comes to social media, that as Americans we often feel we can say whatever we want, whenever we want, however we want to whomever we want.

And we say, "It's our right. Free speech."

And what Jesus is saying here is that if you are a follower of his, your allegiance to him is first and your identity as an American, as great as that is, is a distant second to your relationship to Christ. And Jesus very clearly puts some limitations and boundaries around the words that we speak, and for good reasons. Words are never neutral in their meaning.

Notice in the passage in Proverbs he says, "They either bring life or death." There is no in between. They reveal something and they deeply, deeply affect the hearts of the people who we are speaking to. They either bring life or death.

I want to show you just how deep this whole issue goes with the battle of words by looking at a couple of passages in the very first book of the Bible. In Genesis we see that in the beginning there was just nothing. And then God begins to create. And when he creates he doesn't pull out his Stanley toolset, but he begins to use words in creation.

Look with me in Genesis chapter 1, starting in verse 3.

"Then God **said**," he uses words here and says, "'Let there be light,' and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. God **called** the light 'day' and the darkness 'night.'"

What we see here is that God spoke into the nothingness. And he uses words to create and words to identify. He uses words to bring light and life. He uses words to create and to build up. He uses words to scatter the darkness. Let's say it this way. When God speaks, the lights always come on.

He didn't have to use words. Think of all the ways God could have created. God could have just written some things down. God could have used his hands. God could have just worked quietly. But we see from the very beginning that words matter to God. Words are God's thing.

When we go to the New Testament, each of the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, they all spend the very beginning of their books introducing us to who Jesus was and why he came. John's gospel does the same but his introduction of Jesus is the most unique of all the gospel writers.

When John introduces Jesus he doesn't even mention Jesus' name until verse 17. This is how John chooses to introduce Jesus.

"In the beginning the **Word** already existed. The **Word** was with God, and the **Word was God**. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. **The Word gave life**," notice the consistency to the words in Proverbs, "**to everything that was created**, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it."

Jesus, the Word, and the words of Jesus always bring light and life. I would just encourage you sometime to just go through and read all the words of Jesus in the Bible. I think they have a Bible reading plan to read all the words of Jesus.

If you want to know the heart of God, read the words of Jesus. He was always speaking words of hope, healing, and freedom. He was speaking words of deliverance to people who desperately needed it, people who had been hurt, attacked, marginalized, and wounded by the words of others. Jesus never used words to attack, tear down, or destroy people.

The harshest words he reserved were for those who should have known better and were leading people astray by their words.

You see, the power of life was and is found in Jesus the Word, and in his words. So the questions I have is, “Where did the words that bring death come from?”

If we go back to the book of Genesis we see by chapter 3 something happens. It says this.

“The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made.” And he is going to use some words himself. “One day he **asked** the woman, ‘**Did God really say** you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?’”

And we see here that the enemy Satan is using words as well. And he uses words to destroy and to confuse. With words he brings darkness and death. With words he tears down and he divides. You see, when Satan speaks, the lights always go out.

Therefore, the point Jesus is making back in our passage from Matthew 12 is that if we are claiming to follow after Jesus that means something. That means his Spirit resides in our hearts and we have given him the controls over our lives and our speech. It means he is in there and he is cleaning some stuff up. He is changing the desires of our hearts.

And one of the questions I had when I was a young child was, “If I ask Jesus in, how will I know he is there?” Have you ever asked this question? How do I know the Spirit of God is in my life? Here is a clearer way to say it. How do I know I am saved?

The clearest, most tangible evidence of your salvation is what comes out of your mouth. Now we’ll continue to struggle sometimes I am sure. There will be words that will escape from our lips we could take back. But here is the difference. As you grow more and more in Jesus, that will happen less and less or at least it should.

It means the next time you and I have a slip of the tongue, we’ll own it right away. We’ll recognize it. We won’t ignore that. We won’t diminish it. We won’t excuse it or endorse it. Here’s the great thing. Here is the good thing. Jesus says, “Hey listen, I know words can bring death, but words can also bring life.”

So could I ask it this way?

Whose words do your words sound most like?

Do your words bring light and life to others around you? Or do they bring death. You and I are in no position to answer this objectively, we just aren’t.

Here is something I might challenge you with. I don’t know if you will take me up on this or not. I will challenge you over the course of this series to identify two or three people in your life whom you trust and just ask them.



Just say, "In my everyday conversations, with you and the conversations you observe me having, do my words bring life or do they bring death? Do they encourage or discourage? Are they representing Jesus well or do they not? Let me take it a step further. I give you permission to call me on it when they bring death. I give you permission to speak into this issue in my life."

Words can bring life to others even when you disagree with them about an issue. Your words can bring life even if you guys don't see eye to eye. Or in those moments your words can be disruptive. They can be harsh. They can be hateful.

You see, we oftentimes underestimate the power your words have. I think it is easy for it to slip out of our mouths and we just shrug our shoulders and say, "It's not that big of an issue." But you know what? Chances are you've said something someone else has held onto for a really, really long time.

And some of you have had things said to you by people and they don't even remember saying it to you, but you live with it every day. It's like this suitcase or this bag filled with words, sentences, and descriptions that others have aimed your way. Maybe they said it flippantly, but you've held onto it and it hurts.

There is this lady by the name of Rachel Wolchin and she said this.

"Be mindful when it comes to your words. A string of some that don't mean much to you, may stick with someone else **for a lifetime.**" —*Rachel Wolchin*

This past week I asked a bunch of you on social media to send me the most hurtful thing someone has said to you. The response was overwhelming. So many of you had the courage to comment or to send me a direct message and I just want to read a few of these.

"I've always loved your sister more anyways."

"I'm not sure you'll amount to much."

"I love you, but..."

"You were so hard to give birth to and I don't know if it was worth it."

"I don't like you."

"I don't know why you want to waste the time and money getting your degree. It won't do you any good and you probably won't finish it anyway."

"You'd make a great housewife." (spoken from a dad to his son)

"You should be ashamed of yourself."

"You're worthless."

"You'll never be as good as your brother."

"You don't belong here."

"I don't love you like I used to."

"No one likes you."

"We don't want any [N-word] on our team."

"I can't wait to watch you fail."

"You're not invited."

"You would be so beautiful if you just lost some weight."  
"Nobody wants you. That's why people keep leaving you."  
"You can't do anything right."  
"If you died I wouldn't care at all."  
"If people knew all the bad stuff you've done, no one would be in your life."  
"You didn't pray hard enough." (after a miscarriage)  
"I can't stand to look at you."  
"You'll never do it."  
"We only had you because we didn't want your brother to be an only child."  
"I know that 'you people' are slow learners." (spoken to someone from a different ethnicity)

These words tear down and they divide and they feel like death. As I read these comments on social media, my heart just broke because there are so many people who are carrying around words that are just not true. And maybe the person who said some of these things to you, they are not willing to say it or they are unable to. So would you allow me to say it?

I am so sorry. That is not how God feels about you. The only way to come to this place of healing because listen, you can't just pretend nobody said it to you—the residue of it is still there—but you can begin today this process of healing. The way you begin this process of healing is allowing God's words to wash over you. To allow God's words to you and about you to override the harsh words that have been directed towards you.

So if someone has said to you, "I don't love you anymore," God says, "I've always loved you."

If someone says, "You are worthless," God says, "You are worthy."

If someone says, "You're a mistake," God says, "You're a miracle."

If somebody says, "You're not welcome here," God says, "I've been waiting for you."

If someone says, "You're not good enough," God says, "I am your enough."

If somebody says, "I can't stand you," God says, "Let me stand for you."

If somebody says, "Nobody wants you," God says, "I do. And I sent Jesus so I could have you."

And the two applications I want to leave us with here in week one is an invitation for you to begin that process of healing that can only come by allowing God's word about you to replace others' destructive words towards you.

The next application is that now that we know and understand the power words have, can we as a people, can we as a church, a family, across multiple locations around our city resolve to only speak words of life to others?

In fact, would you be willing to commit this verse to memory this week? Across all our campuses to say this verse out loud together.

“Take control of what I say, O Lord, and guard my lips.”

Could we as a church family commit this verse to memory? Can we internalize it? And let’s be people committed to only speaking words of life not only to each other but to those we work with and those we come across in our lives.

I know there might be a few of you who are pushing back on this saying, “Does that mean we can’t ever speak the truth? Aren’t you just saying we should just butter each other up and blow smoke towards each other in the name of being nice?” That’s not what I’m saying at all.

This doesn’t mean you can’t be honest. It doesn’t mean you can’t speak truth. It doesn’t mean we’re supposed to be disingenuous. You see, we can confront, challenge, and offer constructive criticism in ways that still bring life to those around us. God does. He confronts us in our sins. He challenges our priorities. He convicts us when we mess up. Yet he always does it in a way that brings life.

You know how the Bible describes it in Ephesians 4:15?

“Speaking the truth **in love**.”

We speak the truth but we do it in a way that brings light and life to those around us. And the cynicism, sarcasm, harsh words, and angry words, if curse words, gossip, rumors, half-truths and little white lies are still slipping into your speech on a regular basis it’s because there is something in your heart that isn’t right. It’s time you do something about that.

It’s likely you’ve been coming to church for a really, really long time, but you’ve still not given your heart to God. It is time you do that. And you know what? It’s not just a one-time thing. You’re going to have to continue to give him your heart so that he changes your speech and I’ll be right there with you.

The Bible says in the book of Revelation that God is keeping track of every tear you and I shed in this painful life. I love that imagery. It’s as if every tear we shed God is bottling it up, he is keeping track of it so that one day in the new Heaven and the new Earth when we sit down with our heavenly Father he will pull that off the shelf and begin to reconcile every pain that those tears represent.

Therefore, it stands to reason, don’t you think, that he’s also keeping track of our words. Jesus said as much in the passage. I wonder what that will look like. I wonder if God will pull a cardboard box off the shelf and it will just be labeled Aaron’s words, all 525,600,000 of them.

He and I will sit down and he’ll begin to pull them out one by one. He will pull out that very first word I said and I think God will laugh. I think he has a good sense of humor. Then I think God will also start pulling out some words I’m going to be really, really ashamed of. And I think a tear might come to his eyes and he might say, “Aaron, how could you say that? You had no idea the impact that had on

someone else? Why would you say that?" And I'm going to be really in need of his grace in that moment.

But I would hope, and more and more so as I begin to live out the second half of my life on earth, that God would be able to pull the words I speak out of that box and it would bring a smile to his face. He would say, "Good job. Thank you for allowing me to affect and influence your speech because it might not have seemed like such a big deal to you but that little impulse I gave you that you needed to say something to that person, and tried to figure out if you should, but then you did. Thank you because they really needed to hear that, and it brought life to them. Thank you for speaking in such a way that led people to me."

Let's be that kind of people. And let's be that kind of church that would be willing to speak life into others so others might find new life in Jesus.

Let's pray together.

Father, we come to you right now and as we begin this study we want to give our hearts to you. Because we are often unaware of what's going on in there and oftentimes our words that slip from our tongues reveal what's going on in there. And God, we ask that you would start with our hearts so you can change our speech.

We want to speak words that bring life and light to each other. We know how it affects us when others speak words of death and darkness. God, I pray we can represent you well with our words, that we resolve to be people that would have this prayer on our lips that you would guard what we say, control what we say, so we might bring life to those who need it.

Be with us in the following weeks as we continue this study. I pray that you would do a transformational work in individual lives and in the life of our church.

We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.