

Mind Your Words

Matt. 12:33-37

If we can follow the progress of the argument here in Matt 12, Jesus responded to the propaganda put forth by the Pharisees that He was casting out demons by the power of the Devil. They had said this in the face of a remarkable miracle, where Jesus had cast the demon out of a possessed man who was both blind and unable to speak. The exorcism had given the man both his sight and speech. Jesus demonstrated the dishonest nature of the propaganda with an easily accepted truism. A house or city that is divided against itself will not stand. Therefore if Jesus were to cast out demons by the power of the Devil, Satan's house would not stand and... everyone knows the Devil is smarter than that. Jesus argued further that the miracle actually proved that Jesus was the antagonist of the Devil since before entering a strong man's house and plundering his goods you would want to be sure to first bind the strong man, then you would plunder his house. The casting out of the demon was a plundering of the Devil's house, before doing so, Jesus was wise enough to first, bind the strong man (the Devil).

Jesus then took the exchange to an entirely different level. He said, "Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come." Clearly, Jesus declared that the Pharisees had committed the unpardonable sin when they attributed what Jesus had done by the power of the Holy Spirit to the power of the Devil. So the propaganda of the Pharisees was turned completely upside down. They began as the self-appointed arbiters of genuine spirituality who had the insight to know the real truth about Jesus. The scene is completed by their thorough drubbing by Jesus' reasoned reproach and His conclusion that left them condemned by their own words to the status of "unpardonable."

One possible reaction to Jesus' judgment of the Pharisees might be to protest that He was too harsh with the Pharisees. Why should what they said be "unpardonable"? After all, it was just words.

It is this reaction that Jesus seems to address in verses 33-37. This is necessary since we often underestimate the significance and the power of words. Many of you grew up with the children's rhyme, "Sticks and stones will break your bones but names will never hurt you." For some reason the rhyme doesn't work for though it is true that sticks and stones can break your bones, name calling is also very wounding. As much as we may not want to admit it, words do matter. No one is exempt from

responsibility for the words that come out of his or her mouth. But why are words so significant?

James makes the point that the tongue is very hard to tame and that if you can tame the tongue then you have pretty well mastered your entire body. He compares the tongue to the bit in the horses' mouth that turns the whole body and the rudder of seemingly insignificant size that turns a large ship. In the same way "the tongue is a little member and boasts great things." The third comparison of little and big is between that of a small fire and a great forest fire. James runs with this third metaphor to emphasize all of the trouble that the tongue can cause. "The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and is set on fire by hell." James argues further that man is able to tame every kind of beast and even creatures of the sea "But no one can tame the tongue, it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." To strengthen this point James uses the inclusive 2nd person to describe our use of the tongue, "With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men who have been made in the image of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so." Finally, James again turns to nature, "Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree my brethren, bear olives? or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh."

Of course James comes after Jesus and so his ideas are really from Jesus. Jesus does not back down from His judgment of the Pharisees that was based upon their words. He uses the example of a tree. A tree is known for its fruit. We planted a peach tree in the parsonage backyard some years ago. The tree produced very small peaches that had very little flavor. We let the tree grow for several years. We tried to treat it to get bigger and better peaches but nothing ever changed. Small peaches and not much flavor. When we thought of something else to do with the space the peach tree was in, we had no hesitation about cutting it down. It a tree is known by its fruit, people become known by their words. Bitter or grateful, angry or kind, thoughtful or hasty, vulgar or clean, your words are how you represent yourself to others. And, your words are a true test of your real self for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. You cannot say a word that you did not think first. And, we are pretty good at not saying what we don't want to say in given circumstances.

I have seen people who are livid with temper and appear ready to explode, contain it until they perceive that no one is looking. When they do explode, they are as in control as when they were holding back. We say what we mean to say at the time that we say it. We may truly regret it later but these regrets may have more to do with a regret of the consequences of what was said than the content of what was said. The test is what we say in similar circumstances the next time.

We can change the way we speak. We can become kind and tenderhearted and forgiving just as Christ is toward us. To do so we need His grace. This grace is available, all you have to do is ask.

Finally Jesus taught accountability in respect to our words in view of the judgment. "But this I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." The Pharisees are not alone in facing a judgment based on their words.

Listen to Jesus' words, "Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and

lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

Hear Peter's words when after the crowds departed the day after the feeding of the 5000 when Jesus asked them, "Will you also leave Me? Peter said, "To whom shall we go, you are the one who has the words of eternal life." And hear the Apostle Paul, "Finally brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue, and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things"... for what you think you will speak. Adopt the spirit of David, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, My Rock and My Redeemer."