

WESTMINSTER
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CHURCH



SERMON

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The Majesty of God: Words

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Continuing in our summer series “The Majesty of God,” today we’ll look to God’s majesty as revealed through words. I’ve always had a high value for words; written, spoken, or sung, I’ve always been drawn to the power of words.

I tend to be the kind of person who does my best to go with the flow. Surely, I’m full of idiosyncrasies and peculiarities that help to form my preferences and ideals, but I can often be pretty flexible. And that’s how I felt as Elise and I planned our wedding: happy to be flexible. As many of you know, details abound when one plans a wedding, but there were precious few of those details that were on the top of my priority list, so when Elise would ask me about the color of the flowers, or the type of tablecloth, I would often respond, “I don’t really care.”

I quickly learned that this was the wrong response to the question because what I was unintentionally communicating was that I didn’t care about our wedding, which could not have been further from the truth. I cared deeply about our wedding; I just didn’t have a strong preference about some of those details. It was in those moments that I adjusted the phrase to, “It’s more important to you than it is to me.” I was happy to offer an opinion, but I was also happy for things to go in a different direction. You see, even the simplest words, like “I don’t really care” can be so powerful.

As we walk through this series on “The Majesty of God,” we see that there’s power in all that we have discussed. Anything that is endowed with majesty is also endowed with power; and

powerful things can be used for good or for evil. For building up or for tearing down.

I often use the metaphor of a sharp knife. Sharp knives are a wonder to behold when they are in the hands of professionals. They can slice, chop, carve, whittle, shape, and form with precision and beauty that might leave you breathless. But, in the hands of a child or someone untrained, or even someone with ill-intentions, we all cringe at the thought of the damage that could be done. The same tool, two very different outcomes.

Our words are like sharp knives. When we use them well, we can shape, and form, and build, and support life and redemption. God spoke our very Creation into existence. But when we use them poorly, we cause destruction, pain, trauma, and yes, literal death. Your words are powerful, and you are endowed with great power each and every time that you use them.

This is surely not a new insight. As a matter of fact, this very truth is peppered both implicitly and explicitly all throughout the old and new testaments. Proverbs 10:11 tells us that “The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.” The same tool, two different outcomes. James 3:10 says that, “Out of the same mouth come both praise and cursing.” Again, the same tool, two very different outcomes. Our words and how we use them impact our lives, impact the lives of those around us, and yes, they impact faith and how it forms.

It should come as absolutely no surprise at all that God is well aware of this truth; look to the story of the Tower of Babel in the book of Genesis. In the generations that followed the story of Noah and the Ark and the flooding of Creation, it's as if God sees the same old story playing out all over again and needs to put a stop to it. You see, in the days that preceded the great flood, God looked at Creation and scripture tells us that "every inclination of the heart was evil all the time." And now that the flood has gone and the people are once again multiplying and expanding and progressing by their own desires, God sees a familiar playbook and must once again intervene. This time, instead of a purging flood, God uses the power of language. Scripture tells us that God confuses the language of the people so they will not understand one another, and that they are scattered throughout the world. God puts a stop to their selfish progress through the use of language. Words have power, and that power can draw people away from God. God knows that.

But there's another side to this same coin in the book of Acts: the story of Pentecost. In the days following Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, his disciples are given the task of "making disciples of all nations," which, to a group of relatively uneducated young people might seem like an overwhelming task. Until, once again, God intervenes with the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples are together trying to plan out their next moves when the Spirit comes upon them, and we read in Scripture that people from every nation and language began to suddenly understand what the disciples

were speaking. And you see something unique happening here. God does not force conformity in that everyone speaks and understands the same language. Instead, God uses his disciples to speak to the world in *their own unique language*. Words have power, and that power can draw people *toward* God. God knows that.

Your words - in a variety of dialects, accents, colloquialisms, and languages - can push people away from God, and can draw people toward God. Your words have power. This probably isn't a brand new idea to you, that your words have power. Most of us know this despite the fact that many of us were raised on the lie that "sticks and stones may break our bones, but words would never hurt us." What a bunch of bull that is. Words do hurt: they hurt us, they hurt others, they hurt our relationship with God. And the words that we use have real life implications. Relationships are made or broken. Dreams are sparked or killed. Lives are enriched and sometimes lives are ended because of words that have been spoken or gone unspoken.

Ephesians 4:29 says, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up *according to their needs...*" When used properly, our words are a gift to those around us. But when we use them carelessly, our words are dangerous, pure and simple. The writers of scripture knew this power. And when we take even just a few moments to sit with these truths, the weight of words becomes all the more apparent.

It helps to make sense of the warning that we see in verse 36 of this morning's scripture, "I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment *for every empty word they have spoken.*" Pause with that thought for a moment. Could you give account for every thoughtless word that you've spoken in the past week, let alone the past month, let alone the past year? What words have you swung like hammers, either intentionally or unintentionally? What sharp knife have you wielded and how have you wielded it?

We must be mindful when we speak. We have to be mindful not only because our words are powerful, but because when we speak we do so with the very breath of God. The Greek word for breath is the same word used to describe the wind that blew down on the disciples at Pentecost. It is the spirit that enables us to speak, and our words are a gift from God. The majesty of God is revealed in our very ability to speak, communicate, and share with one another. *Your words are powerful.* So, when we read at the end of this scripture in Matthew that by our words we will either be justified or condemned, there is no surprise at all.

Our words are the outpouring of what is in our hearts. Do you find yourself impatient and spewing inflammatory rhetoric? Do you find yourself mumbling quietly underneath your breath as your neighbors or coworkers walk away? Do you make jokes at the expense of others? Do you denigrate those with whom you disagree in order to support your own position? Your words are literally speaking evidence of what is

in your heart in these moments. Your words testify as witness to your heart. Let me say that again. Your words testify as witness to your heart.

If you want to know what is in your heart, if you want to know if or how your faith is growing – listen. Listen to yourself, listen to your words. And the same goes for others. If you want to know what is in a person’s heart, listen to how they speak. Do they uplift, encourage, support, and reconcile or do they denigrate, slander, insult, and smear? If it’s true, as our scripture tells us this morning, that “the mouth speaks what the heart is full of,” then words are a window into the heart.

This leads me to one final truth. If words are a window to the heart, then when we read in the first chapter of the Gospel of John that in the beginning was the word and that the word was with God...and that the word became flesh in the person of Jesus, this can only mean one thing: God’s heart is revealed to us in the person of Jesus.

Just as our words are windows into our own hearts, God’s word is a window into His heart. You want to know God? Get to know his word. Open up his scripture, the literal words. Learn about the life of Jesus, God’s word incarnate. Yes, words are powerful and there’s never been a more powerful word than in the person of Jesus.

And it’s still going on today, folks. Hebrews 4:12 says that God’s word is living and active, that it pierces us to our soul

and to our bone. This isn't wisdom for a rainy day, or advice for when life is going smoothly. This is a living and active exhortation to check yourself and check your words. Be aware of how you speak to others and the world around you. Be aware of the words of others. Let the Word of God pierce you and change you.

If we did these things, just imagine what our community might look like. What if we only uplifted, only encouraged. What if we spoke thoughtful and caring truths? What if our words revealed that our hearts were full of love, and joy, and peace, and kindness?

Imagine the fruit that would grow on the trees of this community.

Our words can do it, my friends. Our words can do it.

Amen.



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