

Sermon

Grace Street Fellowship, Dr. Jim Burgin, pastor

Sunday, July 22nd, 2018

Sermon Series: "Staying Cool in a Hot Summer"

Sermon # 4 - **The Power to Bless** - Ephesians 4:29

"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 (impart grace) to those who listen."

Opening

1. We live in heated days – personally & politically. Even some of our elder statesmen and wisest people are saying that they've "never seen anything like this." So, how do we stay cool in a hot summer.
 - a. Perhaps JRR Tolkien expresses well what we feel in his classic: "The Fellowship of the Ring."
 - b. Two characters in the novel reflect on the evil of the day – a younger, inexperienced, but growing leader, and a wise, tested one. Speaking of evil's rise in their day, the younger character says "I wish it need not have happened in my time."
 - c. The older, wiser characters responds. "So do I, and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us." The backdrop to Tolkien's novels was World War I.
2. Last week we sought God's perspective about "handling conflict." This week, we seek wisdom about our words.
3. There's the joke about an Iowa preacher's new car breaking down just after the Sunday service. Come Monday morning, the Reverend managed to drive the vehicle to the town's one garage for repairs. "I hope you'll go easy on the cost," he told the mechanic. "After all, I'm just a poor preacher." "I know," came the reply. "I heard you preach yesterday."
4. Poetry
A wise old owl lived in an oak
The more he heard, the less he spoke.
The less he spoke, the more he heard,
Why can't we all be like the wise old bird?

This Must Be Important

1. "Do not let" is a command for believers, not an optional suggestion;
2. The prohibition is against **any** "unwholesome talk" – In other words, our goal is not to fail in this matter even once.
3. Paul doesn't allow for human nature, or stressful conditions, or a high percentage to qualify as success.
4. The conclusion is that this must be pretty important. Not that God is just out to control, micromanage our behavior, but that words matter.
5. We know something about the lasting value of words. In Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, on November 19th, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln dedicated a portion of a battle field as a cemetery for veterans of the war for emancipation. In that speech, Lincoln told the listening crowd that "the world will little note, nor long remember what we say here." But he was wrong, because words have power.
6. On June 1, 1865, Senator Charles Sumner referred to the most famous speech ever given by President Abraham Lincoln. In his eulogy on the slain president, he called the Gettysburg Address a "monumental act." He said

Lincoln was mistaken that "the world will little note, nor long remember what we say here." Rather, the Bostonian remarked, "The world noted at once what he said, and will never cease to remember it. The battle itself was less important than the speech.

Words Have Power

1. James reminds us that, while the tongue is relatively small, it is as powerful. A rudder steers a ship. A bit directs a horse;
2. James compares the power of words to three different forces -
 - a. An unstoppable forest fire; (James 3:6)
 - b. A deadly poison (James 3:8);
 - c. An untamable animal (3:8)

Words have power to break down

1. Other Translations - RSV translates this "evil talk; The NIV and NASB use "unwholesome." KJV uses the word "corrupt."
2. The word is translated sapos, and it is only used in one other context in the New Testament, namely the places in Matthew and Luke where Jesus says, "It is not the good tree that bears bad fruit." The word for bad here is the same word Paul uses for evil, unwholesome, or corrupt in Ephesians 4:29.
3. Wholesome – we know that "wholesome" means whole – not bits and pieces.
4. Un-wholesome words then are words that break down, tear apart.
5. The Words are rotten - fruits and vegetables go bad because of damage caused by microorganisms, such as bacteria and mold, enzymatic processes of bruising. Microorganisms speed deterioration through structural decay.
6. Un-wholesome words therefore are designed to break people down, trip them up, tear them apart.
7. Myron Madden was a Southern Baptist Pastor, and author of the book "The Power to Bless." In His family, the grandfather was the most influential. He showered praise on Myron's two brothers, but ignored him. Myron spent his younger years intensely desiring his affection & attention. The thing that rang in young Myron's years was a repeated remark to his mother about Myron: "You know that boy will never amount to a hill of beans." This left a mark on young Myron. He made a vow to prove his grandfather wrong, and spent a good bit of his life seeking his blessing.

Words have power to build up

1. The Medium - Words can "build others up." Use your words to bless others. You can use your words to bless people, to make a difference. Diagnostic question – are my words helping or hurting, building up or tearing down. Form? Spoken, or written. Notes/E-mails.
2. The Mission – to build others up – to invest in another life, so that they become stronger. To bless. You look for opportunities. Diagnostic question – Am I accomplishing my mission today?
3. The Momentum –
 - a. The power to bless is an extraordinary gift, but it isn't just a gift to someone else, but to yourself. When you are feeling low, overwhelmed, use your words to lift others up, to care, and see how the blessing will return to you. (Acts 20:33-38).

- b. Conversely, when you live your life without a view to bless others, you may end up empty and alone.

How do we use words to bless others? (The Method)

1. According to their need. You need to be close enough to see the person's need, then you can touch the heart.
 - a. Think before you speak - This means I should be careful with "religious clichés." Time heals all wounds. This too shall pass. Baylor University Medical Center had a strong Head Chaplain named Joe Gross. Joe was responsible for training all chaplains, and was a man of significant influence in the pastoral care community. He almost threw someone out of the room who suggested to him that his wife's cancer was God's will, because "all things work together for good."
 - b. Speak to the heart – Adrian James Williams passed away last year on June 15th last year, and his service was here. Adrian was a young man who had just accepted Christ. He was right here in our congregation one Sunday, then gone the next. I officiated the service, and led the Eulogy, but we had a visiting pastor preach. It was one of the ministers from Mr. Williams church. This pastor preached from Psalm 30, verse five "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. One of the instructions of the Psalm is for God's people to sing his praises." This pastor at the funeral had everyone stand, and praise God. I never would have done that. But he knew his people.
 - c. Be Careful – especially if you are inside the circle of someone's heart. If you are working with a child, remember how much power your words have. Think of something so precious and valuable that you know you must handle it with care.
2. With Grace – undeserved favor. Watch what God will do in your conflict if you return blessings when they aren't deserved.
 - a. This is often where our words are most hurtful – when someone else hurts us. We respond in kind.
 - b. Sometimes we give the hurt back to those who hurt us, but many times we don't have that kind of courage, so we take it out on an innocent 3rd party.
 - c. On the one hand, when we respond with Grace, it means we take a moment to stop, to forgive, to release, so that the anger and evil of another person can't flow through us to an innocent party – to someone who doesn't deserve it.
 - d. On the other hand, responding with Grace means we bless when we've been cursed. We turn around and bless the one who cursed us. We thank God for the grace he has given us in Christ, and we extend that grace to others.
 - e. Illustration 1:
 Charles Spurgeon and Joseph Parker both had churches in London in the 19th century. On one occasion, Parker commented on the poor condition of children admitted to Spurgeon's orphanage. It was reported to Spurgeon however, that Parker had criticized the orphanage itself.
 Spurgeon blasted Parker the next week from the pulpit.

The attack was printed in the newspapers and became the talk of the town. People flocked to Parker's church the next Sunday to hear his rebuttal.

"I understand Dr. Spurgeon is not in his pulpit today, and this is the Sunday they use to take an offering for the orphanage. I suggest we take a love offering here instead." The crowd was delighted. The ushers had to empty the collection plates three times.

Later that week there was a knock at Parker's study. It was Spurgeon. "You know Parker, you have practiced grace on me. You have given me not what I deserved; you have given me what I needed.

f. Illustration 2

- i. A sick old woman lay dying in a nursing home. She grew up rough, and her mental health had been difficult her whole life. She had two children, and she favored the sickly one, the one most like herself, but constantly challenged and criticized the younger, more independent child. This pattern stayed constant throughout her life.
- ii. When the old woman died, the younger daughter stayed in the room with her before the health professionals took her away, stroking her hair, and thanking God for her mom. She could do this, because she had long since forgiven her mom, and cared for her through her issues with mental health. This grace had freed her.

How is it possible to bless others?

In a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And to be filled with the Holy Spirit – not to grieve Him. To allow His words to flow through you. There isn't any other way.

Conclusion

1. I don't know how you are keeping cool this summer.
2. But in this heated season, spiritually, let's choose to use our words to build up and bless.

Invitation