

Thought For The Week

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Sayings of the Mouth Matter

Words leave the mouth and never really leave a life. They settle into hearts, shape relationships, and leave marks that time rarely erases. Mike Mathis reminded the West Side congregation of this truth in a recent sermon drawn primarily from Proverbs 10 and James 3, with a clear call from Matthew 7. The message is straightforward yet searching: the sayings of the mouth matter far more than most of us admit.

Mike began by reading James 3:3-6. The passage uses two vivid pictures. A small bit in a horse's mouth turns the whole animal. A tiny rudder steers a large ship even against strong winds. In the same way, the tongue is a little member that boasts great things. Then the language intensifies: "See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And 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 it is set on fire by hell." A small spark can destroy hundreds of homes. Mike pointed to the devastating wildfires near Spokane that consumed more than six hundred structures. The same potential for uncontrolled destruction lives in the tongue.

From there he turned to selected verses in Proverbs 10, using the book's characteristic contrast structure. Many of those verses present a positive statement about the righteous followed by a sharp counterpart about the wicked or the fool. Mike walked through the first halves first, then returned to the second halves.

"Blessings are on the head of the righteous" (Proverbs 10:6a). God pours favor on those who obey His voice and walk in His ways. Their memory becomes a blessing (10:7a). Abraham's faith, tested on Mount Moriah yet answered by God's provision, still speaks. Moses, who once protested that he was slow of speech, obeyed and became the instrument through whom God delivered Israel. Above all, Jesus lived a perfect life, keeping the Father's commandments completely. The righteous are remembered because their lives and their words aligned with truth.

The mouth of the righteous is "a well of life" (10:11a). Linked with Proverbs 12:17—"He who speaks truth declares righteousness"—this picture shows speech that refreshes and sustains. The tongue of the righteous is "choice silver" (10:20a), and the lips of the righteous "feed many" (10:21a). Words that are true, pure, and timely nourish the people who hear them. They strengthen the weak, correct the wayward in love, and point others toward Christ.

Then the contrast appears. "Violence covers the mouth of the wicked" (10:6b, repeated in 10:11b). The same tongue that can bless the Lord and Father can curse people made in the likeness of God. James insists that these things ought not to be so. A spring does not pour forth both fresh and bitter water from the same opening. A fig tree does not produce olives, nor a grapevine figs. The inconsistency is unnatural and unacceptable for those who claim to belong to Christ. The tongue is described as restless, full of deadly poison, and set on fire by hell itself. No human being can fully tame it by sheer willpower. The problem runs deeper than vocabulary; it reaches the heart.

Mike illustrated the rotting of the wicked's name with sober local examples. Certain crimes in the Cleveland area left communities horrified—serial killings, prolonged captivity, and the abuse of women. The houses associated with those evils were quickly demolished. The names of the perpetrators are not honored; they faded into the kind of memory no one wants to preserve. “The name of the wicked will rot” (Proverbs 10:7b). In contrast, the memory of the righteous continues to bless.

The second half of Proverbs 10:20 declares that “the heart of the wicked is of little worth,” and 10:21b warns that “fools die for lack of wisdom.” Speech reveals the heart. Jesus said the same thing: out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. What we store within eventually spills out. The question for every believer becomes personal: Do my words speak truth? Do they build up according to the need of the moment? Or do they wound, tear down, and leave lasting damage?

Mike closed with Matthew 7:21-27. Not everyone who says “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of the Father. Many will claim impressive religious activity, yet hear the solemn words, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.” The parable of the two builders follows immediately. The wise man hears the words of Jesus and acts on them; he builds on the rock. When the rains fall, the floods come, and the winds blow, the house stands. The foolish man hears the same words but does not act; he builds on sand. The storm exposes the foundation, and the collapse is great.

The “sayings” in view include the entire Sermon on the Mount, and therefore include the teaching on speech that runs through it. Saying the right religious phrases is not enough. Obedience that reaches the mouth matters. The foundation is tested not only by external storms but by the daily traffic of conversation—what we say to spouses, children, brethren, coworkers, and even strangers online.

Mike rejected the old proverb that “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Experience and Scripture both prove otherwise. Words can break spirits, fracture trust, and leave scars that last for years. The same words can heal, encourage, and feed many. The lips of the righteous are meant to do the latter.

The gospel itself is spoken. Jesus, the perfectly righteous One, lived without a single sinful word. He died for our sins; blood and water flowed from His side, sufficient to cleanse every sin, including the sins of the tongue. Those who come to Him in faith, repentance, confession, and baptism receive new life. That new life is meant to reshape the mouth as well as the heart. The same grace that saves continues to train believers to speak what is good for building up, that it may give grace to those who hear (Ephesians 4:29).

The practical call is clear. Examine the patterns of speech. Ask whether the words that leave the mouth are drawing people toward Christ or pushing them away. Refuse the easy excuse that “everyone talks that way.” Choose instead the slower, wiser path of truth spoken in love. Build the house on the rock by hearing and doing the sayings of Jesus, including the sayings that govern the mouth.

In a world saturated with careless, cutting, and corrupt speech, the church has a distinctive opportunity. The mouth of the righteous can still be a well of life. The tongue can still be choice silver. The lips can still feed many. Those who take that calling seriously will find that the sayings of the mouth do matter—eternally.

The invitation remains open. If the word has pricked the conscience, respond while there is time. The same Lord who will one day judge every careless word also stands ready to forgive, cleanse, and renew.

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Sayings of the Mouth Matter

Words leave the mouth and rarely leave a life unchanged. In a recent sermon, Mike Mathis pressed this truth home from James 3 and Proverbs 10.

James compares the tongue to a small bit that turns a horse and a tiny rudder that steers a large ship. It is also a fire: “See how great a forest a little fire kindles!” A careless spark can destroy hundreds of homes. The tongue is a world of iniquity, set on fire by hell, restless and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people made in God’s likeness. These things ought not to be so.

Proverbs 10 draws the contrast sharply. “The mouth of the righteous is a well of life.” “The tongue of the righteous is choice silver.” “The lips of the righteous feed many.” Truthful, pure speech refreshes and strengthens others. By contrast, “violence covers the mouth of the wicked,” and “the name of the wicked will rot.” Speech reveals the heart.

Mike rejected the old saying that “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Scripture and experience prove otherwise. Words wound deeply—or they heal and build up.

He closed with Matthew 7:21-27. Not everyone who says “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom, but only the one who does the Father’s will. The wise man hears Jesus’ sayings and acts on them, building on the rock. The foolish man hears but does not obey, and the storm exposes the sand.

Jesus lived without a single sinful word and died to cleanse every sin of the tongue. Those who come to Him in faith, repentance, confession, and baptism receive new life that is meant to reshape the mouth as well as the heart. Guard your speech. Speak what builds up. The sayings of the mouth matter—now and forever.

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