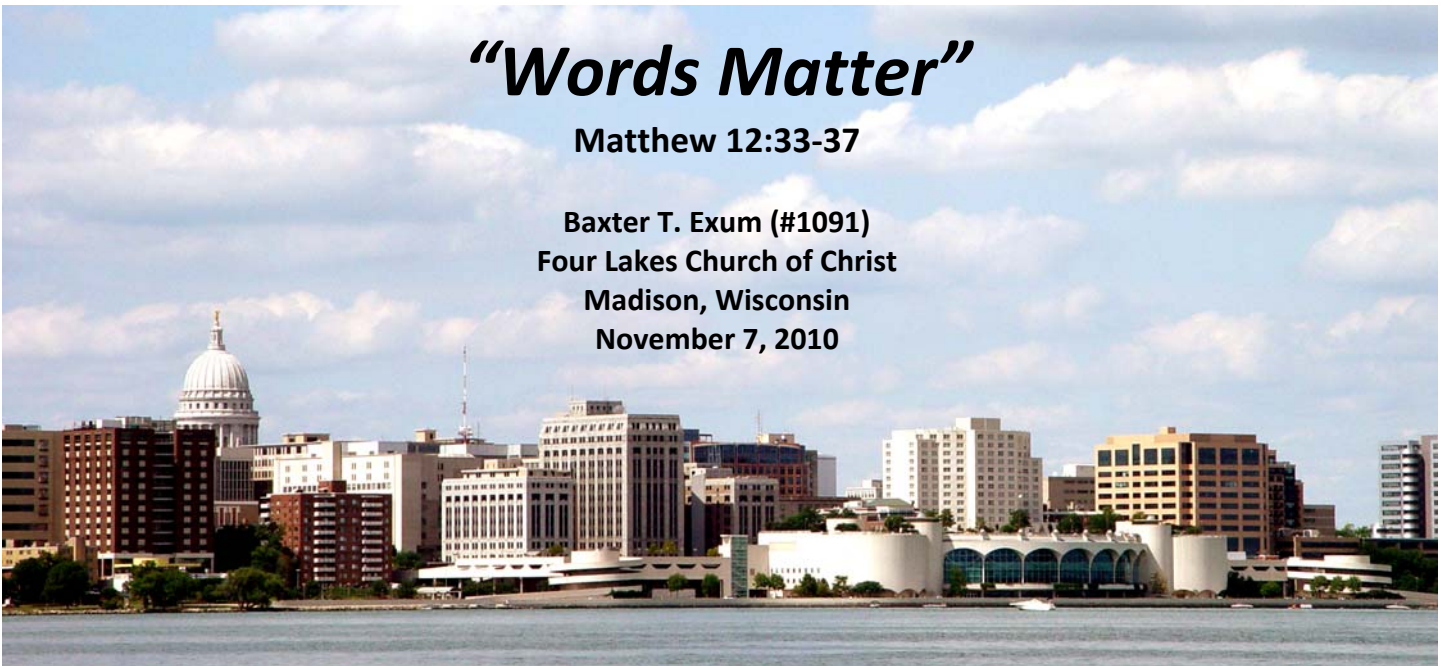


# **“Words Matter”**

**Matthew 12:33-37**

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## **Introduction:**

Most of us here this morning would hopefully agree that words matter. We know, for example, that the entire Universe was created by the Word of God. God said, **“Let there be light,”** and there was light! In fact, ten times in Genesis 1 we read the words, **“God said.”** The amazing power of words! We know that we are living in a nation where our founding fathers sought to recognize one of our most important God-given freedoms in Article 1 of the Bill of Rights in our constitution. Our founding fathers made sure that they put a limit on themselves as they decided that congress should never make any law “abridging the freedom of speech.” Our founding fathers, therefore, understood the fact that words do matter. From our own experience, we know that words can be encouraging. Words can lift us up. Words make our day. I think it was Mark Twain who said that he could live for two months on one good compliment, and we know what he was talking about. But then on the other hand, we also know the danger of words. As James has pointed out in James 3:6, **“...the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.”** Notice: The word “fire” was used three times in one verse! Even in the recent past, we have seen a number of celebrities get in trouble for some of the things that they have said in the heat of the moment. There have been many, but Mel Gibson is the first one who comes to my mind. And so we know both the power and the danger of words. Words matter!

This morning, then, as we think about the power of words, I would like to ask that we think together about a sobering statement that was made by the Lord Himself in Matthew 12:33-37 (page 1521). And so that we can understand what the Lord is saying in this passage, I should point out that the paragraph comes right after a discussion concerning some hateful things that the Pharisees had said about the Lord. Jesus makes some very firm comments directly to the Pharisees, and then He opens it up a little bit, and He gives a more broad lesson on the importance and the danger of the words that we speak. Or, as we might say today, Jesus is about to drive home the lesson that WORDS MATTER. If you will, then, please look with me at Matthew 12:33-37...

**<sup>33</sup> “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. <sup>34</sup> “You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. <sup>35</sup> “The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. <sup>36</sup> “But I tell**

***you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment.*** <sup>37</sup> ***"For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."***

Again, as we look at this paragraph of Scripture and as we look at the idea that words matter, I would like for us to notice, first of all, that the words we speak directly reflect what is in our hearts, and then, secondly, I would like for us to remind ourselves that we will be judged by the words that we speak.

**I. First of all, though, we notice that THE WORDS WE SPEAK REVEAL WHAT IS TRULY IN OUR HEARTS.**

As the Lord points out in verse 33, a tree is known by its fruit. And I am pretty sure this is a concept that all of us can understand. Even the little children here this morning, if they were to walk up to a tree with an apple hanging on it, they could make the judgment that that is an apple tree! If we see a tree with a pear on it, we know that it is a pear tree. If we see a tree with a plum on it, we know that it is a plum tree. The Lord is teaching us something here, but we know that the lesson is not really about fruit, is it? But rather, the Lord is taking what we know, and He is applying it to the words that we speak: Our words are the fruit, and our hearts are the tree! And the Lord is making the point that the words we speak reveal the condition of our heart.

And Jesus explains it further in verses 34-35 as He says, ***"...For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil."*** In other words, as we speak at school, as we talk to our co-workers, as we type on FaceBook, as we text our friends, as we speak to our children, those words reflect what is on the inside. If our hearts are good and clean, then our words reflect that, but if our hearts are evil, then our words reflect that as well—just as certainly as an apple is found on an apple tree.

And so from a practical point of view, if I lie with my tongue, then I need to reexamine whether I am really a Christian in my heart, because Jesus Christ did not lie. If I spread gossip with the mouth that God gave to me, then I need to reexamine my heart, because God's own Son did not spread gossip. If I log into my FaceBook account and start typing f-this and f-that, I need to look at my heart, because God's Son, our perfect example, would never use that kind of language.

So first of all, Jesus is pointing out here that when we speak things we shouldn't, it is not a mouth problem, it is a heart problem. As those of you in this room can see, I am holding a salt shaker, and if I were to turn it upside down and shake it, I can guarantee you that salt will come out—not pepper, but salt—and the reason for salt coming out is that salt is on the inside. In the same way, whatever is in our hearts is what comes out when we speak.

I remember a friend of mine when I was growing up down in Crystal Lake, and whenever he would say a bad word, his mom would wash his mouth out with soap. I had always heard people talk about that, and I thought it was just a figure of speech, but this guy's mom actually did it! Whenever she heard him use any kind of bad word, she would take a dirty sock, put the sock on her hand, run the sock under some water, put some soap on it, and she would literally wash his mouth out with soap. Well, that might have caused him to think about what he was saying, but I think that all of us know that when we say things we shouldn't, we are not really dealing with a mouth problem, we are not dealing with a finger problem, and we are not dealing with a thumb problem. But instead, as Jesus points out here in Matthew 12, we are actually dealing with a heart problem. The words that come out indicate what is happening on the inside. Just as a doctor will check our blood pressure to determine our physical health, our words are a measure of how we are doing spiritually. Now God

is not just concerned about the things we say, but the things we say indicate what is going on here [in our hearts]. So, first of all, we learn from this passage that words matter because the words that we speak (or type or text) reveal our true character. Our words reveal what is really in our hearts.

**II. There is a second concept here that is tied to the main idea that words matter, and that is: The Lord very clearly says that WE WILL BE JUDGED BY OUR WORDS.**

In verses 36-37, Jesus says, ***“But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”*** The Lord, then, is referring even to the ***“careless”*** words that we speak. The word ***“careless”*** in this passage comes from a word meaning ***“work,”*** but it has a negative prefix. In other words, the Lord is referring here to words that do not work—lazy words, useless words, idle words, the words we say when we don’t have anything better to do, the words we let fly in a moment of anger, the words we speak in a moment of jealousy. Even those words will be called up by the prosecution on the Day of Judgment. Or, as we might say today, ***“Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law.”*** Every careless word!

Jesus does not get very specific here, but there are other places in the New Testament where we are told exactly what kind of speech is good and what kind of speech will get us in trouble with the Lord. We can look, for example, at Ephesians 4:25-32. In that passage, the apostle Paul was talking about the change that ought to take place when we obey the gospel, the change that happens when we become followers of the Lord. In Ephesians 4:25-32, the apostle Paul said,

***<sup>25</sup> Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another. <sup>26</sup> BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup> and do not give the devil an opportunity. <sup>28</sup> He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. <sup>29</sup> Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. <sup>30</sup> Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.***

And so the apostle Paul tells us that we are not to allow any ***“unwholesome word”*** to come out of our mouth. The word ***“unwholesome”*** refers to something that is ***“bad”*** or ***“rotten.”*** Have you ever heard a doctor refer to ***“sepsis”***? My understanding is that sepsis is a condition where the blood or tissues of a person’s body become infected with bacteria, and we know that it is a serious condition. Well, the word ***“unwholesome”*** in Ephesians 4:29 goes back to the same Greek word from which we get the medical term ***“sepsis.”*** The word literally refers to something that is rotten or infected, and so Paul is saying: Do not let that kind of word even come out of your mouth, because (as the Lord explains), we will be held accountable for those words.

Perhaps we could look at the Judgment Day as an audit, as a time when the Lord will go back and review every single thing that we ever said or wrote—even if we only used our thumbs while we were doing it. And since we know that the audit is coming, wouldn’t it be good to go ahead and audit ourselves first? If we will be held accountable for every careless word, wouldn’t it be good to be more aware of what we are saying right now? I don’t know if all of us appreciate this, but the things we say and put out there on the Internet are out there forever! Several months ago, we got a letter from Charter concerning some kind of program or something

that someone in our family had either downloaded or reposted (I cannot remember the details), but the owner of the software had contacted Charter, and Charter had contacted us. It was a scary-looking letter with lots of fine print, but down there in the fine print the letter said something to the effect that the deed was done on May 10 at 4:39 p.m. And I was shocked! We took care of it right away and made things right, but it is amazing to think that everything we've ever done online is out there somewhere. There is a record of it. And so when we post something on FaceBook, or when someone texts or sends a picture from one phone to another, we need to realize that those things are out there forever. Do you know what you were doing on May 10 at 4:39 p.m.? Charter knows! And if Charter knows, don't you think God knows as well?

Of course, some people have tried to use euphemisms or abbreviations instead of the actual words, as if God can't figure it out. And so we often hear or see OMG instead of "Oh my God." And yet you know, I wonder whether God might be smart enough to see through that. When God looks at our text messages, do we think that God understands these things, or do we think that maybe it's over His head? Do we think we are like the parents who spell something out so that the kids don't get it, or do we think that God does get it? Do we think that God is not smart enough to figure out what LMAO stands for? Every careless word!

And I hope I've been clear this morning, but God listens to what we say not just on Sunday morning from 10:30-11:30, but the Lord God hears and sees everything. Maybe if we cover the keypad...do we think that might work, that perhaps God might not be able to see through our hand? No, but instead, God will hold us accountable for ***"every careless word,"*** and we will give an account for those words on the Day of Judgment.

It may be possible to fool our Christian family, to fool our parents, to fool our children, to fool our co-workers, to think that we can get away with saying whatever we want to say, but Jesus tells us that we will be held accountable for every careless word. We will give an account for words that hurt others. We will give an account for every word of gossip. We will give an account for every word that disrespects the name of God. We will give an account for every word that causes someone to doubt whether we are really Christians as we say we are.

This morning, then, we have learned from Matthew 12 that WORDS MATTER. We have learned that words matter because words reveal our character—the words we speak and the words that we type or text are a reflection of what we really are inside. But secondly, we have also learned that words matter because the Lord says that we will give an account for every careless word on the Day of Judgment.

### **Conclusion:**

I realize that this has been some heavy stuff, so I'd like to close on more of a positive note, and that is: If we have messed up in the past, God can wipe it all away. The good news is that forgiveness is available. The good news is that God has taken the first step. In our passage this morning, Jesus Himself has pointed out something that we need to deal with. The next step we need to take is to agree with what the Lord has said. Our job is to say, "God, you are right! Dear Lord, my heart is messed up. I realize that this is not a mouth problem, but it is a heart problem." Sometimes we refer to this as "confessing" our sin. Literally, the word "confess" means "to speak together with." In other words, God says, "You have messed up," and we say, "Yes, Lord, You are right!" That is what it means to confess something. For those of us as Christians, we can confess our sins to God, and as we will learn in 1 John 1 this coming Wednesday evening, ***"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"*** (1 John 1:9).

But what if the words keep on coming? What if we just can't stop? Well, it seems to me that we should remind ourselves that words are a symptom of a deeper problem. And we know that in a physical sense if I start having chest pains, and shortness of breath, and maybe a tingling in my left arm, I need to call a doctor—not just to try to get rid of the tingling, but because my heart is most likely having trouble. And the same thing goes for the words that we speak. Our words are symptoms, and so our speech is a matter of the spiritual heart. If we constantly have trouble with profanity, we should have a little warning light going off inside—something is wrong!

And this brings us back to the fact that controlling our speech is up to each of us as individuals. In our Scripture reading this morning, Silas read from James 3, and James reminded us that the tongue is dangerous, that the tongue is like a tiny match that can start a huge fire. About a month and a half ago, I signed up on the City website for the daily reports from the Madison Fire Department, and you know, there have been a lot of fires over the past few weeks. We went for about four weeks with no rain, and so all over the city piles of leaves were just bursting into flames. The fire department is called out, they put out the fire, they dig down in the pile, and they usually discover that there is a cigarette butt down there in the middle of it. Sometimes people will park their cars over a big pile of leaves, and so the leaves then burst into flame. But let's think about that: As Smoky the Bear says, "Only you can prevent forest fires." And so in a spiritual sense, it is up to us not to flick those cigarettes out the window. It is up to us not to park our hot cars on top of a huge pile of dry leaves. In other words, the power to control the tongue lies within each of us. However, we cannot control it alone, and so we ask God for help—we read the Scriptures, we focus on those things that are good and clean, we spend time with our Christian family, and certainly we can take our concerns to God in prayer. As Christians, we open up our hearts to God and we ask God to protect us and to keep our hearts clean. As King David prayed in Psalm 51:10, ***"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."*** And then, as David also prayed in Psalm 141:3, ***"Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips."***

For those who are not yet Christians, the Bible teaches that you must first decide how you will respond to the death of Jesus on the cross. The Bible teaches that God allowed His only Son to die in our place, to take the punishment for sin that we deserve. We accept that sacrifice by turning to God, by turning away from sin, and then by making an appeal to God for a good conscience through baptism, by allowing ourselves to be briefly buried in water (as the Lord instructed) for the forgiveness of our sins.

If you are a Christian and would like for us to go to God on your behalf this morning, we would be glad to do that. If you are having a special struggle with the things that you say and would like for us to pray about it as a church, please let us know—write it down and bring your concern to the front in just a moment—we can pray about it together. But if you are not yet a Christian and you would like to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know about your decision as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [church@fourlakescoc.org](mailto:church@fourlakescoc.org)