

Speech

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn to, there's gonna be a lot of text tonight, but one key text, I'd like you to bear in mind the whole way through. Proverbs 12 and 18. Proverbs 12, 18.

There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Words matter. Your words really matter. We're gonna focus tonight on the words that we speak in our regular conversations, but I'd also like you to think about the words that you text and tweet and all the rest of it. Words matter because when you think about it, so much of what we do is done through words. And words matter because so much of the witness of our lives, for example in the workplace, is in our words and in our body language. And words also matter because they can be so powerful for good or for ill. Proverbs 18, 21. The tongue has the power of life and death. Seeing we're so near ETS, I thought I should have a quote from a famous professor. Words are, in my not so humble opinion, our most inexhaustible source of magic, capable of both inflicting injury and remedying it. That's Albus Dumbledore and ETS and the Deathly Hallows, at least as in the movie. Now before we come to two main things I want to look at tonight through the lens of this text, I want to say two introductory things that I think are very important as we look at this theme of speech in the light of the whole Bible.

The two things are we begin with God and we look to Jesus. We begin with God because God speaks. It's true in his own triune life and it's true in his dealings with us. Imagine if God had never spoken to us. But he has. He spoke to Adam and Eve in the garden, both before and after the fall. He has spoken to sinners in his word, the Bible. He has spoken above all in the word made flesh, Jesus, and he still speaks today by his word and spirit. So our God is the communicating, communicative God and our unique capacity for language, our creativity with words is part of our nobility as image-bearers of this speaking God. We cannot think about speech and we cannot talk about speech without talking about the God who speaks. So we begin with God and we look to Jesus. We sang from Psalm 45 there, the prose version says, I address my verses to the king. My tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe. You are the loveliest of the sons of men.

Grace is poured upon your lips. We sing these words about Jesus and we sing these words to Jesus whose mouth is full of grace. For one thing from the lips of Jesus we hear the only example of sinless human speech in the whole of history. So the words of Jesus convict us and also from the lips of Jesus we hear the gospel of grace, forgiveness for our every sin, including every sinful word we've ever thought or uttered. And when you think about this book of Proverbs, Jesus kept every single proverb in this book, including everyone about speech. And Jesus also died for every failure in this area. Jesus was crucified for my every dumb word and your every dumb word. And now Jesus is our king if we're Christians. So he's the Lord of our speech. So we look to Jesus because Jesus is the last word. So we begin with God, we look to Jesus. Remember that all the way through. Let's come to the first of two main headings tonight.

From this text, rash words or reckless words. This will perhaps take up most of our time. Reckless words. The first half of the text. Now I want to confess my own sins in this area. I have often been guilty of unwise words. Kathy sitting at the back there, our older daughter also here tonight. And they have often heard me say, even in preaching, I probably shouldn't say this but. And then they think don't say it. And then I say it. And then I regret saying it. And all through my life people have said to me, you know, ten years ago you said such and such. And they say I can't believe you said that. Then I say I was only kidding. And it's been a sort of rhythm throughout my whole life. So I'm not speaking here from any sort of personal model high ground as if I'm an example in this area. It's probably why I've never been moderator. I'm sure it is why I've never been moderator. Reckless words. This is the NIV or the old NIV. You know when Corey preaches he says the original says. When I say the original says I mean the old

[7:18] NIV. 20th Century NIV. This is it. Wreckless words pierce like a sword. I think that says it. Wreckless words pierce like a sword. In other words words can really hurt. The imagery here is really visceral. It's saying sometimes you can feel the impact of words in your gut. And it's saying words can be weapons of individual destruction. Words can kill. And in our reading from James 3 it's clear that human words are more likely to demonstrate our depravity than our nobility. The tongue can be really dangerous. So I want to ask in what ways can my speech and your speech be rash or reckless according to the book of

Proverbs? In what ways can our speech be foolish according to Proverbs? So we'll have a slide now with five headings about rashness. First of all the rashness of irreverent speech. Why do I say this from Proverbs? Well remember the fundamental perspective of Proverbs. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of everything. For example chapter 1 and verse 7. The fear of the Lord. It's all about respect for God. Reverence for a Lord whom I love and in whom I find my satisfaction and whom I want to honor and worship. So it's very important that I speak very carefully about God and His Word and His cause. We live in a world where we're surrounded by irreverent speech. And sometimes in a workplace I'm sure you've had the experience of perhaps taking somebody aside. Being careful when you say it and how you say it. But just saying to them after a few episodes where they've taken the name of your Savior in vain. You just say to them I'm a Christian. And that name means so much to me. And as my friend I'd be so grateful if you could be more careful about the way you speak about Him. Now sometimes Christians can be careless in the way that we speak about God. I've decided not to illustrate this because if I illustrate it from very innocent examples you'll say what fuss about nothing. But if I illustrate it clearly from examples at the other extreme you will say well you shouldn't have said that in a public forum especially not with children present. So I leave it to you to think about areas where we sometimes don't speak about God with the reverence that we should. Without saying what it is for one example. We can talk about it later on but there's a conservative evangelical theology sort of biblical systematic theology that the author decided includes some jokes in it. And there's I think an extremely blasphemous joke there about the Father and the Son.

In a book published by Zondervan a book of several hundred pages of solid biblical theology. Why you want to include jokes and why Zondervan let that particular one through? I don't know. But it's an example of somebody not being careful in the way they speak about God. Now I'm saying we shouldn't take ourselves too seriously and I've often been irreverent about myself or or Derrick or the church in all kinds of ways with all our failures and foibles. But we avoid language about God that in the imagery of this text might pierce another Christian. We avoid language about God that might in the language of the New Testament grieve or pierce the Spirit himself. And we avoid language that might make a non-believer think that we are being flippant about Jesus. So the rashness of irreverent speech. Then the rashness of hasty speech. When I give references they're from Proverbs if I don't say they're from somewhere.

29 and 20. Do you see someone who is hasty in their words? There is more hope for any fool than for them. Proverbs is saying it's important to think before we speak. We've all blurted out something without thinking and regretted it immediately the words left my mouth or my phone. Proverbs is also saying that it's important to listen before we answer 18 and 13. The reason NIV. To answer before listening that is foolishness and shame. We need to listen.

[13:34] There's a whole sermon on that. And Proverbs is also saying that it's dangerous to speak in haste when we're angry in the heat of the moment.

1216. Fools show that annoyance at once but the prudent overlook an insult. I read the Scotsman newspaper and following Alexander McCall Smith's 44 Scotland Street recently. I noted that Miss Campbell a primary teacher she gets very annoyed with some of her charges. All of this particularly annoying but so also can be tofu and Hiawatha and all the other spectacular named children in that Steiner school. And when she gets annoyed she counts from one to ten in Gallic. Now I don't know Gallic I don't know any other language I've been trying to learn Elvanto and I've given up but it might be good to learn one to ten in another language because it takes a little more time and concentration. And I have some friends on social media not that I'm on social media but Kathy something shows me what my friends say and I think that some of them should learn to count from one to hundred in Mandarin backwards. It can be very dangerous just suddenly to say anything. And in terms of haste Proverbs is saying that positively we are called to diffuse situations never to exacerbate them.

15 verse 1 in the NIV a gentle answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up anger. I think in terms of hasty speech one of the great spiritual skills to learn is the skill of the quick prayer. I'll come back to that in a few minutes. Then this is the rational of lying speech. I think this is the category of foolish speech that Proverbs seems to highlight most often. So no Christian should be post-truth. No Christian should be casual about fake news. There's been a lot of it over the last seven weeks in the election campaign. If the newspaper that I read is to be trusted in Edinburgh itself in the campaign in one particular constituency someone posted on Twitter that the Lib Dem candidate Christine Jordan had campaigned after the Manchester bombing when everybody else had decided to take 24 hours whatever it was 48 hours you know was clear at first how many but they said she campaigned pretty much the next day and she got abused circulating online on Twitter and the rest and she's called this evil so and so and this someone who deserves to die kind of language. Then eventually somebody came in on her behalf to say what she'd been doing when she'd been seen out smartly dressed in public. She'd been attending her husband's funeral.

I mean you could hardly make it up. I hope the paper is right that I'm not recounting fake news to you. That's the kind of thing that happens when people just take something immediately and pass it on. It's absolute nonsense and Proverbs again and again says stuff about lying. 6:16 to 19 a list of things the Lord especially hates and among them are a lying tongue and a false witness who breathed out lies and when wisdom speaks about herself she says I'm marked by truthfulness 8:6 and following my mouth will utter truth all the words of my mouth are righteous that is nothing twisted or crooked in any of them and if you've your Bible open and you look around this text 12 and 18 look at verse 17 19 22 the text is surrounded by verses about lying in different ways and I think we all know that to be lied to is a very wounding thing to find you've been lied to by somebody you trusted pierces to keep using the language of the text pierces really deeply and the closer the relationship the more wounding the lie is 15:4 says that a deceitful tongue crushes or breaks the spirit so we are not to be liars now I can't hear going to the many complexities around truth telling talk about Rahab later on but we can be resolved tonight to be trustworthy in our relationships we follow Jesus who's the truth and in the Sermon of the Mountain chapter 5 Jesus tells his followers let your yes be yes and let your no be no in other words he's saying simply tell the truth we will sometimes say of course it's not really a lie it's just a fib but fibbing can become a habit and then you can forget what fibs you've told to whom and when about what you get tied in knots because you haven't been telling the truth about something it's a great thing to be trusted to be the trustworthy person in a workplace and I learned in St. Andrews discussing I was never very good at relationship discussion with young people in St. Andrews I often predicted things the wrong way but I learned to ask one question regularly after a bit of experience do you trust him or her it was a key question number one girl talking to me about her relationship and I said eventually she'd given all the right answers to everything else I said do you trust him there was a pause I said do you trust him and she said well he's a good-looking guy do you trust him well girls like him went on in this vein do you trust him well she said I'm sure I've been together for for longer and longer that you know in our mind she wasn't sure about the way that other girls spoke to him and the way that he responded to people flirting with them and there was a doubt at the heart of that relationship from her side trust is

[21 : 19] a very important thing in any relationship I'm almost tempted to give you this text to think about in groups of five but I'm not going to 24 and 26 the NIV an honest answer is like a kiss on the lips discuss the rationalist of lying speech the rationalist then of gossiping speech a very negative character in proverbs is the gossip or the whisperer in some translations or the tail bearer in the authorized King James version for example 11:13 NIV a gossip betrays a confidence but a trustworthy person keeps a secret some things should just be kept to myself now some gossip of course is simply lies so it comes under the criticism of lying speech some gossip contains truth but with added speculation and spin but even if the gossip is absolutely 100% true we ask is it necessary to pass this on here is it helpful to pass it on is it kind to pass it on we ask as many questions as we need to till we say no I won't pass it on we like gossip a couple of verses is actually same verse repeated in proverbs in 188 it's repeated in 2622 how contemporary this is the words of a whisperer a gossip are like delicious morsels they go down into the inner parts of the body what's that say that's what we say we savor gossip we swallow stories and we find gossip juicy that's exactly what proverbs is saying we like juicy gossip proverbs also says how gossip can fuel trouble 26 and 20 without wood a fire goes out without gossip a quarrel dies down we all know gossip can cause havoc that it can destroy people and to gossip feeds on my pride when you

gossip you often perhaps are aware that it's elevating you and it's lower lowering somebody else and I think I've noticed year on year as I've learned more is that the spiritually humble don't gossip I notice that with older Christians because they know their own weakness there but for the grace of God go I I thought it recently my mother passed away at the turn of the year and we were over for her on the islands for her funeral and one elder said to me very cryptically she never took anything in and she never took anything out and I wondered what he was talking about and then I realized he just said something about her being a district nurse for many years and what he meant was she never took anything into any home that she visited you know any gossip from anywhere else and of all the secrets the thousands of secrets she heard in any home she never took any of that out I thought it was a very attractive if I say cryptic compliment she never took anything in she never took anything out so I asked myself am I the person who knows all the latest gossip or am I the person likely to be trusted to keep a confidence it's a challenging question and then the ration is of hurtful speech again the imagery of the text hurtful words do pierce like a sword we still talk don't we have a sharp tongue of words that cut of words that wound we were told nonsense as children about sticks and stones and the rest of it but names can leave someone scarred for life and how often you read about teenage suicides caused by words by verbal bullying and online bullying leaving a young life in pieces so we as

Christians should be very careful about the possible impact of our words to hurt others we're probably not going to get through very much of the second point but I think I will tell a little story here when I was a very young minister obviously a long time ago been a year in the ministry maybe I was asked to go to take a communion weekend particular congregation and the way that congregation did the Sunday morning was that the visitor preached but the local minister I think it happened in more than one congregation in Edinburgh for example local minister did the the table addresses and the serving of the table so I did the main sermon and then the local minister did the talks around the Lord's Supper itself and there was a very senior retired professor formerly of the Free Church College who wanted to speak to me afterwards and he just said all you did was set up the machinery thank goodness Reverend so-and-so was there to provide some oil and he turned and walked away now that was meant to hurt and he said it to one or two others because I think he was quite pleased with how he'd expressed it and he was pleased that it had clearly hurt somebody who was very nervous preaching in a large congregation at probably my first ever communion weekend then in the evening I preached and he was looking for me at the end and he said I don't usually come back at night but I thought

I'd give you another opportunity I needn't have bothered he said I listen to you tonight with a growing sense of disbelief you do not belong in a pulpit you are theologically confused and confusing and I thought I will never do that and it was one of the most important lessons I learned in my life I thought I will never do that to a young minister and for the rest of my career I think it's fair to say that I try to encourage any younger person I ever heard preach so that hurt and it was meant to hurt but even from hurtful things you can learn a lesson that will make a positive difference in your own life and in your own witness as I think I learned that night so what to do about my sinful lips and the light of these five areas from Proverbs well I think I use my lips to pray two prayers number one we pray for pardon memorisea chapter 6 verse 5 I'm a man of unclean lips then in verses 6 to 7 remember the seraph taking the burning coal from the altar behold this has touched your lips your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for and forgiveness is available for us through the sacrifice of Calvary through Jesus we come confessing our sins the sins of our lips and Jesus forgives us all of them and we keep coming and he keeps forgiving we pray for pardon and we also pray for help help for my speech in general help for my words on specific occasions I really love a little detail in Nehemiah chapter 2 verses 4 and 5 where Nehemiah is asked a question by the king and he replies the king says basically what do you want Nehemiah says this is what I want if it please the king but the Bible in between these two things says the king said what do you want then I prayed to the God of heaven and I said if it pleases the king and gives the answer now if you had been watching you might have noticed a flicker of a pause and you'd have think Nehemiah is just drawing breath to answer but Nehemiah was praying to the God of heaven I think that's an amazing spiritual skill to learn to be able to pray in the moment and ask for help for my speech in the moment and pray also to be kept from foolish speech Psalm 141 and verse 3 set a guard oh Lord over my mouth keep watch over the door of my lips well let's turn secondly just for a minute or two to healing words the second half of the text how then should we speak well obviously the opposite of what

we've just seen speech that is reverent careful truthful discreet and kind the ideal of course is to say the right word at the right time 15 and 23 a word in season how good it is the NIV has how good is a timely word so I

just want to ask you to think for a minute or two about this one image in the second half of the text that we find elsewhere in Proverbs about healing the tongue of the wise brings healing it's a very positive image for my speech in 15 for the older NIV says the tongue that brings healing is a tree of life that is quite a claim for the tongue the tongue that brings healing is a tree of life so let's look at this imagery of health how our words can be instruments of healing in the hands of God and a slide with five things we're not going to look at them obviously I was going to fill this out from basically the whole of the New Testament but healing first of all through loving speech here I was going to go into some of what we read in the epistles about the body and how a body the body of the church can be either diseased and dysfunctional in its relationships or it can be healthy in its relationships and the key again and the New Testament epistles is love loving hearts loving relationships loving words love is the prescription for health in these passages we can't look at them healing through loving speech and keeping the fellowship healthy through speech that really loves one another then healing through evangelistic speech you don't need me to tell you often the Bible speaks about our sins as illness and what Jesus does as the great physician as healing and there's surely no higher use of the tongue than to speak the healing gospel we have the privilege of sharing our faith and offering radical healing where healing needs to begin for the most serious of terminal conditions pointing to the greatest of physicians we speak the word as we listen to the culture as we listen to the individual we try to speak the healing gospel appropriately into his or her life then healing through instructive speech as we teach one another and build one another up again you might think well what's this going to do with health well the Bible has a lot to say about teaching in terms of wholeness and soundness listen to this to Timothy 1 17 about heresy infecting their teaching will spread like gangrene few verses earlier Paul has said to Timothy 1 13 follow the pattern of the sound words you have heard from me and the word sound means healthy it's in the NIV it's in the ESV footnote follow the pattern of the healthy health-giving words you heard from me and that word is actually the word from which we get hygiene hygienic teaching that's why we train our ministers so we don't get any church-acquired infections it's really important that the truth is sound is healthy so that we might be healed by preaching and by each other and that our lives might be healthy and wholesome then healing through challenging speech healing words aren't

[36 : 34] always easy to to speak or to hear we all know that a doctor may need to probe and ask embarrassing questions and the investigations may hurt and the treatment may be painful but it's all for good it's for healing so as Christians we may need to confront one another about some aspect of our lives we're called to relationships where we're willing to listen to advice and even rebuke 12 15 the way of a fool is right in their own eyes but a wise person listens to advice 15 31 the ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise 27 5 and 6 better is open rebuke than hidden love faithful are the wounds of a friend profuse are the kisses of an enemy it's speaking in tough love and then healing through encouraging speech think we all know that encouraging words are emotionally healing and spiritually healing we know the difference they make you know when somebody says something to you that encourages you and gives you a boost gives you a spring in your step that makes you feel better and every one of us is called to the ministry of encouragement through words reminding ourselves of things in the gospel or pointing to specific truth to help or saying something which helps someone take the next step or just telling them we're grateful for them we appreciate them

Hebrews tells us in chapter 3 and courage one another daily as long as it's called today and Proverbs tells us to lift each other's spirits 12 25 anxiety weighs down the heart but a kind word cheers it up 16 24 gracious words are a honeycomb sweet to the soul and healing to the bones it's a lovely verse gracious words are a honeycomb sweet to the soul and healing to the bones to the body and encouraging one another it's important for emotional health and spiritual health and maybe even for physical health well the last thing I'll say out of one or two final things I did want to say is to emphasize one word that we find again and again and again in Proverbs heart Proverbs keeps saying that that's where we have the problem the heart of my problem in essence is the problem of my heart and Jesus tells us in the gospels we have time to look at the passages that our sins of speech come from the heart and Proverbs says this again and again specifically about the heart 12 23 the heart of fools blurts out folly you might say no their mouths blurt out folly the

problem says no it's their heart that blurt's out folly 16 23 a wise person's heart guides their mouth it's the heart that decides what will come out of the mouth and Jesus says it again and again out of the abundance the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks so it's all about my heart in Proverbs I need a new heart from Jesus and then when I have the new heart I need the physician to keep looking after my heart and I finished tonight by asking myself and yourselves what do our words say about the condition of our hearts at the moment what will your words tomorrow in the workplace say to others about the spirit condition of your heart now and what do you need to ask Jesus the great physician to do in your heart I don't want to take the healing thing too far but do you need spiritual statins do you need a spiritual stent do you need a spiritual shock what does Dr. Jesus need to do in my

Christian heart tonight so that that heart out of its abundance will speak healing words that please Jesus ask the Holy Spirit to keep your heart healthy so that your words will be pleasing to him and healing to others. Amen.