

Speaking with humility and love

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Preacher: Robin Silson

[0 : 00] Now, I know this will be different for everyone, because just the way our lives are, but I want to talk a little bit about, it's all about how we speak today.

It's all about how we communicate. I don't know when the last time you went abroad was, but when it comes to going abroad, one of the big things that you have to consider is often the country you go to, and when you choose the country that you're going to go to, the thing you have to think about is the obvious, the language barrier, don't you?

The language barrier, and typically, I think as British people, if you've been abroad, we tend to fall into one or two categories. The first category is the sort of conscientious type of person who buys a phrase book and brushes up on their Greek or their Spanish, gets a few phrases, the basics, so that they can find their way around, so they can order things in a restaurant.

But that's the first category of person. The second category of person is the one that doesn't do any of that, just sticks with English, and when ordering something, just speaks a bit slower, a bit louder, might try even put it into a bit of a foreign accent, accompany it with a few hand gestures to just see how they can work out.

I don't know what type you are when you go away, whether you try practice a bit, or whether you go to speaking slower and louder with hand gestures. The reality is you can't really get far, can you, if you don't know the language.

[1 : 47] Speaking with words is really important, and how we use our words matters. You can get so far with verbal cues, but you can only get so far.

What I really want to illustrate is just how important communication is, and therefore how the words we use, and not just the words we use, but how we use them is important.

How we speak, how we use our words, we can use them for good, to build people up, to be truthful, or we can use them destructively. I don't know if you remember this rhyme when you were young and growing up.

I remember this rhyme. I think it was said as, it's supposed to be encouraging, but you realise it's, if you'd ever been called a name at school, there's this rhyme, famous, sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never harm me.

It's rubbish. It's totally untrue. Because, okay, bruises heal, bones can be mended, but the emotional scars from words can take a lifetime to heal from.

[3 : 00] What we say, how we speak, who we speak with as well, who we choose not to speak to, it's so important.

What we don't say is important. You've ever been ignored when you've spoken to someone? It's an awful feeling, because speaking, words matter. What we say matters.

It's not nothing. We've talked, throughout the book of James, remember, right near chapter two, it talks about faith with good works. Faith with good works. We have faith. The good works, they're a demonstration of our faith.

And one of those ways is come through with how we speak. How we show love. How we show that we've not been polluted by the world. Comes through with how we speak.

The book of James, as we've mentioned many times, just to remind us, it's all about wisdom. And wisdom, as I said last week, is a simple way to understand it, is worship in the everyday moments of life.

[4 : 02] Worship in the everyday moments of life. And so speech is a pretty everyday thing. So how we speak is relevant to wisdom. It's the chief action, I think, that reveals us, reveals what's going on inside.

Jesus says that in Matthew 12. He says, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. We reveal what's going on in here by what comes out of here.

What we say and what we don't say. Our aim for all of us, for those who follow Jesus, to become more like him in the way that we speak, the way that we use our words. There's a lot going on in our reading from this morning.

But what I want to suggest, really, and it's partly because of what's going on in James, what I want to suggest is that our overall theme in these verses is about how we use our words.

It's not really surprising in the book of James, like I mentioned, given how often speech comes up. Chapter 1, be slow to speak. Also chapter 1, keep a rein on your tongues.

[5 : 03] Speak and act, we saw the other day, as those who are going to be judged by the law that brings freedom. With the tongue, we praise and we curse. Don't slander or speak evil. It's all about the whole book.

He's talking about how we speak. That was one that we saw last week. It's both positive and negative. How to use speech well, how not to use it. So it's really not surprising that James has come to the end of this amazing book.

That James comes, rather, with positive, specific commands, instructions, as to how we use our words and how to use them rightly and how we might do that in different circumstances we find ourselves in.

So the first one that we're going to touch on is how to, in suffering, to speak the word of God. In suffering, speak the word of God.

Suffering, affliction, is one of the things that pushes our buttons. And you know that when it happens, each of us, when we're suffering, when we're going through something, we're tempted to lash out with our tongues, aren't we?

[6 : 10] When we're stressed out, burnt out, overwhelmed, whether that's physical suffering and pain, or whether it's an emotional burden or a spiritual issue, when we're in the heat of life, in those situations, we are tempted to lash out with words that we don't really mean.

Say something that we regret, a crossword, a sarcastic comment. Listen, what's going on underneath the surface, out of the heart, the mouth speaks when the heat is on.

It is harder to persevere and be patient in the midst, in the heat of affliction. But James points us to the illustration of a farmer waiting for the autumn and spring rain.

And let's be honest, our climate is a tad different to the farmers in James' day. But you get the picture when he's talking about the rain.

The farmer knows the rain will come, he's expectant, but he must wait for it. And we must be patient and wait in the midst of whatever we're going through. The rain and the harvest will come because, is it verse 7, the Lord is coming.

[7 : 24] In the same way that we say the farmer waits, we must wait. The Lord is coming. Be patient. Wait for him. What's brilliant here is that the instructions from James, he then goes into how we might go about that.

How might we go about waiting for the Lord's coming? And he gives two examples of people who waited with patience and what they did. Verse 10. Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

As you know, we count as blessed those who persevered. You've heard of Job's perseverance and seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

First we get the prophets who speak God's word. Yet for many of them as they did that, as we know the stories of the prophets in the Old Testament put under immense suffering for doing that, persecution, dying for what they said, many of them.

But they knew who they believed in and they spoke in the name of the Lord. It was speaking the word of the Lord, knowing his promises in the middle of difficulty that got them through.

[8 : 45] And you could say the same about Job. Terrible suffering. What did Job do when he was suffering? Fell down in worship. Speaking out loud, famous verses, naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I will depart.

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be praised. And we know it's God's word what he says. It's recorded in the Bible as God's living word. When suffering comes, we're tempted to grumble, complain, or lash out.

And each of us will go, or maybe even I right now, or will do in the future, will go through something that afflicts us.

And it'll be tense. Your life will be tense in those moments. And big or small, it will feel suffocating. What you need in those moments when you feel like that, what you need is to speak the word of the Lord.

You need the word of God. You need to speak it. Or you need it, or you need to hear it spoken to you. To remind yourself of your saviour, of Jesus Christ, of the promises of God that the Lord is coming and he's coming soon.

[10:01] To hear Matthew 28, I'm with you to the end of the age. What a wonderful thing to be heard in the midst of affliction. I'm with you. I'm with you to the end of the age.

Or what about Psalm 46? God is our refuge and a strength and a very present help in trouble. Or Psalm 23, 123, which we started with, to you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens.

In the middle of affliction, of difficulty, when we're overwhelmed with anxiety and trouble, it's the word of God because there's power there. In the middle of suffering and affliction, it is the living God who will lift you up with his word.

It's powerful. So that's the first one. How do we use words? Good words? How do we speak? We speak the word of God because we know they're good words.

The second one is speaking words of integrity, speaking truth. So that's what we see in the second way, that we are to use our tongues with words of integrity.

[11:11] Verse 12, above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear nor by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple yes or no, otherwise you'll be condemned.

This problem, it shows, is still a very modern, it's still a very current issue, but it shows that it's actually been a problem throughout the ages.

But we experience that, don't we, quite often. And I include myself in this, that we don't like to overcommit. Not always the case, it's not always the case, but often we don't like to say straight away yes to something.

And often that can be just in case a better offer comes along. I don't know about you, but I reckon we've all done that. And added into that, perhaps when we, somebody asks us something, we don't want to offend them either, so we don't want to say, no, I can't come.

We'll see what happens. We kind of leave things up in the air just to see what happens in the coming week, which basically means, can mean, doesn't always, to see what else I might have on, to see what better offer I get, let me get back to you.

[12:29] What it means is that when you do want to say yes or no, if you're constantly kind of putting, sitting on the fence before you commit, you kind of have to make an oath to really tell someone that you mean it.

You have to add emphasis to your, you can't just say a simple yes or no, you have to add emphasis. Instead of just saying yes or no, you have to say, I'm definitely going to be there. I'm 200% in.

And the more unreliable you are with following through all the word, the bigger the oath you have to make. The reason we do that is because deep down we know that we've let people down in the past with our words.

We've made oaths, promises, if you like, and haven't kept them. However, I know for everyone, isn't there someone who you know who never lets you down?

There's always someone in your life who you know who has integrity so reliable what they say has weight. When they say they'll do something they'll be there. The point here is they speak with integrity.

[13:43] You'll notice in these areas of speech and wise living, James addresses the church. Verse 7, verse 10, verse 12, he says, brothers and sisters.

That is crucial to this passage. It's really important to why that matters. He's speaking to the church. As we've said, this way of living would be good for anyone.

But as followers of Jesus, the community of believers, we live as witnesses to what God is like. We live as witnesses to what God is like. If we live with a lack of integrity and our words can't be trusted, the reason that we have here above all is because actually that way of living reflects badly on God because we're there to represent Him.

And the one thing the living God does not want to be associated with is falsehood. He doesn't want to be associated with lies because He's the God of truth. I am the way, the truth, and the life, Jesus said.

So speak with integrity. Yes. If you say yes, mean it. If you say no, mean it. Don't make promises we can't keep.

[14:59] Speak with integrity. So that's the second one. So we've had speaking God's Word and speaking with integrity. The third one is to speak words to God.

To speak words with humility and love. The last section we've got, there's lots of examples of different types of speech, how to speak with humility and love.

Lots of ways of using words in these last verses. But I think there's one thing that joins them all together. They're all humble. They all demonstrate humility.

And as a church, one of our values is that we want to be, we want to express humility. We want to be a church that is humble before God and before one another.

To quote Tim Keller, I'm not often one for quoting people, but Tim Keller says this, I think, better than I could. He writes it in his book called Self-Forgetfulness.

[16:02] He says something with real precision, I think, about what humility is, the key to it. He says, it's not thinking less of yourself, but thinking about yourself less.

I'll repeat that. It's not thinking less of yourself, but thinking about yourself less. Because if you're not thinking about yourself, you'll be thinking about God and about others.

You could be thinking about others not in the right way, but that's not the point. The idea is you don't think about less of yourself, but you think about yourself less.

You think about God, that his ways are higher and better than ours. And to consider others as more important than ourselves, that's humility. Thinking more about God's ways, his desires, than our own and considering others' needs, not ours.

what we see in this final point is lots of examples of people using their words in humility and love.

Look with me in verse 3, in verse, it's not verse 3, verse 13.

[17:14] Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick?

Let them call the elders of the church to pray. And they'll pray for that sick person because thinking of the sick is thinking of them is more important than yourself.

It's humble. You sacrifice time to go and do what the needy person is asking you. Verse 16, we have confess your sins.

It's a recognition, confessing sins that God's ways are better than ours that we haven't lived up to them. It takes humility. Pray if you're in trouble, sing if you're happy, call for help if you're sick and needy, and elders, pray for the sick if they call on you.

If you've sinned, confess, admit God's ways are better. They're all expressions of humility and love. It is wisdom in everyday life and how we use our words. It means giving up time for others and for the living God.

[18:22] Now we have to pause here. We have to pause here at verse 14 and really consider what some of these verses mean and what they don't mean because there's lots of questions arise from this passage and actually we don't have time to address all the questions that would come this morning but there are just a few things that I want us to think on to remember because I think actually as we focus in on some of the details it actually brings clarity and informs us how to use our words better.

We must remember here that the sick is not exclusively those with physical illness. It is a much broader category it is those with emotional issues or trauma mental frailty comes into it but it's also those who consider themselves to have a kind of spiritual weakness and illness not illness a spiritual weakness.

I think that really it's really important that because it means that I'm going to take the last one as an example it means that if you're struggling or have been for a long time with a particular sin in your life and you keep turning to Christ but constantly it feels like you're not making any progress we've been there and experienced that it's frustrating and you feel the weight of it of just really feeling like you keep falling in the same area it's entirely appropriate that in those moments that you can call on myself on Craig and Gareth in confidence to come and pray for you to anoint you with oil and lay hands on you.

It's because of the broader category as well that because we know the breadth of that calling on for the sick that it's not that it's emotional issues too mental frailties because of that that the broader category we know that it means that not everyone who if we do this it's not an ABC guide to healing everyone the important point here is if someone doesn't get healed after you've prayed for them you're not responsible for that.

It isn't because of a lack of faith. We have to know that. You remember what Jesus said about how much faith you need to move a mountain into the sea?

[20 : 50] How much faith? A mustard seed. It's the tiniest seed. The point is the point is he chooses something small to emphasize that you could lose you know you could lose if I had a mustard seed and blew it that's it it's gone you never find it it's small it doesn't sound enough doesn't it?

That's the point because the point is it's not the strength or the size of your faith that heals that saves that brings restoration it's not the size or the strength of your faith but it's the size and strength of your saviour.

It's the object of your faith. It is Jesus who saves and heals not you but he uses and works through you and faith is a gift.

The prayer of faith is a gift prayer. It is a gift prayer given to the ones praying at a particular moment because Jesus wants to heal in that moment.

Your faith that you need in that it's not something that you have to conjure up or if only I had enough faith to make this happen it's not something you have to conjure up faith's a gift.

[22 : 02] He gives this special faith gift prayer in a particular moment to bring that healing about. That has everything to do with how we speak doesn't it?

Because if we how we think about the understanding what's going on with God and how we pray it actually changes how we come to praying. Elijah given a a gift of prayer of faith about the weather verse 17 but what do we read he was a human being he was a human being as we are what that means what that means is call the elders and both elders and the ones who are calling have expectation but have expectation because the one you're praying to is almighty God not because of something special about us but because the one you pray to can do mighty things then we get verse as a final demonstration of how we speak of an expression of humility and love verse 19 my brothers and sisters if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back remember this whoever turns a sinner from the error of their ways will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins it would be easy and common to distance yourself from someone who walks away from the truth because you feel hurt you feel like they've rejected you or rejected the church or rejected what you believed in there's lots of reasons why someone might wander but here we get what Jesus wants us to do it's really clear do everything you can to bring them back into the fold is there anything more beautiful than when Peter is restored back to the bosom of his saviour on the beach it's beautiful such a beautiful moment

Jesus calls us to do that he thinks he's he doesn't think he's anything in that moment but Jesus reassures him that he he is forgiven don't think less of yourself just think about yourself less consider others as more important than yourself it will no doubt involve words that build up that encourage that seek restoration it will involve the things that we've talked about it will involve prayer and worship and song how you speak matters how you communicate it matters speak the word of God in suffering speak with integrity with truth and speak with humility and with love and as we as we think about that we remind ourselves of the Lord Jesus Christ who when he was suffering he needed to remember the plan he made with the father he spoke with integrity with clarity and he spoke with humility not thinking of himself at all but thinking of you and me even as he hung on the cross dying

I don't know if you know how the mechanics of what happened on the cross when Jesus died when Jesus died the way that Jesus died was by or anyone with crucifixion is by asphyxiation so as they hang there on the cross the weight of their body their thoracic cavity sinks and they can't breathe which means that in order to breathe Jesus would have to push down on the nails on his hands and push down on the nails in his feet to lift his cavity up to take a breath imagine the pain to push down there and to take a breath and he does that pushes his hands down pushes his feet down lifts up his thoracic cavity to take a breath to do what to say father forgive them he speaks the word of God words of integrity words of humility and love in this most difficult moment gaze at Jesus listen to him in his word and know that the same words that Jesus speaks he speaks to you he speaks to us of

compassion and love and forgiveness the forgiveness to the paralyzed man the forgiveness to the blind beggar the healing to the children he speaks those words to you today good words but more but more than that he wants to speak through you today to bless someone to guide someone else to edify so that you can edify your neighbour so that you can build up your family through the word of God and we know this the speaking work the speaking ministry the speaking work of Jesus Christ continues today through his church through us he is at work through us it is his ministry that has not stopped but he continues by his spirit through his church isn't it isn't the gospel wonderful what Jesus has done what he continues to do and what he will be doing for eternity let's pray almighty God what a as we sung earlier what a beautiful saviour we have you so we just love you Lord and it blows our minds the length that you went to even on the cross speaking words of compassion and forgiveness where you had to put your bodies through so much I pray that that you would change us that you would make us a a word of God speaking church I thank you that you've done that

[28 : 14] I pray that you'd do it more that you'd speak through us and I pray that you would make us to a to be a church that speaks with integrity that we would be a church that prays that sings in all circumstances that speaks with humility and love forgive us where we haven't done that in the past so we just commit ourselves into your hands we thank you that your word's powerful and so bless us we pray have mercy upon us we ask in the name of Christ Amen