

We learned in this week's sermon of the need for generosity in our speech. We cannot hope to bless those we encounter without the truth, even though the truth can be difficult to hear as well as to speak at times. When our words are the result of our own motivations and inclinations, they will almost always lack the ability to be transformative because of our deeply ingrained selfishness as well as a much more fundamental problem. Even when we rise above our selfish desires and motives to something approaching love, the problem in our speech is that it most often strives to connect others to us rather than to connect them to God and so misses the redemptive power that is only found in a relationship with the father. Let's spend some time this week in prayer and meditation considering how we can be generous with our words.

## Day 1

### Prayer

We begin not with our speech to others but with our speech to God. If our speech is to be generous it must have its source in Him and not in us. It is fascinating to me that the most unpleasant times and places to live in all human history have been the times and places where utopia has been attempted. Nothing is so much like hell as when humans attempt to create heaven. This seems surprising until you consider what C.S. Lewis observed in human nature, that is that benign neglect is often preferable to an unyielding but misguided attempt to do you good. We have surely all experienced this in encountering some busy body who we couldn't wait to get away from, and just as surely others have experienced it with us. So how do we avoid doing harm with our words while we intend to do good? In John 21:15-17 Jesus tells Peter to feed his sheep, but only after asking if Peter loved Him. The reality is that away from a total love for God we will usually do much more harm than good. We begin this week, then, with a need to make sure we are tending our love for Christ. That through prayer and being in the word our own words and actions are being motivated by love for God, and that when it comes to our words to individuals in our lives they have been preceded by prayer so that we can be sure those words are coming from a place other than our own selfish thoughts and desires. Try to make a schedule this week to pray for those who are in your life. It may be helpful to begin with those closest to you and then to work your way out in concentric circles so that you end by praying for the country or even those you know globally.

## Day 2

### Heroes

Our culture is full of super heroes. It seems that every time you turn on your computer or t.v. there is another superhero movie or show, and it only seems to be accelerating. There is a desire in many people today to make their life count, to give it meaning and purpose by taking on a cause or to help someone in need. Environmentalism, racism, the war in Ukraine and many other injustices and disasters seem to need to be addressed and making our lives count by contributing to the righting of wrongs seems like a good way to fight the nihilism that pervades the times in which we live. In John 1:43-51 we see Philip introducing Nathanael to Jesus. This would not necessarily fit our description of a heroic action but it is something that fits a pattern of Philip's life. He seems to spend a lot of time introducing people to Jesus, which may be a better use of our time than being heroic, although you could arguably do both at the same time like the friends of the paralyzed man in Mark 2:1-12. In order to have our words be generous we must give up the need to be heroes and instead introduce people to Christ. Our words to others should, as often as possible, be Christ's words to others. When people come to us with problems it is often a temptation to be an expert, to have the right advice, to be the person who is wise and discerning rather than to be the person who introduces them to Jesus. Is there anyone that you

know that could be introduced to Christ? Are there any more generous words that could be spoken than those spoken by Philip when he says, "come and see!"

Day 3

Grace

Generous words are gracious words. Grace and generosity go hand in hand as both are giving someone more than they deserve. Are you known to be gracious in your speech? If you were to die today and one by one those you knew were to get up to eulogize you, would they remark on the generosity of your words and graciousness of your speech? If someone wrongs you, do they approach you with fear and trembling knowing that whatever follows will be some form of disaster, or do they look forward to the restoration that confession will bring? Jesus has been gracious to us in word and deed, and scripture is full of words of forgiveness like Psalm 51 written after David sinned with Bathsheba. In this Psalm we see both the confidence of grace and forgiveness, the desire for a clean and renewed heart, and the declaration that David will teach others about the grace of God. Are our words a reflection of God's words of grace toward us? Do we draw others into a relationship of God built on grace and do we demonstrate grace when someone sins against us. Spend some time this week thinking of any opportunities of being gracious in speech. Is there anyone you have been unnecessarily harsh toward? Do you have a reputation for gracious speech? If not, how could you start building that today?

Day 4

Confrontation

By this time, you might be thinking that in our talk of gracious and generous speech we are leaving out the need to confront someone. Fair enough. Luke 18:18-30 tells the familiar story of Jesus' interaction with a certain ruler who was young and rich. This guy had a lot going for him as he was apparently righteous as well. He also had a desire to get into heaven, which is not exactly unique but he was interested enough to ask Jesus how to do it which is unique. In this interaction Jesus displays a quality which seems to be the antithesis of gracious generosity in his speech. Jesus tells the guy to sell everything and then when he refuses and leaves, Jesus fails to chase after him lowering the standards to a point the young man finds acceptable. My contention is that while this seems harsh, in fact it is quite gracious. Why doesn't Jesus negotiate? Why couldn't they settle on half? Sell the Ferrari but keep the Porsche? Because it is not about rule keeping but instead about love. Jesus is inviting this ruler into a loving relationship with the Father, which is the most generous thing anyone can do. It would not be an act of further generosity to make that relationship a sham. Jesus understands that a true relationship with God is one that is complete. God will give you all of himself, and because He is so big you cannot hold anything else in your hands. A little God will do you no good, but God, in his generosity, is willing to give you all of Himself. The call to give up things that are of no real value in the eternal scheme of things so that you can receive what is of the greatest eternal value is not ungenerous. When we find ourselves needing to confront someone, are we this generous? Do we offer something of greater value? Is our desire to bless the other person and to remove roadblocks from their glory? Spend some time this week in prayer and meditation about how you might make your confrontations look more like this.

Day 5

Gratitude

In Matthew 8:5-13 Jesus encounters a centurion of great faith. Jesus praises the man's faith and tells him that his desire for the healing of his servant will be granted. In doing this Jesus demonstrates a form

of generosity in speech that is profoundly attractive. As we have looked at this topic throughout the week the perspective has largely been what we offer others in our speech. We are in the position of having something of value to share with others and have been encouraged this week to make the most of that opportunity. It is important to remember, however, that it is important not just to give and to serve but to draw others into a relationship of giving and serving. That will require us to sometimes be on the receiving end of others virtue, character, and generosity. When I grew up, I was taught that as the son of a Pastor I was to refuse gifts when they were offered to me. We were often in the homes of members of the church and were often offered food or drinks while there and were under orders to always decline politely. This is something that I carried into adulthood as I almost always find it much easier to serve than to be served and have had to learn that to not accept someone's offering is a form of rejection. Being gracious in accepting what others have to offer is a very important part of being generous with our words. How we accept, how we praise, how we encourage even a small offering often helps draw others into a relationship with God and his people by giving confidence to them that they have something to offer. In Matthew 14:13-21 Jesus takes the gift of a small lunch and by graciously accepting turns it into enough food to feed thousands. That is the power of generosity in our words in accepting the offerings of others. How could you be more gracious in accepting offerings from others? Is this something you struggle with as I do? What would be the result of greater generosity with your words in this area?