

Date: September 20, 2009

Title: Live Like You Were Dying "Speak Sweeter"

Scripture: James 3:9-10 NLT; Proverbs 18:29

James 3:7-12 (NLT) ⁷ People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, ⁸ but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. ¹⁰ And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! ¹¹ Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? ¹² Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring.

Proverbs 18:21 (NLT) The tongue can bring death or life; those who love to talk will reap the consequences.

This morning we are continuing our consideration of how our lives might be different if we only had 30 days to live. How would the knowledge of that fact change the way we live our lives? You see, the Bible says in **James 4:14 (NLT)** *How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it's here a little while, then it's gone.* And indeed that is how very fragile life is; here one moment and then vanished into thin air. Against the backdrop of eternity, even if you live 80, 90, or 100 years, your life is still just a vapor that quickly vanishes. And, all of us know that truthfully we have no guarantee of living to a ripe old age. The only thing we know for sure is that we have today.

Again, I call your attention to the lyrics of the song, "Live Like You Were Dying." The man in the song who was faced with a life threatening disease decided to live out his last days in as positive a way as he could, but we all know that not all people in this situation choose positive. I mean, many

times when people are faced with similar circumstances, rather than looking for all the joy they can find, they instead choose to be bitter and resentful and demand of God why this terrible thing is happening to them.

I believe that as we go through our '*Live Like You Were Dying*' exercise exploring what we might discover about ourselves and God, we will get a chance to think about how we want to go through our lives whether we have 30 days to live or 30 years. I think the point is the choice is ours and we simply don't know how much time we have so we might as well choose to live the best we can with how ever much time we have remaining. So, with that in mind let's look at an important choice the man decided to make: He decided to "Speak Sweeter."

Now, how many of you have heard the little children's rhyme, "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me?" How many of you have said that, either out loud or to yourself, at one time in your life? How many of you really believe it? Of course we all realize that words have incredible power...probably much more power than sticks and stones. They have the power to harm or to build up. Our Proverbs scripture says, "*The tongue can bring death or life.*" James says "*blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth.*" But then he goes on to say, "*you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring.*" This is telling me that what comes out of our mouths gives some indication of what we have in our hearts.

Have you ever noticed that? Often, people say just the right words, but something about the way they say them lets you know that what they are saying is not exactly lining up with what they truly think or believe. So, again, if we are going to speak sweeter and have what we say really come out *sweeter*, we will need to make sure that what is in our hearts is sweeter. This might sound obvious, but I can imagine how sad I would feel to find out I only had 30 days to live but didn't have enough time to make

the kind of transformation that areas of my life might need so that I could be genuinely sweeter on the inside. I know that all things are possible for God, but it has been my experience that even with God's help, personal change can take a fair amount of time and a lot of intention and motivation. So, if we decide that we want to speak sweeter and agree that the best way to speak sweeter is to **be** sweeter, how do we go about becoming sweeter?

I know I have talked about this quite a bit before, but I think it bears repeating. Being sweeter begins with being grateful. Genuine gratitude begins when we realize that all the blessings that are ours only belong to us because God has blessed us. If we forget this (and I have to tell you that I forget this a lot!) and slip into a sort of *I'm entitled to what I have because I earned it or because I can afford it*, we can easily become bitter and angry either with God or with others because God or *life* is not giving us what we think we deserve. An ungrateful heart finds joy to be very illusive. An ungrateful heart causes grumbling and negativity and begins to unravel community.

In his rule for monasteries, St. Benedict considered grumbling a serious offense against community life. He says, "First and foremost, there must be no word or sign of grumbling, no manifestation of it for any reason at all." The most wonderful line in Benedict's rule describes the appropriate response to a monk who was creating discord by their grumbling. "Let Father Abbot send two stout monks to explain the matter to him." You complain and whine in the monastery and you get a visit from a couple of monk bouncers named Bruno and Guido. Maybe we should implement such a strategy in the church.

Now, I know that some of you might be saying, "But you don't understand, Pastor Steve! My life is really tough!" It's true that I don't understand exactly the struggle that you face, but what ever it is, it will never erase or

cancel out the blessing that God gives us throughout our lifetimes. The pain might overshadow the blessing for a while, but they are there if we look. The Apostle Paul wrote to the people in Thessalonica: *“in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”* **(1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NASB))** Paul is not saying the trial or the tribulation is God's will but that giving thanks is God's will. In everything we are to give thanks! Do you suppose Paul really meant *everything*? One of my goals in life is to be thankful for everything right up to the last breath I take. I have seen some people do this and it is a beautiful thing to behold. I have also seen people spending their last days complaining about how bad everything is for them. Now, I'm not making judgment on these people. I do my share of whining when things don't go my way, but I really do believe that living a life filled with gratitude is bound to be a lot more fun no matter how pain filled or troubled it might be.

On the face of it, it might not seem like much but when a person really gets to know Christ the blessings never cease. No matter what, we can know that we are loved, we are forgiven, and we can have the peace of mind to face our earthly departure with confidence and hope. Earlier I said, “An ungrateful heart finds joy to be very illusive.” Conversely, a grateful heart finds life to be filled with joy. When people realize God has touched them and they get to live a life they don't deserve, their hearts are filled with gratitude. And you know what happens then? Their face gets notified and they smile more. Their mouth gets notification and they speak grateful words.

And the really wonderful thing about gratitude is that when people have it, they pass their peace and joy along in the form of encouragement. How many times have you been challenged with a situation – convinced that there is no way you can get through it, when someone gives you a few words of encouragement. Encouraging words might come in the form of a

compliment or they might come from a friend letting you know that he or she is thinking about you and praying for you. Just letting a person know that you are going to be with them where ever they have to go can be a tremendous encouragement to them. I heard one of our ladies ask another who was to going to see the doctor the next day about something pretty serious, "Ok, so you are going to the doctor tomorrow; how many of us do you want to go with you?" What an encouraging thing to say.

We can say things to friends when we know they need encouragement, but how about people who serve us. What an encouraging thing it can be to simply notice that someone has done something to help you and then to say thank you for his or her efforts. Just letting someone know that you noticed and you appreciate it can be a special blessing.

And then, how about people who have shaped us. Every one of us has been touched and shaped by countless individuals who have made a difference in our lives in one way or other. Do you think that it might mean a lot for that person to hear from you that he or she made a significant difference in your life? What a gift to simply let someone know that you appreciate what he or she did for you or for someone else. It may seem like a small thing, but it really adds up and it's a gift that keeps on giving...and giving...and giving! Mother Teresa said, "Kind words can be short and easy to speak but their echoes are truly endless." You know about the echoes, right? Someone gives you a word of encouragement and it makes you feel good, so it's easy for you to turn around and give words of encouragement to someone else. Feeling good, they in turn encourage someone else and the "echoes" keep going and the world is better for it.

We, as the church are charged with bringing the Kingdom of God into the world. The Apostle Paul understood that we could move forward with our mission better if we would encourage each other. To the Thessalonians

Paul wrote: “Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.” **(1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NASB))**

Words of encouragement are so important to the well-being of the Body of Christ. Many times as Christians we wonder what God is calling us to do with our lives, but the simple act of giving an encouraging word makes the world a better place.

This morning we want to take just a few minutes and make the world a better place. In your bulletin you will find encouragement cards. What I would like is for you to take just a few minutes to write an encouraging word or two to someone who you think would appreciate it. You might want to thank someone for what they have done or you might want to let someone know that you are praying for them during a time of challenge. Just take a few minutes here and let God lead you.

I’m going to finish with our second scripture from the Book of Proverbs Chapter 18:21. It says, *“The tongue can bring death or life.”* Wow! That is quite a concept. Your words can give life! What an awesome gift that is. This week let’s see how much life we can spread around, shall we? Amen. This week, and for the rest of this month let’s all go out and see just how much life we can spread around. Amen.