

Out of the Abundance of the Heart the Mouth Speaks

- In last week's sermon, titled "The Hope Within You," Steve considered a passage in First Peter in which the Apostle gave this admonition: **"...in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you..." (1 Peter 3:15).**
- The best case scenario for a follower of Christ is that his or her life is so full of the fruit God's grace that others notice and make inquiry as to what is different about them.
- Steve offered several possibilities as to why those outside the faith may not notice a difference. They included:
 - **Camouflage** – other priorities in your life hide your faith from view. You are known for things other than your faith.
 - **Sin/hypocrisy** – the sin in your life chokes out the bit of faith that may be there.
 - **Ashamed** – you have a fear that people will view you as obnoxious or not cool.
 - **No hope** – perhaps you don't have real faith that generates hope.
- Listen again to 1 Peter 3:15: **"...in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you..."** Notice that it starts with your heart. It's what resides in your heart that generates hope, the hope that others should be noticing.
- In biblical terminology, your heart represents the deepest part of you; it's what motivates you, the heart is where your desires are centered.
- Jesus spoke numerous times to the **connection between our hearts and what comes out of our mouths**. Matthew records, in Chapter 12 of his gospel, an encounter Jesus had with the Pharisees just after Jesus had cast a demon out of an afflicted man. The Pharisees said the only reason the demons obeyed Jesus was because Jesus was in a partnership with the devil. Jesus had a lot of things to say, but in his rebuke he made this observation:

33 "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. 34 You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. 35 The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. 36 I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, 37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

- "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks."
 - **A bad heart generates bad words** which (according to Jesus) results in condemnation.
 - **A good heart generates good words** which results in justification.
- We won't be justified simply because we said the right things. A constant fountain of good speech (and good works) **reveals a heart that has been redeemed through faith**.
- And, according to Peter, it's normal and expected for others to ask. If others aren't asking, perhaps we should examine our hearts, and we should examine what is flowing out of our hearts through our mouths.
- Before I proceed, I'm well aware of the admonition in James 3:1-2 where he cautions that **"Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body."**

- Even though we have a heart redeemed by grace, our negative words can be a significant part of a “bushel” that is hiding our faith. (this little light...hide it under a bushel-No!)
- In numerous passages in the New Testament, the apostle encourages believers to put off their old selves and put on the new. Certainly part of the old self is bad patterns of speech that can camouflage or conceal our faith.
- I scoured the New Testament (ESV) for words that describe negative patterns of speech. Here they are in alphabetical order. Listen to this list:
 - anger, bitterness, blasphemy, boasting, clamor, conceit, crude joking, cursing, deceit, envy, falsehood, foolish talk, gossip, grumbling, hostility, hypocrisy, jealousy, malice, obscene talk, quarreling, slander, strife, wrath...
- That’s a long list! Some of those words describe patterns of speech that are similar. In an effort to make it more manageable I have taken the liberty to condense them down to five major categories: falsehood, anger, crudeness, grumbling, and gossip.
 - **Falsehood** – intentionally, or through ingrained habit patterns, misrepresenting the truth in order to gain a selfish advantage. Examples of false speech include:
 - Flat out lying to avoid negative consequences
 - Exaggeration in order to build yourself up or tear others down
 - Misrepresenting the truth or not telling the whole truth
 - **Anger** – using threatening words to leverage your position (it should be noted there is such a thing as “righteous anger,” but our topic today is about negative speech patterns).
 - Expressions of hate which Jesus equates with murder
 - Temper tantrums – trying to get your own way
 - **Crudeness** – profanity, obscenity, foul language, coarse jesting, foolish talk...all intended to shock, entertain, tantalize, and/or embarrass others in order to bring attention to oneself.
 - **Grumbling** – complaining against God for the things he allows to happen in your life. This sin reveals a functional lack of faith in God and his goodness.
 - **Gossip** – conversation that brings negative attention to others, primarily to make those who are participating in the conversation feel righteous or superior.
- **We are all guilty of these negative speech patterns.** Here are some tests or circumstances that reveal our hearts, our words exposing what’s really there:
 - If you stub your toe, drop hot food in your lap, hit your thumb with a hammer, etc., what are the first words out of your mouth?
 - Do people seem to hesitate when relaying to you some juicy gossip, or when telling a dirty joke? If not, why not?
 - Have you ever use the cover of a prayer request as a “sanctified” way to gossip?
 - Do others apologize to you when they use nasty language around you? If not, why not?
 - How often do you feel a “check” prior to saying something, and how often to you honor that check by keeping quiet?
 - Do others seem to hesitate when they disagree with you? Prior to saying something “controversial” do they give disclaimers like “I know this is going to upset you...”? Why are those disclaimers necessary? Do you have a “hair trigger”?
- I could go on, but you get the point. Our words reveal the sin in our hearts. When we are convicted by the Lord for our words, and we find the need to apologize, instead of saying “I’m sorry for what I said,” we should go to the root of the problem by confessing “My words reveal

the corruption that still resides in my heart. Please forgive me for making it public in what I said.”

- * I want to make a special comment about cursing, the kind of cursing that even involves blasphemy...invoking God’s name. Have you ever noticed that, so often, spontaneous swearing involves God or Jesus? Swearing like this makes common the most precious names in creation. It’s one aspect of using God’s name in vain. Even “harmless” expressions tiptoe around a flippant use of God or the name of Jesus. Is it any coincidence that sayings like Jimminy Cricket, jeepers creepers, jeesh, Judas Priest, gosh, golly, gosh darnit (maybe you can think of more)...they all dance around the edges of invoking the use of God or Jesus Christ? Just something to consider!
- In his letter to the believers in Ephesus, Paul brings these sinful speech habits to their attention while encouraging them to put off the sin that represents their old life. Listen to his words:

17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do (outsiders, those outside the faith), **in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart** (there it is...the heart). **19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.** (put off...put on)

As I read these next verses, pay close attention to how central our speech habits are to the process of putting off the old self and putting on the new:

25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil. 28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need (there is a connection in Scripture between idleness and being a busybody and a gossip). **29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption** (the Spirit prompts you to keep quiet or tone down words, but when we ignore His promptings He is grieved). **31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:17-32)**

- Verse 29 is the perfect summary of this message: **“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.”** A similar admonition from Paul can be found in **Colossians 4:5-6: “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”**
- Do you think if we, as a body, truly lived according to this admonition, it would draw others to us and to the Lord? Would this kind of gracious environment cause others to ask about the hope that lies within us? I think so.

- One of my newer friends on Facebook is actually an old friend from high school named Jack. I always appreciated Jack because he had a kind heart, even though he was fun-loving and ornery. I don't know his full history, but it's now obvious that Jack is a solid believer who radiates the love of God in just about everything he posts. Listen to this testimony:

"A few years ago a young man from Atlanta was hired where I worked and was sent to my department for training. There was a lot to cover, so we spent most of the day in training. When the office closed we decided to stay and go over a few things. When we were finished no one was there but us. We just talked for a while. And then he began telling me about his life and why he moved to Indiana. He said that he had some friends who were recently busted for drugs and knew that he needed to get away and start over. So he moved in with his mother who was a Christian. I asked him if he went to church with her and he said no. He said that he really never got anything out of church and really didn't understand why people went. As he was talking, Jesus suddenly showed up. I sensed the Holy Spirit with power. We were both quiet for a minute or so, and then I looked at him and asked him if he was feeling what I was? With tears streaming down his face he said yes. Then I ask him if he knew what was happening and he said no, not really. And I said brother we are having church right here, right now and explained that this is what church is all about. He wants you to know that He loves you and that He knows what you're going through. He also wants you to know that His church is not a bad thing and that you can experience church anywhere, anytime when He's there, although He probably has a specific group of people with whom you can worship Him together someday. He understood and agreed with what I was saying. It was one of the best church services I have ever been in. The next day he told me that he shared this experience with his mother. And she confirmed to him that God was with us. There's even more to the story. But I want to keep this as brief as possible so that the love of Jesus remains the focus and purpose of this sacred experience. To God be the glory!"

- May God grant us the grace to consider the condition of our hearts as we monitor our words. David's prayer in Psalm 19:14 provides a simple yet powerful model for us in this respect: **"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, oh Lord my rock and my redeemer."**
- Communion verse: ***"This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:5-9)***

Resources:

- "The Hope Within You" - Pastor Steve Bush's message from Sunday, September 24, 2017: <http://millersportcc.com/sermons/the-hope-within-you/>
- "Make Your Mouth a Means of Grace" by John Piper: <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/make-your-mouth-a-means-of-grace>
- "Using Your Tongue for God's Glory" by Joel Beeke: <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/using-your-tongue-gods-glory/>

An allegory – “The Rabbi’s Gift”

There once was a famous monastery which had fallen on very hard times. Formerly its many buildings were filled with young monks and its big church resounded with the singing of hymns, but now it was deserted. People no longer came there to be nourished by prayer. A handful of old monks shuffled through the empty hallways and praised God with heavy hearts.

On the edge of the monastery woods, an old rabbi had built a little hut. He would come there from time to time to fast and pray. No one ever spoke with him, but whenever he appeared, the word would be passed from monk to monk: “The rabbi is in the hut. The rabbi walks in the woods.” And, for as long as he was there, the monks would feel sustained by his prayerful presence.

One day the abbot decided to visit the rabbi and to open his heart to him. So he set out through the woods. The rabbi warmly welcomed the abbot to his hut. But when the abbot explained the purpose of his visit, the rabbi could only commiserate with him. “I know how it is,” he exclaimed. “The spirit has gone out of the people. It is the same in my town. Almost no one comes to the synagogue anymore.” So the old abbot and the old rabbi wept together. Then they read parts of the Torah and quietly spoke of deep things. The time came when the abbot had to leave. They embraced each other. “It has been a wonderful thing that we should meet after all these years,” the abbot said, “but I have still failed in my purpose for coming here. Is there nothing you can tell me, no piece of advice you can give me that would help me save my dying order?”

“No, I am sorry,” the rabbi responded. “I have no advice to give. The only thing I can tell you is that the Messiah is one of you.”

When the abbot returned to the monastery his fellow monks gathered around him to ask, “Well, what did the rabbi say?” “He couldn’t help,” the abbot answered. “We just wept and read the Torah together. The only thing he did say, just as I was leaving --it was something cryptic-- was that the Messiah is one of us. I don’t know what he meant.”

The monks were startled by this saying. “What could it mean?” they asked themselves. “The Messiah is one of us? Could he possibly have meant one of us monks here at the monastery? If that’s the case, which one? Do you suppose he meant the abbot? Yes, if he meant anyone, he probably meant Father Abbot. He has been our leader for more than a generation. On the other hand, he might have meant Brother Thomas. Certainly Brother Thomas is a man of light. Certainly he could not have meant Brother Elred! Elred gets crotchety at times. But come to think of it, even though he is a thorn in people’s sides, when you look back on it, Elred is virtually always right. Often very right. Maybe the rabbi did mean Brother Elred. But surely not Brother Phillip. Phillip is so passive, a real nobody. But then almost mysteriously, he has a gift for somehow always being there when you need him. He just magically appears by your side. Maybe Phillip is the Messiah. Of course the rabbi didn’t mean me. He couldn’t possibly have meant me. I’m just an ordinary person. Yet supposing he did? Suppose I am the Messiah? Oh God not me. I couldn’t be that much for You, could I?”

As they contemplated in this manner, the old monks began to treat each other with extraordinary respect on the off chance that one among them might be the Messiah. And on the off, off chance that each monk himself might be the Messiah, they began to treat themselves with extraordinary respect.

Because the forest in which it was situated was beautiful, it so happened that people still occasionally came to visit the monastery to picnic on its tiny lawn, to wander along some of its paths, even now and then to go into the dilapidated chapel to meditate. As they did so without even being conscious of it, they sensed this aura of extraordinary respect that began to surround the five old monks and seemed to radiate out from them and permeate the atmosphere of the place. There was something strangely attractive, even compelling, about it. Hardly knowing why, they began to come back to the monastery more frequently to picnic, to play, to pray. They began to bring their friends to show them this special place. And their friends brought their friends.

Then it happened that some of the younger men who came to visit the monastery started to talk more and more with the old monks. After a while one asked if he could join them. Then another, and another. So within a few years the monastery had once again become a thriving order and, thanks to the rabbi's gift, a vibrant center of light and spirituality in the realm.