

Proverbs 18:20-21

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[0:00] Let's open up your Bibles again to Proverbs chapter 18.! We'll be looking at verses 20 and 21.! The book of Proverbs says a lot about our words.

It constantly warns us to be careful with our words, to not speak too quickly, to be careful before we open our mouths. I've been revising for my final ordination exam on Wednesday, and I've been trying to do little summaries of every book of the Bible.

And one summary I think I could give for Proverbs is this. Shut your mouth. Maybe Kresh can learn that next term, right?

Shut your mouth. That's Proverbs. Now that's obviously oversimplifying it. Proverbs says a lot we've read about work and friends and wealth and time.

But a big theme is our words. And that's because our words matter. Words are such a significant thing in this world.

[1:28] Just think, how many times have you got home from church or work or a social, and you've been chatting to lots of people, and you get home, and all you can think of is, oh, why did I say that?

Oh, I hope she didn't take that the wrong way. And you just kind of replay that conversation over and over again in your head, and it kind of haunts you for the next few days. But why do we do that?

It's because our words matter. Or just think, how many times have you drafted and redrafted, read and re-read a WhatsApp message before you send it? You're kind of staring at the screen, hovering over the send button in panic.

Why do we do that? Because we know one wrong word or one right word can have a real impact. We know our words matter.

And so we have this divine book of wisdom, Proverbs here. The all-knowing God dissecting how this world really works and what matters, all that is important in our world.

[2:36] And words maybe come at the top of the list. We know, and God knows, our words really do matter.

And this proverb we're looking at today is trying to do something. It's trying to show us that our words matter even more than you think. So just look at this striking statement in Proverbs 18.21. Death and life are in the power of the tongue. Do you hear what that's saying? Our words don't only matter.

They have power. Our tongues, our mouths, our words have power, real power to do something. And what kind of power? The power of death and life. This proverb is capturing something really important about what can come out of our mouths.

[3:38] Our words can kill or our words can bring life. Our words can be poison or they can be nectar.

Our words can ruin or they can rebuild. Our words can be a weapon or they can be life-changing medicine.

Death and life are in the power of the tongue. Have you heard the saying? I'm sure we all have. Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.

This proverb is saying that is nonsense. Don't listen to that. Of course words can hurt us. We know that all too well.

And that is because our words have power. The power of life and death. And I want us to look at those two powers today.

[4:39] I want us to see how powerful our words really are. To see our words matter even more than we think. And I also want to see the reason why our words have so much power.

And so the first thing I want us to see is this. I want us to see life is in the power of the tongue. Life is in the power of the tongue. Words can change the course of history, can't they?

Words can send our lives in a different direction. Just think of some of the most famous words ever spoken. Think of Martin Luther King. Four words that still ring today.

I have a dream. From those simple words, the course of history was changed forever. From that speech, a nation was rallied and galvanized.

And eventually civil laws of an entire nation were transformed. Those words started something. It brought life.

[5:45] And we see that not just in the famous speeches of the world. But we see that in our own lives. Think of that word of encouragement, that compliment you got years ago.

But you still remember it today. It still sticks with you. And when you think about it, it gives you that bit of oomph, doesn't it? Well, that is a word impacting your life and giving you, hitting you with the power of life.

Or if you've ever played sport and you're in the game, you miss the shot. And you're crushed. And you could so easily just give up on that game.

You could so easily give up on the sport entirely. And the words of your coach can change everything, can't they? Hey, don't worry about it. Things like that happen.

You've been playing well. Stick with it. Simple words. But without them, you could be crushed. But with them, it gives you life.

[6:51] And it sticks with you. And it can change the course of your life. It can start something. In a striking way, our words impact reality. They do something in this world.

It's not just sticks and stones that change things. But our words have power. But why is that? Why do such simple things like words have such an impact?

Well, the answer is in God. God is a speaking God. And his words do something.

They have power. They give life. Just think of creation. Think of Genesis 1. In the beginning, there was nothing. But then God spoke four words.

Let there be light. And what happens? There was light. God spoke. And something happened. Something started.

[7:55] There was life in this universe. God's word has power. Hebrews 1 even says, He upholds the universe by the word of his power.

Or think about scripture right in front of us. God's word. What does this do? This isn't just a book. This isn't just information. No, we sang earlier.

The law of the Lord is perfect. Reviving the soul. When God speaks to us, it actually does something in us.

It impacts our soul. It changes us. It gives life to this world. God's words, they have power. And as we are made in the image of that God, that means our words have power too.

Death and life are in the power of our tongue. Now, obviously, we don't have the same type of power as God. Our words can't create light and matter.

[9:05] But as his image bearers, we reflect that power. And so our words can bring real life to this world, to all those around us. And the picture the Proverbs gives us is a picture of producing fruit.

Did you see that? Look at verse 20. From the fruit of a man's mouth, his stomach is satisfied. He's satisfied by the yield of his lips. Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.

As we speak, we produce fruit. You can think, okay, your tongue, it's a tree, and it produces fruit.

Every time your vocal cords rumble, and a word comes out of your mouth, you can produce either good fruit or bad fruit. Fruit that gives life, or poisonous fruit that kills.

And both we and everyone else around us, we eat that fruit when we speak. Whatever fruit I produce, my stomach is filled with that.

[10:17] Look, did you see that? From the fruit of a man's mouth, his own stomach is satisfied. If I produce good fruits, my stomach is going to be satisfied in a good way.

My life is going to be a lot better from it. And we know that's the case. Think of that person whose charisma is just off the charts.

Okay, you don't have to think of me. Think of someone else, right? Think of that person. Charisma's off the charts. And they're just great at asking questions, and including people. And they always know how to joke about themselves, but compliment everyone else around them.

And they never say a bad word about people, and they make everyone laugh. Their lips produce the fruit of life. And what happens for them?

Their life is smoother because of it. People are warmer with them. People want to be around them. There's less hostility. Fewer clashes with people.

[11:22] People enjoy working with them. The boss recognizes them. They reap what they sow. And now, of course, this isn't always the case. This world isn't perfect like that.

But this proverb is showing us that this is generally the case in the world. Our mouth produces fruit, and we consume it. Our own lives can have life by our own words.

But also, other people eat the fruit of our words. Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

The people around us eat the fruit of our words. And if you eat some really good, ripe fruit, what happens to you? I'm really into pears at the moment.

Bethany's been buying pears. I think they're seriously underrated. They're great fruit. And you just eat the perfect pear. What happens? You get energized, don't you?

[12:29] It fills you up, and you get life. But you eat rotten, smelly, festering fruit.

What happens to you? You get sick. It produces death in you. And that is our words. Our mouths are trees producing the fruit of life or the fruit of death.

And so our words have real power. And so the right words, spoken at the right time, it can be the fruit of life to those around us.

So just like Martin Luther King or your hockey coach, our words can change the course of lives. It can start something new.

It can change someone's day or year entirely. And this proverb is getting us to think very carefully about the words we use and to realize the real life that it can produce.

[13:39] some of you are teachers here. Do you realize the power that your words have? One little bit of encouragement to a pupil when they're six years old.

One little bit of recognition here. One bit of kind feedback on that random day. You could have said nothing. You could have just got on with your day. But with a few words, you have just sent them on a trajectory for the rest of their lives.

You've started something. That is you as God's image bearer giving life. And that's same for Sunday school teachers, for Club 16 leaders, Ignite leaders, for parents.

Or think about what a text can do. your friend is just having that rubbish week. They're struggling in their faith and they're feeling lonely.

And you send a text out of the blue. How are you doing? You've been on my mind. I was praying for you this morning. That little text, those words can transform their week.

[14:56] Your proof, that text and your writing it, that is proof that life is in the power of the tongue. Or how about two simple words?

I'm sorry. Those two words can transform a marriage. That can turn the cold and the silent into something full of life and joy.

Words can rebuild the broken. And this is the case for all human beings but we need to particularly have this in mind as Christians.

Jesus says a tree is known by its fruit and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. And so, a watching world is looking upon us to see if there's life in us by whether or not our words produce life.

They are an overflow of our life in Christ. And so, how are you using your words? Are your words producing life?

[16:12] Because do you realize what an extraordinary gift and serious power we have? Life is in the power of the tongue.

So, just have a think. Where can you use your words to bring life? Instead of speaking behind someone's back in the office, can we spread kind things about them?

Instead of making fun of someone, can you build them up? Instead of ignoring someone, can you ask how they're doing? Christ has given you life in your heart and he's given you power in your tongue.

And so, as his image bearers, but even more as his redeemed, we are to use it to give life. Because if not, what's the other option here?

What is the other power? Death and life are in the power of the tongue. And this is the second thing I want us to look at. Death is in the power of the tongue.

[17:18] when we think of the power of our words, I think our mind so easily goes to how destructive our words can be. Words can crush you, can't they?

That one insult, that one little comment made 15, 20 years ago, but it sticks with you like you heard it this morning. Words can start wars.

just look at what is playing out on the global stage at the moment. Look what happened in the Oval Office the other day. Things are teetering in the balance because of words.

Or words, a lie, that can break trust forever. Words can destroy a reputation, words can end friendships.

I had a best friend when I was 14. We did everything together. He was my best mate. But one day I said to him one thoughtless comment about him.

[18:24] I said it to his face and in my memory, I was trying to remember it, my memory I think was about eight words, just an eight word sentence and I said it to him and from that moment the friendship was never the same again.

From that point we basically began to part ways and now I haven't spoken to him since he was a teenager. Just eight words. That is death in the power of the tongue.

Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me. Is that true? Not one bit. In fact, our bones can heal and scars can disappear without notice but the wounds of words, they can be raw for the rest of our lives.

That's why saying, kids if you're listening, kids, that's why saying things like I take it back or I didn't mean it, that's why saying that it never really works.

once we've said it, the rotten fruit's already been eaten. And I think we all know this too well. What sticks with us from childhood, it's how we're spoken to.

[19:47] What makes your workplace enjoyable or a nightmare, it's the words of your boss or whether or not there's gossip flying around the office. What gives us headaches when we get back from church, it's when we think, oh, I shouldn't have said that.

What causes friction in our families is words. If we wanted to, our words could have serious power to destroy.

So how many people are in the room right now? Maybe a hundred, over a hundred? But there are potentially a hundred weapons of mass destruction in this room right now.

And all we have to do is speak. do you realize that you have this power? Our words are not to be used lightly.

Is it any surprise why proverbs could be summed up with, shut your mouth? As a fairly new parent, I'm learning more and more about how careful I need to be with my words.

[20:55] this proverbs says we consume words like fruit and you can see that so clearly with a three year old. And I'll tell you that they devour whatever you say.

So Lydia and I, we like to do brain teaser puzzles on my phone now and again. Whenever it's my turn to do it, I'll always go, oh, okay, okay, think, think, think, think, think, think, think. And now what happens?

Whenever it's Lydia's turn or in fact, whenever she's concentrating, what does she do? Oh, okay, okay, think, think, think, think, think, think. She's a sponge. They absorb these words, all that we say.

And I think for every parent that that's sobering to think, that I am setting the course of history here with my words. Yes, it can bring life, but that also means it can bring death.

Losing our temper and saying words that we might stick with them for the rest of their lives. Having this power, it can feel overwhelming, can't it? Or even if you're not a parent, that this power can feel too much.

[22:06] We can realize we've already done so much damage with our words. Ended friendships. Soured that dynamic with a colleague.

Broken trust. Ruined a reputation. death. Or maybe you just think, I look at my words and it's driven everyone away from me. If death is in the power of the tongue, it's like we're walking around with blood on our hands every day.

The gossip we spread, the snarky comments we make, the grumbling we are so prone to. And these things, they're not just quirks of our personality. No, look at this proverb.

proverb, it's death. And you might be looking at the ruins that your words have caused. Or you see the damage in the relationships around you.

You might grieve at what your family has become all because of words. Or you may be living with the guilt and the regret of the last words you said to a person and you cannot take them back.

[23:11] And we may look at all this death and just think, how is there any coming back from this? The words have been said now that they can't be taken back, that the death is out there.

Look at all this damage. How is there any coming back from this? Even if I say the right words now, there still won't be life. It's like the power of death is greater than the power of life in my tongue.

And so what can be done? What can be done in this world filled with death and shattered by words? Well, we need life to be brought in again.

We need someone to speak words of life to repair and to forgive the death that we have caused.

We need God to speak into our death.

And this brings us to our final point today. The power of life is in God's word. The power of life is in God's word. Do you remember what Peter said to Jesus in John's gospel?

[24:22] Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Christ has come to speak words of life to repair and rebuild all the damage from our words of death.

And as his gospel goes out and as his grace reaches our sins, what sins does that reach? It's the sin of our words.

What is Jesus doing here among us as his word is opened up and he speaks to us? What is happening? He is speaking to bring life to all the death that we have caused.

The regret and the guilt that we feel from all those words that we can't take back. Without Christ, what can even be done? Nothing.

The damage is already done. We can only eat that poison fruit for ourselves. But what does Christ promise when you bring to him all that death?

[25:36] Forgiveness. Forgiveness from all the guilt of all those careless words, those spiteful words.

He knows the damage even greater than you do. And still he says come and find forgiveness in him. and he promises to remember your words no more.

And so our words may not be able to be taken back, but they can be forgiven and they can be forgotten by the one who matters most.

And the death it has produced in you, that can become life. And so come to God with all those words that you have spoken. And that says a lot about how we should forgive people who have spoken bad things to us.

When we truly forgive, what does that mean? Does that mean that we always think about what they have said and we replay it again and again? Do we always hold it against them?

[26:49] No. How does God treat us with our words? He remembers them no more. We should always have that in mind when we forgive.

But what about our relationships that have been broken from these words? Is there any coming back from it? It can seem irreparable. Well, in Christ, in Christ, this is where we can actually find forgiveness and reconciliation.

It is in the church, bound together in the love of Christ by knowing his forgiveness. That is where real healing and reconciliation can happen. If death has caused those broken friendships, only heavenly life, heavenly words of life can really fix that.

And of course, that won't be perfect, this side of heaven, but it begins here. Now, that doesn't mean all our relationships will suddenly be healed when we become a Christian.

Not all parties will belong to the church, but it is through Christ's life-giving word, that's where healing begins, either in our own hearts or in the reconciliation of the relationship.

[28:09] Christ's words bring life to the dead, even dead relationships. And this is a great relief to any parent overwhelmed with the power of our words.

We don't need to have anxiety or feel overwhelmed thinking that there's just too much hanging on my words here. Because our words aren't the only words our children are hearing.

They are also hearing the words of life from their God. And so in his mercy, our words don't do as much damage as they could. And so yes, absolutely be careful with our words.

Don't be overwhelmed. You don't need to feel anxiety about them. His grace is far greater than our parenting. So yes, we have a great power.

life and death is in the power of the tongue. Use it carefully. Use it wisely. But praise God, unending life is in the power of his words.

[29:19] And he is able to bring life to whatever death that may have been caused. And so come to him for life. Come to him for forgiveness and healing from those wounds.

Because in this shattered world that is so full of death, where else can we go? The Lord Jesus has the words of life.

Let's pray.