

INTRODUCTION

This is the next message in my series called, "Parables and Miracles." This message is entitled, "Take out the Trash Talk." In our culture, we have developed a habit of a lot of trash talking. If you look that phrase up in a dictionary you'll discover the definition of trash talking is, "Boasting about oneself or offering insulting speech about another person or group." A lot of trash talking is heard during sports competition.

I once had the privilege of speaking at a national Fellowship of Christian Athletes event with legendary football coach Tom Landry. He told the story about rookie Cowboys running back Walt Garrison playing in his first NFL game. They gave Walt the ball and he was crushed at the line of scrimmage by one of the toughest linebackers in NFL history, Dick Butkus. After the tackle, Butkus stood up and said, "Little man, don't you run at me again." But on the next play they gave the ball to Garrison again, and Butkus flattened him again. Butkus pointed his finger down at Garrison and said, "Little man, if you run that ball at me again I'm going to bite off your head and swallow it whole." Walt Garrison looked up and said, "And if you do that, big man, you'll have more brains in your stomach than you have in your head!" That's trash talk.

Some trash talking is funny and harmless, but in our passage today Jesus points out there is a kind of speech that is destructive and dangerous. There is a kind of trash talking that should be eliminated from the lives of Christians: We should take out that kind of trash talk.

The context of this passage is important. The Pharisees accused Jesus of being in league with the devil. How could they say such a terrible thing? Jesus points out that the words coming out of our mouths are really a reflection of what is in our hearts.

Matthew 12:33-37: "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

Our lives are made up of words. From the time you say "Good morning" until you say, "Good night." You will average 37 conversations each day. We often joke about women speaking more than men, but it's true. According to a study conducted at Penn State University a man averages 6,000 words in a day and a woman speaks 8,800 words in a day. That's why when a lot of guys get home in the evening they've expended their 6,000 but their wives still have 2,800 to go! In a year's time you will speak enough words to fill over 100 books each with over 200 pages. If you've been talking for 20 years, that's a library of over 2,000 books filled with your words.

Words are very important to God. He created the universe by speaking words. He said, "Let there be..." and there was. And we are created in the image of our speaking God. We're His only creatures who use words. Dogs bark, lions roar, whales click, and cats meow, but only people use words to communicate. Words are the stuff of life. Jesus didn't say, "By your WORKS you

will be acquitted or condemned." He said, "By your WORDS." So how do we apply this to our lives? Let's examine four principles we can learn from Jesus about words.

I. A LOT OF TRASH COMES OUT OF OUR MOUTHS

If you're talking about harmless chiding friends engage in, trash talk isn't too dangerous. But there is a kind of trash talk Jesus called evil. This is the kind of destructive trash talk we need to take out of our lives. Have you ever come home after being gone a few days and as soon as you walk in the house you realize you didn't take out the garbage? There's a terrible odor because something in the trash spoiled. And the odor isn't confined to the trash—the whole house stinks. You have to open the windows, and spray disinfectant and deodorizers. But the first thing you have to do is take out the trash.

Words can do the same thing; they have a lingering effect. Some words are sweet and leave a pleasant fragrance, but trash talk stinks up your life and the lives of others around you. The Bible has a lot to say about how much damage can be caused by a careless tongue. James wrote, "The tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue is also a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body." (James 3:5-6) I want to get specific and talk about some examples of stinking trash talk. Let me give you seven examples of destructive trash talk:

A. DECEIT

If you are a child of God, honesty is not the best policy; it's the *only* policy. When you speak the truth in love you are reflecting the character of your Creator who always speaks truth. When you lie, you reflect your fallen, sinful nature. Jesus said Satan is a liar and the father of lies. When Adam and Eve were first created, every word they spoke was truth—just like their Creator. But there was another voice in the garden. The serpent slithered up to Eve and the first thing he did was question whether God was telling the truth. He said, "Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the Garden?" Eve replied that if they ate from one tree they would die. And in the first lie recorded in the Bible, Satan said, "You will not surely die. In fact, if you eat the fruit you will be like God." The lie worked, because they ate the fruit. And when God confronted them, we read the first example of a person trash talking. Adam said, "It's not my fault. The woman that YOU put here gave me the fruit and I ate it." That was a lie. It wasn't Eve's fault, they had both chosen to disobey God's word.

That was the first of billions of lies that have infected our human race. The problem with one lie is it always gives birth to more lies. When you tell one lie you have to tell several lies to cover that lie. It was Sir Walter Scott (not Shakespeare) who wrote: "Oh what a tangled web we weave when at first we practice to deceive." Take out the deceit.

B. GOSSIP

We are a nation so addicted to gossip that we have people who call themselves celebrity gossip columnists. But forget Tiger Woods. Let's talk about gossip that happens locally. Gossip is

spreading unfavorable information about someone who isn't present—even if it's true. It's character assassination. Gossip stinks because it ruins people's reputations.

Have you ever wondered WHY we love gossip? Proverbs 18:8 says, "The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts." In other words, when we hear gossip our fallen nature says, "Yummy! Tell me more, tell me more, tell me more." In the movie "Steel Magnolias," Claree said, "If you can't say something good about somebody, come sit by me." There is something about our fallen nature that says, "Yum" when we hear gossip.

Of course, now we can gossip in other ways than in person or over the phone. We can gossip using email, Facebook, Instant Message, or you can even Tweet your gossip.

Have you ever noticed how Christians often disguise gossip as a prayer request? Somebody will say, "Pray for John. He lost his job." If you stop right there, no harm, no foul, no gossip. But then you go on and say, "That's the fourth job he's lost in two years. He just can't seem to keep a job, so pray for him." Suddenly you turned a simple prayer request into character assassination, all in the name of prayer.

We tend to think gossip is one of those "itty bitty" sins God overlooks. But when you read Romans 1 and it speaks of the wrath of God being poured out against all unrighteousness, Paul gives a list of sins. He writes, "They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossipers, slanderers, God-haters." (Romans 1:29-30) God lists gossip and slander right up there with murder.

C. SLANDER

Slander and gossip are cousins. They aren't kissing cousins—they're killing cousins. God listed gossip and slander with murder in Romans 1 because they are both character assassination. Here's the difference between gossip and slander: A gossip hides in the bush and puts a silencer on his gossip gun and fires from hiding at the character of a person. But a slanderer walks out of the bush, takes off the silencer, and "bam," just outright fires at the person. Slander is making a false or misleading statement about a person that damages their reputation. Actually, if your false accusation causes them to suffer financial or personal loss, then you can be sued for slander. But I'm not talking about the crime in the context of the church. We sometimes make false, damaging statements about people because we don't have all the facts, or we misjudge someone's motives.

Here is an example. Let's say you call John on his phone and leave a message for him to call you back. A couple of days pass and he doesn't return your call, so you leave another message. No response. You end up leaving three messages that week and John never calls back. You're at church Sunday and you see John and he waves at you and says nothing about your calls. That makes you mad. Then you see him talking to a mutual friend. As John walks off he says to this third person, "Okay, I'll call you next week." You walk up to the guy and say, "Hey, don't count it. John never returns his calls. He's lying if he says he'll call you back." You've just defamed his character. But what you don't know is John was on vacation all week and just got in the night

before and didn't have a chance to check his phone messages before coming to church. Then how do you feel when he calls you on Monday? You've already slandered his character.

D. FILTHY LANGUAGE

I used to have a real sense of pride over the fact that I never used profanity. But pride is a dangerous thing. When I lived in Alabama, I was working one hot summer Saturday to replace a bathroom light and fan fixture in our house. To access the unit, I had to crawl through the attic, carefully stepping on the ceiling joists in order to disconnect the wires and install the new unit. To make matters worse, it was in the corner where the roofline meets the side of the house, so it was a very tight working location. It was at least 130 degrees in the attic, and of course, I had to make five or six trips back through the attic to get another tool, or to seat the new light from below. Finally after about three hours I finished the frustrating job. I was tired, and sweat was pouring off my body and filling my eyes as I walked back through the attic. Suddenly my foot slipped off one of the ceiling joists and the next thing I knew my foot punched a hole in the ceiling. And I fell halfway into the bedroom below. I was stuck up to my hip in this big, ugly hole in the ceiling. At that moment, I didn't say, "Well, praise the Lord." In fact, I found myself uttering a word that wasn't very nice. It didn't make it any easier that Cindy walked into the bedroom at that moment and started laughing hysterically at me. They say confession is good for the soul—but bad for the reputation.

Here's my point. Sometimes even the best of folks who are trying to live for Jesus slip up in a moment of weakness and revert to language they're not proud of. But in that moment, you realize it is sin and you ask God to forgive you. That's bad, but that's not the same as people who continually and constantly pepper their conversations with vile profanity and feel no twinge of guilt whatsoever about it. In fact, they proudly drop the profanity bombs left and right. That's the worst kind of stinking trash talk.

In the sixth chapter of Isaiah, he saw the glory of God and he said, "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips." (Isaiah 6:5) I wonder what Isaiah would say today if he could hear some of the potty-mouthed comedians and performers we have in our culture?

E. BOASTING

When James wrote about the danger of being hung by your tongue, he warned that although the tongue is small, it boasts great things. Boxer Mohammed Ali elevated trash talking to an art form. He is famous for saying, "I am the greatest!" He also said, "I'm so fast that last night when I turned out the light switch in my hotel room I was in bed before the room was dark." You don't have to be a boxer or a professional wrestler to be a boaster. Have you ever known someone who was a "one-upper?" If you told about something you did, they have to talk about something better, harder, more exciting than they did? If you mention a trip you took somewhere, they have to one-up you by talking about a better, more distant, more exotic spot they visited?

F. COMPLAINING

The world is full of chronic complainers who feel it is their God-given duty to point out every problem in the world. They are never happy, because they are only looking for things to complain about.

Some people are never content. Someone wrote: "If it's hot they complain that it's too hot. If it's cold they complain that it's too cold. If they're young they complain that they aren't old yet. If they're old they complain because they aren't young anymore. If they have a hundred dollars they complain because they don't have \$200 dollars. If they live in an apartment, they complain that they don't live in a condo. If they live in a condo, they complain because they don't live in a house. If they live in a house, they complain that they don't live in a bigger house, a newer house, or a nicer house. If they don't have a job they complain that nobody is hiring. If they have job they complain about not having a better job, a higher-paying job, a job with better benefits. If they're single, they complain that they aren't married and if they're married they complain... (I'll let you finish that)." Chronic complaining is trash talk.

G. CONDEMNING

One of the worst kinds of trash talk is when you use your words to hurt someone. Condemning trash talk is when you tell a kid they're stupid and will never amount to anything. You are condemning that child to a life of low self-esteem. When we were children we were taught to say back to someone who taunted us, "Sticks and stones may break my bones; but words will never harm me." We soon learned that little poem was a lie, and that hurtful, harmful words cause painful wounds that take many years to heal.

As followers of Jesus we should never use words to condemn and attack others. Our words should always be used to encourage and build others up, not to tear them down. The Bible says, "Don't let any unwholesome talk [rotten, just like stinking garbage] talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for the building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." (Ephesians 4:29) What would be different in your life if you decided to take out the trash talk and use your words to *only* encourage and build up others? You'll never know until you try.

II. YOUR WORDS REFLECT THE CONDITION OF YOUR HEART

The parable in this passage is found in seven simple words: "A tree is recognized by its fruit." I'm not a botanical genius but when I see an apple hanging on a tree I say, "That's an apple tree." When I see a cherry hanging on a tree, I say, "That's a cherry tree." When I see spaghetti hanging on a tree I say, "What happened here?"

The application of this parable is clear. You can identify the inner nature of a tree by examining its fruit. And you can identify the inner nature of a person by listening to their words. Jesus said the reason the Pharisees said evil things was because their hearts were full of evil. Whatever you talk about the most is generally what fills your heart. Some people's hearts are filled with their hobby, so they talk about their hobby most. If your heart is full of your job, you'll talk about your job. Jesus said words provide a window into a person's heart.

For instance, if you meet a person whose mouth is constantly spewing out profanity, you know their heart is full of filthy things. When you meet someone who uses words as a weapon to hurt someone, it's because their heart is full of anger and hatred. But if your heart is full of Jesus, you'll be talking about Jesus.

British Pastor Charles Spurgeon once said: "More of a man is seen in his words than in anything else belonging to him; you may look into his face and be mistaken, you may visit his house and not discover him, you may scan his business and misunderstand him; but if you hear his daily conversation you shall soon know him. The heart babbles out its secret when the tongue is in motion."

That's why there are more admonitions in Proverbs about being careful how you speak than any other topic. One of my favorites is Proverbs 15:1-2, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of a fool gushes folly." When someone screams in your face, if your heart is full of Jesus, you can respond with a gentle answer. But if your heart is full of anger, then you'll yell back. And the fight begins.

III. INSTEAD OF "FRUIT INSPECTING" OTHERS, LISTEN TO YOUR OWN WORDS

One of the easiest things to do when you hear a message like this is to sit there and think, "Good for you, Pastor, I hope so-and-so is listening to this message, because they really have a problem with gossip or grumbling." Stop. This message is not for you to get the CD and give to someone, this message is for you to examine your *own* heart.

I've got to confess to you in the process of preparing this message I came under the convicting power of the Holy Spirit that I am guilty of trash talk. I've had to repent before the Lord myself. We all like to be fruit inspectors and judge others, but why don't you pray this prayer right now? "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is an offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23-24) Sometimes we're so busy talking that we don't listen to ourselves enough to realize we're guilty of trash talk.

A guy with a moustache attended a party and ate a Limburger cheese sandwich, not realizing he smeared some of it in his moustache. Before long, the cheese started to spoil and stink. As he was talking to someone he smelled an unpleasant odor and said, "I don't mean to be rude, but when was the last time you took a bath? You stink!" The offended person stormed off. The guy turned away and sniffed again. He said, "This room stinks." He walked into another room and said, "This whole house stinks!" Then he walked outside and sniffed again and said, "The whole world stinks!!!" Of course, the real problem was under his nose all along. When it comes to trash talking, let's do what Jesus said and look for the log in our own eye before we try to help a brother who has a tiny speck in his eye.

IV. TO GET RID OF "TRASH TALK": DON'T BITE YOUR TONGUE - ASK JESUS TO CLEANSE YOUR HEART!

Now you're probably ready to take your shoes off because I've been stomping on your toes. But let's talk about what we can do about trash talking. The first step in taking out your trash talk is realizing you can't fix your tongue by your own strength and willpower. James writes, "No man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison... Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be... Can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs?" (James 3:8-10) Jesus said, "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good." (Matthew 12:33) You can't make your heart better—only Jesus can. If you have a weed in your yard or your garden, you can cut it off at ground level, but unless you dig out the root, the weed will grow back even stronger because the root is larger. If you bite your tongue to cut off your trash talk, the root of the problem is still there. It's not about washing out your mouth with soap; it's all about asking Jesus to give you a pure heart. Here's a great prayer to memorize and pray every time you hear yourself trash talking: "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." (Psalm 51:10)

CONCLUSION

We should be careful with our words, because once spoken, they cannot be unspoken. I sometimes quote a poem called "The First Settler's Story." It's a nine-minute ballad about a pioneer who moves into the wilderness with his young bride. One night in anger he scolds her with harsh words. His words wound her so deeply, she eventually dies and he believes he killed her with his words. I won't quote the entire poem here, but the last few lines bear repeating. He concludes his story by saying, "And wherever this story's voice may reach; This is the sermon I would have it preach: Boys flying their kites haul in their white winged birds; But you can't do that when you're flying words; Careful with fire is good advice we know; But careful with words is ten times doubly so. Words unspoken may fall back dead. But even God can't kill them once they're said."

Maybe you've been guilty of trash talk. How does it make you feel when you read that Jesus said that on the Day of Judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you've ever spoken? Does that sound a little scary? By the way, scientists who study sound waves theorize sound waves never really vanish, they just diminish until they are no longer audible to the human ear. And each sound wave has a unique frequency. Some believe if we could invent a sensitive enough instrument, we might someday be able to go back and capture the faint echo of words spoken hundreds of years earlier. Wouldn't it be something if we could one day actually hear Lincoln giving the Gettysburg address? Well, that's the stuff of scientific journals.

But, for God, recapturing every word I've ever said won't be hard. But I'm not worried. Do you know why? Because there are a few important words I've spoken that take care of all the trash talk I've ever done. One day I said, "Jesus is my Lord." And I asked Him to forgive my sins. You have a choice you can stand by your words and your works and be condemned. Or you can ask Jesus to forgive you and there is therefore now NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. I want my words to be pure and clean, but I'm not worried about my trash talk in the past because I know that I won't have to give an account for all my bad words. In fact I won't have to give an account for any of my sin because the Bible says in Romans 4:8, "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him." The blood of Christ has covered all our trash talk and sin! So, let's keep on taking out the trash talk!

OUTLINE

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- B. Gossip
- C. Slander
- D. Filthy language
- E. Boasting
- F. Complaining
- G. Condemning

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"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." *Psalms 51:10*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes