

Monday, March 8

Today's Reading: Matthew Chapter 12: 22-46

Today's Devotional Message is by Pastor Jeff Thackston

"A good man out of the good treasure of the heart brings forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things." Matthew 12:35

Are your words important? Christ's words here seem to suggest that not only they are important, but they are a direct reflection of what is in your heart. Throughout the New Testament this idea is prevalent. Paul, James and other New Testament writers echo the sentiment that Christ speaks here. The idea is that no matter how much you clean up, shape up, or try to hide what is in your heart. Sooner or later your words will betray you. Words are the mirror of the soul. They reflect the secret parts of us and sometimes give others insights that we would rather they didn't have.

So what is the purpose of bringing this point out? Why did Jesus make such a concerted effort to make this idea so clear? I believe it is because the whole words-heart correlation can both reflect the heart, but also causal in nature as well. I think Jesus is inferring that if one works on the mouth, it can truly help bring the heart around. In other words, trying to control the mouth can go a long way in affecting a change of the heart.

Here are a few time tested hints in using the mouth as an instrument of change on the heart.

1. Listen more than you speak. It is a saying old as time, but it is true: "There is a reason God created two ears and one mouth, it is because he wanted us to listen twice as much as we speak". Ok, so it may be a little corny, but it is so relevant. Most of us formulate our responses to other's conversation, before that person is even finished talking. Listen carefully to the other person, take a couple of breaths and then say what you want to say. This will go a long way in making your mouth an instrument of peace, instead an instrument of strife.
2. Try to find the compliment instead of the cut down. Guys are really bad about this. We have been ingrained to think that part of male bonding is to cut the other guy down. The problem of course is that when we are in relationships, this often spills over to the special people in our life. My dad came to this conclusion on his own. For most of my life, a compliment consisted of the phrase (or something similar to it): "Not bad for a kid". Or, "That was pretty good". It was not until later in life did he realize how that affected those he loved. He has since repented of that and now uses much more unequivocal statements like, "Good job" or "I am proud of you, you did really well".
3. Always speak as if Jesus was in the room with you. This may be the most difficult. I know that all of us speak in many different languages. We have a work language, a home language, and probably even a church language. If you find yourself talking differently around the "boys" or the "girls", then that may be an issue with your heart. Take a minute and evaluate whether or not Jesus could be involved in all your conversations.

Now I know this is not easy stuff. This isn't the normal devotional material. But I hope that you will take a minute now during Lent to evaluate your speech. Figure out if everything you say brings honor and glory to God. Ask God to help you clean up the parts that need it. It might also help you to get someone to help you, a friend, a confidant, someone you trust who can help you in your quest to follow Jesus' instruction on controlling your mouth.

Can I say, that I will pray for you, because believe me when I say, everything I have written today pertains directly to me as much as anyone. So will you pray for me as well? So we can bring out the "good treasures of a good heart" with the words that we speak.