

Psalm 12

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[0 : 00] I would like us this evening to turn back to the twelfth chapter of the book of Psalms and look at the fourth verse, but look at it in the light of what Jesus says about speech in the passage from the Sermon on the Mount we read in Matthew chapter 5.

I read again from verse 3 of Psalm 12. May the Lord cut off all flattering lips and every boastful tongue that says, We will triumph with our tongues. We own our lips. Who is our Master?

We own our lips. Who is our Master? We will triumph with our tongues.

In Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of this verse, he translates it as, Our lips manage the world.

There are many people who believe that their words manage the world. Words are very important.

[1 : 23] Rudyard Kipling said that words are the most powerful drug used by mankind. Words can be used to deceive ourselves.

They can be used to deceive and manipulate others. God is concerned about how we use our words. One of the ways in which we are made in the image of God is that we speak, is that we have the gift of speech.

And he wants us to use it for his glory and for the well-being of others. Now, we live in an age in which there are more words spoken and transmitted than perhaps at any other time in history.

We live in an age in which many people are concerned about the ways in which words are used and abused. There is great concern today about the growing use of spin, half-truth and disinformation in public and private discourse.

But this concern is not anything that is terribly modern, because the psalmist had the same concern. This ancient psalm defines ungodliness almost exclusively in terms of the misuse of words.

[2 : 49] The poet is aghast at how widespread the misuse of words had become. In verse 3 he speaks about empty talk.

Everyone lies to his neighbor, he tells us. He tells in verse 2, everyone lies to his neighbor. Talk had become empty.

Words had lost their meaning. And they did not communicate what they appeared to. He is also concerned about smooth talk.

He speaks about, in the same verse, of flattering lips. He speaks also of double talk, because he speaks of them, he complains of them speaking with deception.

But most of all, perhaps, he is shocked by what we might today call big talk. Those who say we can talk anyone into anything. Our lips manage the world.

[3 : 54] We will triumph with our hands. We own our lips. Who is our master? Now, this preoccupation with the power of words is a preoccupation not only of the media, not only of those who communicate through words professionally.

It is also a big concern today of philosophers. Because many philosophers today tell us that words create reality.

That the world that we see and that we can touch and that we can feel is a creation of words. They no longer speak of a world out there.

They speak of our perception of the world. And that our words, our language, creates this perception. A great deal of modern philosophy has to do with language.

And sees human language creating the world. There is a very real sense in which this is an act of defiance against the creator, God, of whom we read in the book of Genesis, that he created the world by his word, by his powerful word.

[5 : 14] And so we live in an age in which philosophers tell us it was not God's word that created the world, but it is our language. It is our word.

And so, Peterson's paraphrase is not far off the mark. Our lips manage the world. That's the kind of age in which we live.

And this is the age in which we are called upon to be good stewards of words. God has created the world through his word.

God has given us the Bible as his word. He has sent his son into the world and has called him the word of God. God has called us to be exhibitors of the true word.

Of a word which is not deceitful. A word which is true. And of a word which means what it says. Now it's important for us to recognize that the poet here, the psalmist here, is writing or singing, not as an observer but as a victim.

[6 : 24] He himself has become the victim of the misuse of words. He's one of the weak and needy who are groaning under verbal assault.

As he refers to in verse 5, because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, the Lord will respond. And he is conscious that he is one of those needy people.

And of course one key to receiving God's blessing is to recognize our need. To recognize that we are needy. And that we are the victims of sin.

And that we need the grace of God. And the psalmist here is brought to an extremity. He's brought to a point where he acknowledges his need. This is the psalm of David.

David was a king. David had a great deal of authority. And yet, he recognizes that all that authority that he had could not in itself undermine the attempts of his enemies to sow lies and deception and propaganda against him.

[7 : 34] He recognizes that he needs God's grace. He needs God's intervention. He needs the Lord to help him. David was one of many psalmists.

And all of them had, or many of them at least, had a problem with enemies. They were brought up in a society which is much more in common perhaps with the society of modern Iraq than of most Western countries.

Where enemies abounded. And one of the key weapons of the enemy was propaganda. Was words. Words are the most common weapon, the most frequent weapon which is used against the psalmist by their enemies.

We see this in Psalm after Psalm after Psalm. In Psalm 52, part of which we read, the psalmist says that his enemies were using words like a razor.

Sharp. Cutting. Disfiguring. Destroying. He was very much aware of the power of words.

[8 : 48] And he appeals to God for protection. These appeals are frequent. There is a sense in which, as the NIV Study Bible says, it is only in God's courtroom that a person can obtain redress from such verbal attacks.

Now what the psalmist assures us here is that God has promised to protect those who are maligned. And all of us who seek to be faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ will find ourselves sooner or later, to a greater or lesser extent, maligned.

We will find that people will speak against us. People will speak behind our backs. People will seek to undermine our witness by sowing deception, by making false accusations.

Again and again in the psalms we have the psalmist being falsely accused, bringing these accusations before God and appealing to God to vindicate him.

And so the psalms give us a very useful means of responding to such a situation. When we ourselves become the victims of malign words.

[10 : 03] When we ourselves become the victims of deceit and of lies and of propaganda. There are songs many of the psalms in which the psalmist who is falsely accused bring he appeals to God.

And he appeals to God as the judge of all the earth. He appeals to God to intervene. And God promises to protect those. He says, I will now arise says the Lord in verse 5 I will protect them from those who malign them.

And he goes on to speak about the words of the Lord. The psalmist goes on speaking of the words of the Lord are flawless. Very different from the words of his enemies.

The words of the Lord are flawless like silver refined in a furnace of clay purified seven times. And it is as if the psalmist is saying here that God's words will protect him from the evil words which were spoken against him.

And God has given us his word to be a shield to be a protection to us when we are maligned and we are attacked by those who misuse words and who use words as razors and who seek to destroy the character of the people of God.

[11 : 22] God's word he says offers a protective shield against all curses lies and threats. It is more than human words it is also a vehicle of divine power.

God's word is much stronger than any human word. God's word is a word of power. God's word is a word by which he created the world. God's word is a word through which he will wrap up the universe at the end of the age and create a new heavens and a new earth.

And that word is given to us as a protective shield. And when we find ourselves the victims of verbal attack when we find ourselves misrepresented when we find ourselves maligned then let us find our refuge in the word of God and discover how protective it is.

Let us find refuge here. One of the key words in the book of Psalms is the word refuge. Again and again the psalmist finds his refuge in God.

he finds that God is a high tower in which he can hide himself and he is inviting us to make that same discovery to find that the word of God and God himself is our refuge and our strength and to turn to him and to his word at this time.

[12 : 46] And so the Lord is offering a spiritual shelter in his word tonight. He says I will now arise. that is a formula a form of words from the Old Testament where the Lord promises to intervene against the enemies of his people.

I will arise. It is not as if God was not paying attention earlier. It is a figure of speech it is an idiom it is a metaphor which tells us that God is going to intervene that God is going to take action that God is going to protect his people.

I will arise says the Lord I will protect them from those who malign them. So when we become victims of lies of innuendo of threats or even of the misuse of scripture as our Lord himself became the victim of when he was tempted by the devil on these three occasions recorded in the gospels. When we find ourselves in such situations let us take the fullest advantage of this protective shield that God has given to us in his word. Let us use God's word just as Jesus used it in order to fend off the words of the devil.

The devil came to him through words and he comes to us through words he may use other people he may use different institutions but words are a common commodity of the devil's attack and Jesus in each occasion used the word of God.

[14 : 22] It's very interesting he was living on earth as the son of God but he was living as a believer he was trusting in the word of God and giving us a model so that we might learn from him to live and use God's word to parry to repel and to defuse these evil words that come against us because we belong to Jesus.

So words are of crucial importance but of course we are not only the receivers of words we are also the purveyors of words.

We find ourselves not only at the receiving end but we often find ourselves at the giving end. Surely we need to remember that and to pray with the psalmist in Psalm 19 that the words of our mouth and the meditation of our hearts might be pleasing in God's sight.

He is our rock and our redeemer. Now Jesus makes this clear it makes clear the importance of the not simply when we are under attack finding refuge in the word of God but then we have the opportunity to communicate to use words to use them in a way which is worthy of him.

So Jesus is thinking in the Sermon on the Mountain that short passage which we read not only of us as victims but he is thinking of us as users not simply as receivers but as users purveyors of the word of God.

[16 : 04] Now in that part of the Sermon on the Mountain which are called the Great Antithesis Jesus is widening and deepening the commandments of God.

He is not contradicting it he came to fulfil the law he did not come to abolish it but he is making it more intense he is widening it from actions to thoughts he is deepening it making it much more personal for each and for all of us.

And he says some very significant things about words when he is speaking about the sixth commandment you shall not kill Jesus is saying that words can kill very similar to what the psalmist said about his enemy that his words were like a razor and Jesus is saying that words can kill so that we in fulfilling the sixth commandment we fulfil it we obey it not simply by not taking a knife or a gun

and killing somebody it's much deeper much wider than that it involves words as well as weapons because words can become weapons and Jesus is urging his disciples he is urging us who name his name to be careful how we use our words now Jesus refers to two particular types of words he speaks about one type of word which is just borrowed taken over into the

English translation from the Aramaic *rata* this was a term of scorn a term of contempt and Jesus said that if we were to use a word like that then we find ourselves guilty of judgment and he's warning us against using contemptuous language putting somebody down because we think that we are better than they perhaps an equivalent of the word *raka* today would be to call someone a brainless idiot or a total fool the word that Jesus refers to here is a word which expresses an arrogant contempt for someone who is less gifted than we are someone who's got a lower level of intelligence someone who's got less initiative someone who has not achieved the level of training that we have enjoyed to look down to reproach someone because they've got lower than average ability lower than average experience and Jesus is saying this is unfair that we are what we are by the grace of

God and we have no right to lord it over others many people feel unable to cope in certain circumstances in life and Jesus is urging us not to look down on them not to make them feel even more insecure he's urging us to use words that are kind words that will build up not words that will destroy words that will strengthen not words that will weaken Jesus himself was the victim of such words on the cross you remember what his enemy said he saved others himself he cannot save that must have been something that hurt the lord Jesus Christ because he knew full well that he could save himself he could have come down from the cross but he didn't and in his love and in his mercy he absorbed in himself that scorn that contempt directed at him the other word that [20:14] Jesus refers to in Matthew chapter 5 is the word fool he says that if we are to call someone a fool then we are in danger of the fires of hell not just of judgment but of punishment so Jesus is in the sense saying that this is an even more serious word if *raka* is a term of scorn then fool as it was used by Jesus and was used customarily in his culture was a term of slander the word fool as we have it in the sands in psalm 14 for example does not have the sense of lack of intelligence it's much more it's a moral word rather than a mental word it describes not a person's mental capacity but his moral character and what

Jesus is referring to here is what we today call character assassination and you know characters can be assassinated you may not take a gun you may not take a knife but you can destroy someone with your words Jesus is saying if we do that we're guilty of the fires of hell Jesus is urging us to take with the utmost seriousness our words how we use them to ask he's urging us to avoid malicious tailbearing vicious gossip and it's all too easy to find this not only in the world outside but also in the church of God it's too easy for us to believe the worst rather than the best and it's so easy for us when we become obsessed with something to lose all sense of reason all sense of proportion it's so easy for us to get onto this assassination train character assassination and Jesus is urging us here to use not these words but words that are healthy words that are health giving words that are up building words that will build people up one of

Job's friends came to him and spoke about his words and reminded him in the modern translation puts it this way your words put men on their feet and I think what Jesus is saying here is that our words should put people on their feet not strike them down not undermine them not take the feet away from them but lift them up and build them up and strengthen them we are called to a ministry of the word all of us not just those of us who are called to technically the ministry of the word in the church of God we are called to use words wisely helpfully and in a way which will build the people of God up will build up men and women and bring glory to God if we are to live as Jesus wants us to live we will demonstrate the motive love love love

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13 does not rejoice in the wrong but rejoices in the right now Jesus is not suggesting that we ought to keep quiet when something goes wrong he is not suggesting that we close our eyes to certain situations that he is saying that we need to use our words wisely helpfully and in love sometimes we are called to speak out sometimes we are called to protest but we need to do so as messengers of God's love and of God's grace we need to do so remembering that we are what we are by the mercy of God and by the grace of God and that we have no right to look down on anyone else God has called us to be his servants and it is by his grace that that is our privilege nothing else and so God is speaking to us tonight through this sound reminding us of the power of words reminding us that when we ourselves become victims to find our refuge in the word

of God to ask him to protect us through his powerful word and he can and if you find yourself under attack if you find yourself under siege because you are a believer in the Lord

Jesus Christ then turn to God's word God's word is so strong it is tried seven times it is purer than silver God's word is there God's word is given to us and when we find ourselves not simply as the receivers of the words of others but when we find ourselves as the conveyors of words to others then we are to use our words in a way which reflects the life and usage of words by the Lord Jesus Christ he used words a great deal he spoke a great deal there is a great deal of not simply his parables not simply his discourses or sermons there is also a lot of dialogue a lot of conversation in the gospels look make that make Jesus your model he used his words to further the kingdom of God he used his words to help other people even if at times to help them he had to hurt them

[26 : 19] God has given us his word and God asks us to be conveyors of that word he calls us to exhibit that word in who we are so that our words are backed up by our characters and our lifestyle so that our words are not words only that they're confirmed they're authenticated through who we are and through what we do so let us remember that God's word is all powerful God's word is the word through which the world is being created and will be recreated and God has given us the privilege of sheltering and finding refuge in his word and being the means of communicating that word to others may we be faithful may we seek to honour him and glorify his name and so that we may be delivered from the feet of judgment and from the fires of hell by trusting in the Lord

Jesus Christ who is the word of God and who is the saviour of the world let us bow our heads in prayer our heavenly fathers we come before you tonight we pray that you will speak to each and to all of us and forgive us if so often and so easily and so unthinkingly we have misused words we pray oh God that you will enable us to the quietness of this moment to confess our failures before you to pray for your forgiveness to thank you that your forgiveness is readily available to us and help us tonight to find our refuge in your word when we ourselves are under attack help us oh Lord our God to know that you will protect us that you have promised never to leave us and never to forsake us may we trust in you and may we believe that those who are in the hollow of your hand will never be dislodged accept our thanks for this assurance and grant us your blessing as we part now in Jesus name

Amen Before we sing our closing psalm let me remind you of the edict which I read in the morning service concerning the meeting of presbytery with the congregation on the 11th Wednesday the 11th of July at half past seven for when you will have an opportunity to sign a call to the Reverend Dr.

Bob Ackroyd please make every effort to be present on that occasion because we need to have over half of the signatures of the over half of the people on the roll the communion roll of the congregation if you're not on the communion roll of this congregation or an adherent in this congregation you're also free and invited to sign the call and to concur with the call I think is the terminology that is used if you cannot be present on the 11th of July then you can sign a mandate empowering the session clerk or any of the office bearers to sign on your behalf mandate forms are in the vestibule and if you cannot be present then please take a form and sign it or if you know people in the congregation who cannot attend church but who would like to sign the call then take mandates for them so that we may be able to have the maximum support for this call it received tremendous support at the congregational meeting on Monday and I trust that that support will continue as we go into signing the call and above all let us pray that the Lord would lead and guide in this process that he would guide us as a congregation that he would guide Dr.

Ackroyd as to how he might respond that he would guide the presbytery as to what it should do in this situation that this may be trust hopefully lead us to the close of the vacancy