

Sermon for Sunday, November 14, 1971 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"SPIRITUAL ECOLOGY AND THE POLLUTED HEART"

Text: "But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a man."
St. Matthew 15:18

My grandfather, who was a doctor, lived just across the street, so as a child I had the best of medical care. If I looked pale or wane he would hook his thumbs in the pockets of his ample vest and with his mustache fairly bristling, he would glare at me over his glasses and demand, "Boy, stick out your tongue." In some mysterious way I could never quite fathom, he could judge the condition of my health and he always knew before I did when I was getting sick. My tongue gave me away.

In a much more profound way, the tongue also gives away our spiritual ecology, the general state of health of our souls. By the words we speak, by the things we say, we reveal the inner conditions of our hearts. For example, the meaning a particular word has for you comes about through association. For example, if I say the word "dog" what do you think of? There is no such thing as a dog in general for there are only dogs in particular. So, probably you think of your dog at home or you picture in your mind some dog you once loved and cherished. Or take the word "rose". What do you think of? The roses your husband sent you on some special occasion? The rose in your back yard? Or perhaps the first white rose you wore on Mother's Day?

Words, then, are never mere words. They reflect something within you. They represent something inside of your own heart and in your own experience. That is why it is difficult to talk in merely theoretical terms. To understand thoughts we need to be able to relate them to experience and visualize them in our minds. Jesus was a great teacher because for one thing he could take great theoretical ideas and make them come alive in the experience of people. For example, when he came to talk about a concept such as brotherhood, he related it to reality and said, "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. . . ." When he wanted to talk about a concept such as the Kingdom of God, he said, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed. . . ." When he wanted to talk about the love of God for individuals, he said, "If a shepherd has a hundred sheep and one of them is lost. . . ."

So, the meaning you attach to words arise out of your experience, they arise out of what is in your life and in your heart. Therefore, what you say, how you use words, is a clue to what is inside you, a clue to your spiritual ecology. That's why Jesus said, "for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." And that means simply that the things we say are symbols of what is inside of us. Words tell us whether our hearts are polluted or not.

That is one reason counseling has been so successful in our day. Through what we say the trained person can discover who and what we really are. Our words lay bare the raw materials of human personality. Our words are windows into the depths of human personality where the soul is naked, stripped of pretension and guise. So by our words we are indeed either justified or condemned. Our words are a clue to our spiritual ecology and tell it like it really is inside of us. They may tell us of the polluted heart.

In the words of Jesus the Bible says, "Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. . . either in this age or in the age to come." That is the so-called unforgiveable sin. Are you guilty of the unforgiveable sin? If you are, your words will tell it like

it is. Let's see what the unforgiveable sin is. Just before Jesus uttered this statement we discover that he had healed a man who had a devil, who was blind, and who was dumb. The Pharisees didn't like it. They said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons that this man casts out demons." They attributed the work of God to the work of the devil, to something or someone else. It was in response to this that Jesus uttered the statement about the unforgiveable sin. That is to say, the Pharisees denied the reality or the possibility of God working in human lives and in human history.

That ought to be plain enough! When a man denies the working of God in human lives and attributes it to something or someone else he commits the unforgiveable sin. When a man fails to see God at work in the world, when a man refuses to believe that God influences the course of human events, when a man refuses to believe that God cares and is concerned for men, when a man attributes life to fate, chance or fortune, then he is revealing the destitution of his soul, he is revealing a heart that does not believe in God. For such a man the Bible says there is no forgiveness.

But maybe you are saying, "But I would never do that. I believe in God. I believe he works in the world." But do you remember the parable of the rich fool? He said, "I will do this; I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry." (Luke 12:18ff) Here is a man who credited himself with who and what he was. That's the sin against the Holy Spirit. But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you." He was a fool because he denied the working of God in his life and gave himself all the credit.

Do you see? Your words tell it like it really is in your heart. What you say about yourself, how you see yourself, reveals your real understanding of life and what you really believe about God and his working in your life. If you do not have the spiritual sensitivity to see God working in your life, you may be guilty, too.

Yes, our words are a clue to our spiritual ecology. And many of us may be guilty of the sin of sacrilege. But note secondly that many of us also may be guilty of the polluting the source. Jesus said, "The good man out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth evil." Your words reflect the pollution level from which they come--your heart. One of the basic laws of nature is that opposites may not come from the same source. You cannot get salt water and fresh water from the same spring. As St. James puts it, "From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brethren, this ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening fresh water and brackish? Can a fig tree, my brethren, yield olives, or a grapevine figs?"

What is your heart really like? Your words reveal the pollution level. Profanity, cursing, filthy jokes, ugly remarks, vile words, vicious gossip, reviling of others--all tell us what is in a man's heart for you don't get brackish water from a fresh well. The Bible says, "Can blessing and cursing come out of the same mouth?"

The tongue is a marvelous thing. It can incite a mob to lynch a fellow human being, or it can inspire a nation to heroics. It can destroy friendship and break up homes, or it can comfort a soul in distress and despair. It can destroy a human personality by gossip and petty criticism, or it can encourage to new accomplishments. It can tear a church apart by ambitiousness and personal glorification, or it can help

to build the Kingdom of God. It can lead a person to Christ or it can forever alienate him. But there is one thing the tongue cannot do--it cannot produce opposites from the same source. . . As Jesus put it, "for the tree is known by its fruit." Or again, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Our words--how we talk, the things we say--tell it like it is in our hearts.

Yes, the sin of sacrilege and the sin of a polluted source, the heart. Notice finally that Jesus says, "I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." This means quite simply that our words reflect our salvation. Are you a saved person this morning? Does your heart belong to Jesus Christ? Then your words will reflect that. Just because your words reflect the reality of what is in your soul they reflect whether you belong to Jesus or not. Because that is so, we will be called by God to give an account of everything we say. You know, I think it is interesting that Jesus used the expression "careless word." When we are on guard, when we are thinking about what we say, we can make the things we want to come out. . . we can say the right thing. But when we are in an idle moment, when we are not thinking about it, the careless, thoughtless words that come out tell it like it really is in our souls. For those words especially, we will have to give account because they reflect our relationship to Jesus. As some poet has put it, "I shouted aloud and louder. . . While out on the plain one day; . . The sound grew faint and fainter. . . Until it had died away. . . My words had gone forever. . . They left no trace or track. . . But the hills nearby caught up the cry. . . And send an echo back." Yes, by your words shall you be justified, and by your words you will be condemned--like an echo caught up in the eternal hills of God they shall come back to haunt us. Words are, indeed, a clue to our pollution level in the heart.

A tree is known by its fruit. Your words tell it like it is for they are windows into your soul to reveal who and what you really are. As the Old Testament proverb puts it, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." There is only one way to deal with your tongue and that is to give your heart to Jesus Christ. Only Jesus can give us the unpolluted heart. Let him cleanse and redeem your heart and the glory and the joy within will be reflected in your tongue.

Oh, that my tongue might so possess. . . The Accent of His tenderness. . . That every word I breathe should bless! . . For those who mourn, a word of cheer; . . A word of hope for those who fear; . . And love to all men, far or near. . . Oh, that it might be said of me, . . "Surely thy speech betrayeth thee. . . As friend of Christ of Galilee!"