

## **“The Power of a Word”**

### **Luke 7:1-10**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

You’ve all heard the old children’s defense mechanism, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” If only that were true. Words can cut you down with the power of their vitriol and with the malice that may be behind them. On the flipside of that, 17<sup>th</sup> century English priest and poet, George Herbert, once wrote, “Good words are worth much, and cost little.” A good word can lift up, encourage, and heal a wounded heart, bringing someone peace and a good conscience. Your words are your weapons—for good, or for evil. You fight battles every day in this life as you stand toe-to-toe with the evil one and his temptations. And part of those temptations is the urge to use your words as daggers, striking the weakness of a fellow brother or sister for your own personal benefit. But the power of your words always has the force of sin lurking in the background. The reality of your total depravity is always driving them, even when you believe yourselves to be doing some good by your speaking.

The power of a word in this life as you walk this fallen earth is nothing compared to the power of the Word of Jesus. Your words can guide a friend to find comfort, but Jesus’ words give comfort. Your words can lead someone to forgiveness and repentance, but Jesus’ words give forgiveness and repentance. Jesus’ words truly have healing power. In our text this morning, having never even laid eyes upon this centurion or his servant, Jesus speaks a word of healing and he is healed. And the reality of this healing flows from the fact that this man, this Roman centurion, had such great faith that Jesus could do anything, even accomplish the healing of his servant while not being present with him. The power to accomplish this does not lie in the word of the centurion’s request via his friends who came to Jesus. It was not the amount of his faith that compelled the Word made flesh to grant his request. All the power and all the glory belong to Jesus alone. And by the power of a word, the Son of God blessed this man with His grace.

This topic is one that is spoken of all too often in the modern church today, but not in the way that we address it. I’m sure you all have heard of the “word of faith” heresy. This heretical sect teaches and believes that their words have the power to manifest God’s grace in their lives in the form of good health, wealth, and prosperity. Their false teachers tell them that all they have to do is believe hard enough and speak what you want and that God will grant it to them because of their inherent power that makes it impossible for God to deny them.

The arrogance with which they pollute the Gospel knows no bounds, either. The gospel that they teach is one of the self, and not of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who died to redeem the world. They are those of whom the Apostle Paul warns you about in our Epistle lesson this morning. Galatians 1:6-7, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the Gospel of Christ.” I pray every time that I hear one of these preachers that they are only mistaken or misled and not intentionally distorting the Gospel for their own benefit. Unfortunately, there are many of the latter, and they corrupt the Gospel to their own gain so that they can pad their bank accounts and manipulate the people who give them their money to facilitate more and more for themselves.

The irony of this “word of faith” heresy is that their words do indeed have power, but the power of a word in their parlance is the power of Satan. The word which they speak and teach leads only to condemnation and death if they truly believe that they possess the power to command the Triune God and bend Him to their will. As agents of the evil one, they lead astray the saints of God and further the cause of the devil in his futile attempt to overtake God’s kingdom. He uses false teachers all over the world to his advantage, and they are without excuse, and cannot claim they didn’t know when God’s righteous wrath descends upon them.

The Apostle Peter knew this would happen, and it was even happening in his time. He writes in 2 Peter 2:1, “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.” Their choice to make their words the most powerful thing in their life is an utter denial of their Master. It is a denial of Jesus Christ, the one who bought them back from the curse of sin and death. And if they would just rely on the revelation of God as the source of their teaching, they would not find themselves on this dangerous path of eternal death. We must call these men and women to repentance, to renounce their commitment to false doctrines of the devil and to turn back to the truth of God’s Word which declares the truth of their salvation in Jesus, not in the power of their own will.

But Holy Scripture is secondary for them unless they can twist it to fit their own narrative, despite the absolute truth that “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” (2 Timothy 3:16). Your rebuke of these heretical, nonsensical babblers is not hard to find. It is and will always be the inspired and inerrant Word of God which has been revealed through faith by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is there You find the weapon of the Word

which is “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword,” as the writer to the Hebrews tells you. It is beyond important and cannot be overstated that the Christian needs only God’s Word in their lives, and never their own free will or self-proclaimed power of their own word.

St. Paul tells you the power of God’s Word in your lives in Ephesians 6, where he describes for you the armor of God. The defense of the Christian is found in the Word of God, and the power of your words are found in a life of prayer. It is not found in speaking “faith-filled words” or believing that you can speak something into existence. The Apostle says in Ephesians 6:19-20, asking for the prayers of the saints in Ephesus, “and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.” He doesn’t beg them to ask for him to have the power of a word for himself, but that his words would be filled with the Gospel “as he ought to speak.” No self-serving diatribe is ever included in the Scripture, because God does not desire that we serve ourselves. He tells you that you ought to rely upon Him, and Him alone for your needs. The Lord will provide for you according to His will and in His time.

You don’t need the power of a word in this life to understand what the Lord wills for you. He has told you with His own omnipotent Word what He desires for you and what He has given you. What He desires for you goes all the way back to the garden. He created you to be His eternal companion, to live with Him in righteousness forever. That is why He created you the way He did, according to Genesis 1:26, “Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness.” It is only because of the sin of Adam which now pervades your lives as original sin that that which God intended for you to have from the creation is lost. But it’s no secret that His desire for you is to be righteous, to be like Him according to the human nature of Christ. That is what John speaks of in his 1<sup>st</sup> epistle, where he writes in 3:2, “Beloved we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.”

Everything that God desires for you belongs to you now by faith, and will be realized in its fullness at the last day. You don’t have to speak that into existence, or manifest it in your lives. By faith, you obey the Son and receive the gift of eternal life in His name. But not because you are so good at obeying, but because you have been given it as a gift according to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Jesus says this plain as can be with the Samaritan woman at the well, when He says in John 4:14, “but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him, will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will

become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” We have already received the living water, because the living water is Jesus Christ Himself. Our faith will continue to grow as it wells up within us unto eternal life.

And as you await the fulfillment of your faith, in this life you must strengthen your faith and grow in your knowledge of Him. Even this is not something that you must do, or speak into your lives. He has given you the means by which to accomplish your growth in the faith, and it is His action by the Holy Spirit that does the growing. By the preaching of the Gospel, in the water of Baptism, and in the reception of His Holy Supper, you receive the concrete assurance that His Word of salvation has been spoken to you and that truth sustains you unto eternal life. These means of grace are treasures of the Gospel that He has given to you only because of the Father’s love for His only begotten Son. The body and blood of Jesus have redeemed you and because of that blessing, the Father has declared you to be His adopted Son by His gracious mercy. That is the powerful word, spoken by the righteous judge. He has declared you to be justified.

In your lives, words from others can bring hurt, or they can bring hope and comfort. No matter the experience those words bring with them, they can never compare to the saving words of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Our words have no power over and above the words of Jesus. It is He, and He alone, that brings the true words of comfort that bring the believer the hope of eternal salvation by faith in His death and resurrection. It is an undeniable fact that God’s desire to save all men is fulfilled and made known to us in the blood of Jesus, who has given Himself into death that you might receive the promised inheritance that is yours for His sake. He being the very Word Himself is the power of a Word, and He has spoken God’s powerful declaration of justification by faith in Him. According to that faith, you know beyond all doubt that He has redeemed you and that you will be with Him in your eternal home, present in His glory forever. Amen.