Mouth Management – 071424 Complaining

Announcements – Block Party – sign up to help

Thank you for not blowing off church today when you heard the name of this series. I know it's going to speak to a lot of people in a very personal way. We're launching into a series called “Mouth Management” – isn’t that a great slide. Craig Rainville makes all of our slides and he is so creative!

The goal of this new series is to help us understand that there is such power in the words that we speak. Our words have the power to give life. Our words have the power to take life. Jesus said "Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks." Luke 6:45 and Matthew 12:34 We're going to talk about the words that we speak and I believe we are going to get them right. Sometimes people wonder when we start a new series– how many weeks are we going to talk about this, how long is this series – well, The answer is as long as it takes. It may be four, it may be five years. I don't know how long it will be, but we're going to get this right. It’s so important!

We're going to talk about things like the problem some of us have of lying. We're going to talk about criticizing. We're also going to talk about gossip.

A couple weeks ago I was walking out of church with Kim and Eric Gustafson and Mike and I were getting ready to leave on vacation to TN. Mike is from TN and a lot of our family is there. Kids, grandkids, Mike’s siblings. And Eric said have a great vacation! And I said something like its going to be so hot! I have become super sensitive to heat the last 5 years or so and just thinking about TN weather was giving me anxiety. Here I was about to leave for vacation – which is such a blessing. We drove down and I love road trips. We were going to get to see our family and spend time with them. And I found myself complaining ahead of time instead of focusing on all the fun we were going to have and how nice it would be to see and be with everyone. Then this past week my Dad turned 80 years old and he is in Florida so I had booked a trip to go down for a couple days to surprise him. I made my reservation to fly down and I made it for 6am out of Boston because that was the best flight I could get. And Jake and Mike were both out of town - So, what time do you think I had to leave my house to get to Boston, park my car, take a shuttle and get to the airport for this flight that I booked! I told you I am very sensitive to heat and well I am also very sensitive to not sleeping well and my best sleep comes in the later half the night, which is really morning. So, again I am excited and feel blessed to be able to take a trip to celebrate my wonderful Dad and I started complaining about getting up and thinking about leaving the house at 3am, plus knowing I was going to miss a couple days of work so less days etc etc to get all my work done and ….wan wan, wan….

Complaining, complaining, complaining. That is going to be our subject today. And as usual God wanted me to be convicted and have material to share. Let’s talk about the problem of complaining.

When I think about complaining in the Bible, my mind goes to the Old Testament, to think about God's chosen people, the Israelites, who, when they were in captivity as slaves for hundreds of years complained, complained, complained, complained. Then when God did miracle after miracle after miracle ... He issued ten different miraculous plagues to turn the heart of Pharaoh. He parted the Red Sea. He drowned Pharaoh's army. He fed God's people with bread from heaven, water from rocks. Their clothes never ever ran out. And what did God's people do? They griped, they whined, and they continued to complain. In fact, it's almost comical to me how much I think “how could they do that” and yet….here I am, God has done many miracles in my life and I find myself complaining just like the Israelites.

In Exodus 14 verse 11, they said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? We were so happy when we were slaves, but now you've brought us out of there. Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone. Let us serve the Egyptians.' It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians and then die in the desert." Sounds so much like so many of us. To add insult to injury, Moses said something that probably should stun us all into a moment of silence. He said this about our complaining. He said, "You're not grumbling against us, but against the Lord".

Imagine if every time that we complain, it's not just about our circumstances or about the traffic or about another person, but what if in God's eyes, we were actually complaining about him? Maybe that is the way he sees it. Ouch

Today I want us all to hear the message through the lens of our own complaining. Not our spouses or friends or family. I want to ask you, as myself "What is it that you complain about the most?" Think about it and be real honest. Let it kind of rise to the surface. Complain, complain, complain, complain. Wah wah wah. Poor me. What is it that you think you complain about most? Some of you would say you complain because you're not married or even dating. I wish I was married. I wish I had a companion to share life with. Those of you married, you complain about your spouse. Maybe for some of us we complain that money is tight or that the house is so small or your boss drives you crazy. It might be something smaller that you complain about like the heat or the cold, the weather – like me or the wifi is slow or there's nothing to watch on TV, nothing to do. Maybe there is too much to do, your too busy, schedule too full, your kids are in too many extra curricular activities. How many times do we say – I am so busy. How are you? Busy.

The problem though is not the weather. The problem is not the traffic. The problem is not that Netflix hasn't come out with new content that meets our approval rating. The problem isn’t that we are too busy or that we have or don’t have someone to share life with. The problem is that we've taken our eyes off of the goodness of God and we've placed our eyes dead center on ourselves. That is the problem that leads to a constant curse of complaining.

Let’s look at scripture that to me is very powerful. It's written by the apostle Paul, and if there's anyone who had the right to complain, it was certainly the apostle Paul. The number one desire of his heart was to go to Rome as a preacher, to go to Rome to communicate the gospel. The top thing for Him was what He knew he was called to do. He knew if he could go to Rome and reach the leaders in Rome, that he could have a chance of impacting the whole world. At the top of his list of things that he wanted to accomplish in life was to go to Rome as a preacher. Instead,,,,,, he was arrested and sent to Rome as a prisoner. The dream is to be a preacher. Instead he is a prisoner. He was locked up for about two years, 24 hours a day, chained to different Roman guards, awaiting, very possibly, his execution.

I'll be honest. Put me in that place. If I want to go there as a preacher. But I end up there as a prisoner. I'm locked up. I've been serving God. Pretty sure, I'm going to complain to God. This isn't fair. Why are you allowing this to happen? I've served you. I've been faithful. If I'm Paul, I've been shipwrecked, I've been beaten, I've been snake-bitten, I've been left for dead. All I've done is serve you, serve you Lord, serve you. We could make a difference here for you Lord. Instead, here I am as a prisoner. The floor is hard. The food is minimal and bad. This Roman soldier's body odor is so bad it makes me want to throw up. That's kind of what would be going through my mind.

But, instead of complaining, instead of whining, instead of telling God why God got it wrong, this is what Paul said in a letter to the Christians in Philippi. He said - Philippians 2:14-15. "Do everything without grumbling or arguing." Another version translates it, "Do everything without complaining." Do everything without grumbling or arguing, "so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." That is a very high standard. Whatever you do, wherever you are, and whatever deed or word, do everything without grumbling or complaining.

There's a lot of very spiritual reasons why we should live without complaining. There's also a lot of practical reasons. I want to spend time talking about the spiritual reasons, but for just a minute lets talk about some of the practical reasons.

There's a doctor named Dr. Travis Bradberry. He wrote a book called "Emotional Intelligence 2.0". He's done a lot of research on the idea of complaining. What he says is that repeated complaining hard wires the brain to do, guess what? More complaining. In other words, the more negative you are, the more likely your brain is going to be triggered to continue to be negative. He and many others talk about what it means just to have this kind of negative mindset that before long we enter into what they call a confirmation bias. In other words, you expect something to be bad, therefore you get what you expect.

There may be somebody here that you've just decided you don't like small churches, or you don’t like women preachers. . You've decided you're not going to like something, so the moment you walk in the door, your preconceived ideas are confirmed because your expectations are already so negative. It's the same with ... I've heard some women say, "All men are losers.", or, "All men are jerks." Then it's your preconceived idea. You meet a guy and you see the bad rather than seeing the good. Guys some of you say “ all women nag” or if you are single you think all women are looking for sugar daddies. You see the nagging every once in a while from your wife and you turn it into “she always nags” which means she is a nag.

This was the problem with the Israelites. They were negative when they were in captivity. They were negative when they were free because their negative mindset trained them to be even more negative. This is so dangerous. I don't know about you, but I don't want to go through life preconceived to find the bad, when there's already enough bad in the world. I want to train my mind to find the good, the pleasant, helpful and hopeful, instead of always focusing on what's negative.

When you look at the apostle Paul, the way he lived and what he taught, he would communicate two big ideas.

Paul, by the way he lived, and by what he taught, very likely he would have said something like this. He would say, "If you can change your circumstances, if there's something negative and you can do something about it, then do something about it." If there are negative circumstances, something that is unpleasant, something that is not right, something that you wish you could change and you can do something about it, then do something about it. Let’s not go through life and pretend like everything's okay when it's not okay. It's not a sin to notice something that's not right. When it becomes sin might be when we complain and complain and complain about it and don't ever do anything about it. Talk complaining about it and do something about it.

It's a little bit like Nehemiah in the Old Testament. Nehemiah recognized that the walls of Jerusalem were down, and he was really upset about it. What did he not do? He didn't complain, complain, complain. "This is the worst thing ever. Oh my gosh, the people are vulnerable. Or , Why didn't anybody else do something about it?" He was bothered by it, but he did something about it. If there's something that you dislike, something that gives you a righteous dissatisfaction, if there is a godly discomfort, if there's something you look and say, "This isn't right on behalf of God." Don't complain about it. Don't just put comments on social media about it. Get on with your life and do something about it. If there's a negative situation and you can change it, then bring your A game and change it.

Then, Paul, by his teaching, I think he would say this. He would say, "If you can't change your circumstances, then change your perspective." If you can do something about it, do something about it. If you can't change your circumstances, then change your perspective. Change what you say about it. Change how you think about it. Change what you see in those circumstances. This, to me, is so powerful. He says in Philippians 2:17-18. If you remember, he's chained to a Roman soldier. He's awaiting his very possible execution. His dream was to preach the gospel and he's locked up in prison. This is what he says. He says, "But even if ... " I love that phrase. "But even if I'm being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me." **Even if** I'm being poured out like a drink offering, I am still glad.

You might hear that phrase and think, "What in the world does he mean by being poured like a drink offering?" like to spend it all. What the priest would do is they would make a sacrifice to God, maybe with a lamb or some type of an animal, and put it on a burnt offering. Then they would take a drink offering, which would be the most expensive liquid that they had, usually wine, , maybe honey, because honey was difficult and expensive to come by. They would take their most expensive drink and they would pour it on top of the burning sacrifice. This would be their drink offering. You can imagine, you put liquid on something really hot, what happens? You've got the pssh, and the smoke comes up. This would be their offering to take their very expensive drink, pour it on the sacrifice, and the smoke would rise into heaven as an offering of incense unto God. He said, "Even if I'm being poured out like a drink offering, yet I will rejoice."

A lot of people think that when he said, "I'm being poured out like a drink offering" he was talking about when he would actually give his life. I read some commentaries about this and I don’t believe he was talking about his ultimate death as being a sacrifice. What I read said, the verb is a passive present tense verb. It says "even if I am being poured out", not "even if one day I'm poured out", but "even as my life is oozing away, even right now." His ultimate death was not his sacrifice in his mind. It was his daily life that was a sacrifice. This is why Paul also said , he said, "You offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God and this is, "your spiritual act of worship." Worship isn't just lifting up our hands to a holy God, that is worship, but worship is every single day, offering your life wherever you are, even chained up in a Roman prison, as an offering to God. This is my act of worship to you.

You are still working your job that you dislike so you can provide for your family.

I look at Paul though and think How could he be in prison, chained up to a Roman soldier, and offer praise and worship to God? I believe the reason Paul could do this is because Paul was not the center of his own story. Jesus was the center of his story, and because Jesus was the center of his story, he could take the negative circumstance and Paul could change his perspective about it in a way that it would impact what God was able to do through this situation.

Here he is chained up 24 hours a day, a different smelly Roman guard every eight hours. Here's a new one, over and over and over again. Here's what Paul says. "Now, I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel." He's not complaining. He's changed his perspective, and he's seen the power and the goodness of God in it. What's happened to me has actually moved the message of Jesus forward. He says, "As a result, it's become clear through all the palace guards." All these soldiers, they know it. Everyone else knows it. "They know that I am in chains for Christ."

He was saying, "You think that I'm the prisoner here? Let me tell you who the real prisoner is. Every eight hours, I get fresh meat….. virgin ears. I get someone new. One of the most powerful people in all of Rome chained up to my arm for an eight hour sermon that I write new for each and every one. You think I'm the prisoner here? You've got no idea how God is using what others would see as negative to advance the gospel." In other words, this isn't my plan. Paul isn’t just saying oh this is amazing being in prison. He admits this isn't what I would have chosen. There's a lot of reasons why I could probably complain about this, but because I can't change my circumstance, I am changing my perspective. I know that my God works in all things to bring about good according to his purpose to those who love him and are called according to his plan and purpose. I see my God doing something.

If you're in a place you don't like, you can recognize God still has a plan. God still has a purpose. God still has an assignment. It may not be what you'd choose. It may not be what you ever wanted. It may be the last thing that you would choose. It doesn't mean God can't use it to get the message of his goodness being pushed forward.

Think about it. Paul is chained to a Roman soldier 24 hours a day. I would ask you this. What are you chained to? What are you chained to? Don't say my husband, or my wife!....But maybe it is a very painful relationship. Maybe it's a job situation that you don't know what you're going to do. It could be you're chained to a financial problem. You're in the middle of a hole that you don't know how you're going to get out of. It could be a health issue. The list can go on and on. Let me just say this to you, to us. If you can do something about it, do something about it. If you can bring your A game, bring your A game. If you can pray, pray. If you can work hard, work hard. If you can get counseling, get counseling. If you can seek help from others, seek some help. If you can get wisdom, get wisdom. If you can turn over a new leaf, turn over ... If you can do something about it, do something about it.

But, when you can't change your circumstance though, change your perspective. Change the way you look at it. Change the way you think about it. Change the words that you speak about it. Rather than complaining about something you cannot change, choose to see God's presence and his power, even in the middle of something you would have never ever asked for.

Worship team - In my situations with the weather and knowing I was going to have to get up and drive so early and then so late – got back to Boston at midnight. First I changed my attitude about the weather in TN and chose to look at the blessing it was to be able to go see family and have a couple days in the car with Mike on the rode trip. And for my trip to see my Dad I asked Darlene and Margie to pray for me AND I changed my attitude to be I can do this – I can get up and drive and God will give me the strength that I need. It probably sounds minor to some of you but sometimes things like that can seem so overwhelming.

We can complain, you can gripe, you can whine all day long, and you may be justified. I know right now many of you, there are some things that are just not pleasant. Things you are dealing with that are not fun.

You can change the way you look at it, and say, "I can't do anything about this, but I can choose to look for God in it. I can choose the way I speak about it. I can choose how I represent it. I can believe that this is the worst thing ever, or I can look for some sign that God's going to use me in it. I can ask him to do something in me while I'm in the middle of it. I may not be perfect on the other side of it, but I may be a little more conformed to the image of Christ because of it. I may be a little more dependent on the goodness and the grace of God in the middle of it. I may pray a little bit more passionately because of it. It may draw me into a more intimate relationship with God. Then one day I may have a little more compassion for someone who's going through something. I may wake up five years from now and recognize I'm able to have a voice into people's lives because I endured it and God did something. If you can do something about it, do it.

If you can't change the circumstance, at least change your perspective about it.

I love the phrase Paul uses. "Even if". So powerful. "Even if." Even if at this moment I'm being poured out. Even if my life is oozing away. Even if everything that I've wanted to accomplish never comes to pass. Even if I've only got days left on this earth, he says, "Yet I will rejoice." Why? Because in the middle of this thing I never would have asked for, I can see a glimpse of the goodness of God. He's still using me. He's still in me. He's still working through me. He is still good, even though I would have never asked for this.

For you it might be even if I continue to suffer in my body, I will still praise my God. Even if my migraines never ever go away, I will continue to declare his goodness. Even if I'm still crying myself to sleep praying for that miracle, I will fall asleep praying because I believe in the goodness and the power of my God. Even if I continue to look for a job, even if it doesn't come, even if they do let me go. Whatever it is, even if, I still trust the goodness, the character, the nature of my God. Even if. If you can do something about your circumstances, do it. Get in the game. Make a difference. If you cannot change your circumstances, change the way you look at them.

How do we do it? We recognize we are not the center of the story. When Jesus is the center of your story, it changes how you let your story be told. When you change your perspective like this, you can endure, you can be light in the middle of your darkest day.

Life may be difficult right now. Choose not just to look at what's wrong. Choose to look at what is right. Choose to look at the goodness of God. See his grace. See his power. See his goodness. Experience his forgiveness. Let his Holy Spirit carry you when you are weak. His strength is made perfect in you. Let everything that I am praise the Lord. Let everything that I have give glory to him. I will not for a minute give my enemy the benefit of the doubt by complaining about what is not. Instead I look and I see what is, and I thank my God for it.

Even if. Even if my greatest prayer is never ever answered. Even if I never get out of this situation that I wish I was not in, I will still praise my God because he is good. He never leaves me. His presence is with me. His power is in me. Therefore I will praise him with everything that I have.

Pray - Father, I ask today that there would be a special grace, especially for those who are facing significant trials. It's so easy to complain about the big stuff, or even the little stuff, God, I pray that if we can do something about it, we would. If we can't, give us the power to change our perspective. Father, I pray. I pray for a healing. We're going to believe God that the moment that we're tempted to complain that you're going to give us a pause. Instead of focusing on what is not right about our lives, we're going to focus on what's right and good about you. God, help us to remember we are not the center of the story. Your son, Jesus, is always the center of the story.

May we build up with our words and not tear down.

As we keep praying, God not only loves you like I told you last week, but He loves you more than you can imagine. So much so that He sent His Son Jesus who was perfect in every way, without sin. Jesus became the perfect and the final sacrifice. He died and He rose again. So that anyone, and this includes you, who calls on his name would be saved. There may be those of you right now that you feel like your life is really low. Maybe God has allowed you to get to a place this low so you could look up to him and you recognize you need him. Maybe you're trapped because of your sinfulness. When you call on the name of Jesus, he'll forgive every sin that you've ever committed. You will become completely brand new. Your sins are washed away. You are new, not because you're good. You're new because he's good.

Let’s pray - Nobody prays alone. Pray, "Heavenly father, I give my life to you. Save me. Forgive me of all my sins. Make me new. Fill me with your spirit so I can know you and serve you and follow you for the rest of my life. My life is not my own. I give it to you. Thank you for new life. Now you have mine. In Jesus' name I pray."