

Proverbs 25:11  
Psalm 19:11-14  
Proverbs Series: Memorable Words  
October 25, 2015  
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If you had to name the most memorable speeches in history, who would make your list?

I pondered that question as I considered this final installment in our Proverbs sermon series.

I consulted the oracle known as YouTube and discovered the following top five list which includes excerpts from some of the greatest historical speeches in all time – according to the video’s creator.

**[9:30 a.m. – As you watch the video pay close attention, the speeches are original so the recordings are a bit ‘grainy’ and the music is a bit on the loud side however they are subtitled. *Play video...*]**

**[8:15 & 11:00 a.m.]**

Number 5 on this list was Nelson Mandela who served over 27 years in prison & who received The Nobel Peace Prize in 1993 for his work toward peaceful termination of the apartheid regime. Mandela spoke the following words, “I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society – in which all persons will live together – in harmony!” *“It always seems impossible until it’s done.”*

Number 4 – Winston Churchill – England’s Prime Minister during WWII who delivered this speech in his distinctive British voice “We shall fight in France, We shall fight on the seas and oceans – We shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island whatever the cost may be – we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds – we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills – we shall never surrender!” *“If you’re going through hell, keep going.”*

Number 3 – John F. Kennedy – the youngest person ever elected President of The United States – who spoke the following, “I am talking about genuine peace, the kind of peace that makes life on earth worth living – and the kind that enable men and nations to grow, and to hope, and build a better life for their children – not merely peace for Americans, but peace for all men and women, not merely peace in our time – but peace in all time.” *“A man may die, nations may rise and fall, but an idea lives on.”*

The 2<sup>nd</sup> greatest speech of all time according to this video is attributed to Martin Luther King, Jr. who led the American Civil Rights movement & who at the age of 35 was the youngest man to have received the Nobel Peace Prize – “I have a dream – that my four little children one day will live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin – but by the content of their character – I have a dream today!” *“We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.”*

The 1<sup>st</sup> on this list was Mahatma Gandhi who employed nonviolent civil disobedience which lead India to independence and inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world (Gandhi’s life and words greatly influenced MLK, Jr.) – “Through our pain we will make them see their injustice, and it will hurt – as all fighting hurts...but we cannot lose. We cannot! They may torture my body, break my bones, even kill me – Then, they will have my dead body – not my obedience!” *“Be the change you want to see in the world.”*

Would any of these individuals make your list? Perhaps they’re there although you would choose a different speech of theirs. Perhaps you’d have someone else on this list...

Someone like: Neil Armstrong as he took that step off the lunar lander, “One small step for man...one giant leap for mankind.”

Ronald Reagan’s *Berlin Wall* speech at the Brandenburg Gate, “Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate. Mr. Gorbachev...Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”

Malala Yousuf Zai, the Pakistani girl who was shot in the head by the Taliban in October 2012 for demanding education for girls, spoke the following words to the United Nations one year following her recovery, “I speak not for myself but for those without voice... those who have fought for their rights... their right to live in peace, their right to be treated with dignity, their right to equality of opportunity, their right to be educated.” ... “Let us remember: One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world.”

She later she spoke at her Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance, “When my worth changed, my priorities changed too: I had two options, one was to remain silent and wait to be killed or the second was to speak up and then be killed. I chose the second one. I decided to speak up.”

New York Yankee’s first baseman, “The Iron Horse” Lou Gehrig stood at home plate and addressed that Yankee Stadium crowd in his now famous farewell speech after having been diagnosed with ALS, the disease that now carries his name, “...Today, I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth...” Gehrig concluded with these words, “...I might have been given a bad break but I’ve got an awful lot to live for, thank you.”

My list would include words spoken by another Lou – Lou Nyiri, my father, who would remind me on Saturday nights in high school, “Lou, remember, I don’t care how big a man your friends think you are tonight, you’re never too big a man to not get up tomorrow morning and go to church.”

We’d be remiss living here in Gettysburg to not recall the words of President Lincoln who on the day he dedicated The National Cemetery spoke words which fittingly met the moment at hand, “We cannot dedicate...We cannot consecrate...We cannot hallow this ground. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here; but it can never forget what they did here...That this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from the earth.”

Memorable words, we’ve all heard them at pivotal moments in our lives and they’ve helped shape us into the persons we are today.

Some have been good – perhaps some have been not-so-good and maybe we’ve spent time trying to get those words and the life-script they produced in our heads corrected....I have a few moments in my life where words meant to be funny or corrective were in actuality hurtful and poorly timed. A great image I carry with me about the words we use is those Alphabet Blocks – we all have the same building blocks we use to create our words – the questions is what kind of words are we forming?

In an effort to see the impact of positive words in our lives, the kind of life I believe we are called to live as disciples of Jesus Christ...and for that matter as members of the human race... I’d like to consider the words of the wisdom writer, the one who penned the words found in Proverbs 25:11, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.”

In this artfully constructed saying, the wisdom writer compares fine speech to well-crafted jewelry. What exactly the writer is implying is difficult to ascertain – it could mean a word which fits a specific circumstance or it could mean a word spoken at just the right time.

Others came to interpret it from a literal point of view – was it referencing an apricot like fruit of gleaming gold amid the bright yet pale foliage...or...was it a fruit carved in gold and set in some kind of dainty work of silver as brilliant a piece of decoration as could be imagined.

Whatever the metaphor might mean, one thing is of interest: a word “fitly spoken” is a wonderful gift of grace. It is also something we can all aspire to & attain.

We can make such a claim because it’s not up to us alone – rather it’s up to us to work together with each other & more importantly to work with God to make our words and actions both uplifting and edifying.

In order for us to be the kind of people who offer words which will be fittingly spoken and fitting each circumstance – we need to be people who live in dependence upon God’s grace and claim upon our lives. The Psalmist reminds us that in order for our actions to be in tune with God’s call to us it is wholly reliant upon God. As human beings we are not blameless – we are as the Psalmist would write – not sinless – however we are claimed by a power greater than us and it is that power which enables us to be who it is God knows we can be – and so, to be blameless as Psalm 19 declares is not to be sinless rather it is to understand that an appropriate posture in life is to live in dependence upon God. This type of dependence upon God for forgiveness and for life itself is what makes one’s words and thoughts “acceptable” to God.

Our rock – is God – our strength comes from God.

Our redeemer – is God – and it is a very personal experience. The understanding here is of a familial relationship whereby one is responsible to “buy back” or “redeem” ones relatives who had fallen into slavery.

The power of this kind of relationship is the power that gives us the strength to be and say the right words at the right time. Because we are grateful for all we’ve received – we also are harbingers of that grace.

Are our words the kinds of words that will change lives for the better or are they the kinds of words that hold others back?

I like how the great Presbyterian Preacher, Peter Marshall has said, “Words are like arrows shot into the air that come to earth we know not where. Sometimes they find lodgment in the hearts of those whom we love – and whom we would not deliberately stab with *daggers* – yet wound with careless speech.” (Peter Marshall: New and Inspiring Messages, p. 10-11, 1969, Hallmark Books)

There’s a meme circulating the Facebook realm by Kevin Spear which depicts two people talking and one is saying to the other, “I’m deciding whether to build you up today or tear you down.” *At least in this meme the interlocutor is honest.*

Yet, as Marshall says, “No more can the plucked flower be joined again to its stem or the cracked egg-shell be made whole. No more can the snowflake that melts into the river find its first shape again, than

can we bring back the foolish, impetuous word that went out to sting to hurt or to offend. The damage is done, we can pluck out the thorn but the pain of it lingers.”

Words after we’ve spoken them become our master.

That is why our words are important – we had better use them wisely.  
We had best make sure they are fittingly spoken – like apples of gold set in silver.

Words fitly spoken inspire, give direction, and encourage.

These kinds of words mean more than we can possibly imagine.

How many of us know someone who needs an infusion of life-giving, soul nourishing, morale boosting words?

How many kids...how many adults...do you know who could benefit from these kinds of words?

I have yet to meet a person who declares, “I sure could use one more person to be mean to me.”

Think to your own little corners of the world – how many of us know someone who is in dire need of hearing someone speak to them an encouraging, hopeful word?

You may be thinking right now, *That’s just not possible. The gift of encouragement wasn’t downloaded into my life’s hard drive. Encouragement isn’t part of my DNA. We cut our teeth on sarcasm in my family.*

To which I’d say sarcasm is appropriate occasionally, however most times the impact of sarcasm’s words is found in the root meaning of the word itself ~ sarks – flesh & chasm – tearing ~ to be sarcastic is to tear one’s flesh & typically torn flesh results in scarring. Heart scars can last a lifetime.

I’d also say there is nothing learned that cannot be unlearned.

Isn’t the definition of grace – our past in no way determines our future – we can be who it is God calls us to be – we can be encouragers.

Isn’t that part of what it means to be the church – the body of Christ – to encourage – to speak and to be people who build up the heart!

Here are a few steps to being or becoming an encourager, even if you don’t think of yourself as one:

**Assume everyone needs encouragement.** ... Turns out everyone needs encouragement in some way or another. If you know one person, you know someone who needs encouragement.

**Notice people.** Look around. People will tell you a lot without ever saying a word. Chances are if you start looking, you’ll find someone who needs encouragement. Keep your eyes open.

**Do one easy thing now.** Consider sending a Text, posting to someone’s Facebook wall or sending them a Facebook message with an encouraging word. Encouragement texts or Facebook posts can take a matter of seconds, the results can last a lifetime.

**Do one hard thing later.** Write encouragement letters or notes to someone and mail it. Consider using birthdays as an occasion to remind someone that “This is the day God made them and you’re so glad

God did.” Talk to the person even if you don’t know their name – consider telling the person cleaning the play area in the fast food establishment you appreciate their work.

**Practice.** We’re more likely to encourage if we feel prepared. Use your *words*. Practice saying "Thank you" or "I appreciate you" or "You’re doing good work!" Listen to other people encourage each other and learn from them. (*--Excerpted and adapted from "5 on Friday: Steps to Become an Encourager," Living Echoes, a blog by blogger Lisa Bartelt, lmbartelt.wordpress.com/2014/05/23/5-on-friday-steps-to-become-an-encourager, May 23, 2014. Retrieved July 3, 2015.*)

Here’s the key – you have to mean it...people know when it’s just lip service. So, as you look around, as you share these encouraging words, seek God’s grace in the moments – see the world through God’s eyes...then:

Speak fitting words.

Speak encouraging words.

“...Through those words, we learn we are children of God, and we grow into deeper community with one another.” (*--Carol Howard Merritt and Diana Butler Bass, Reframing Hope: Vital Ministry in a New Generation (Rowman & Littlefield, Aug 23, 2010 ), Kindle Loc. 1130-41.*)

As we treat one another the way God intends we become a far better community.

As part of this community, may our words be ever fitting – ever encouraging – ever life-giving...

Let the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O LORD, our rock and our redeemer.

Words hold power...Choose them wisely.

Amen & Amen.