

A LEAKING MOUTH!

Today's Text: Ps. 141; Matt. 12: 31-37

Extracts:

1. *Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips* [Ps. 141: 3]
2. [Jesus said to the Pharisees]: **Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure, brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned** [Matt. 12: 34-37]

Pardon the Interruption (PTI) is a live and very provocative sports show, which is aired every evening on ESPN (an American cable television sports station). It discusses only current events and opinions in the sporting world. Within the 30-minute period allotted for the programme, well over twenty topics are covered, each within a 45-second stretch, plus a 5-minute segment for a major live interview with a key sports figure in the news. Therefore, there is no time for the presenters to speak in turns! Two **Washington Post** journalists, Tony Kornheiser and Mike Wilbon, go at each other to ensure that his point of view prevails over that of the other. The show has been on the air since October 2001 and it is so popular that it is re-aired every evening on ESPN2.¹

What I like about the programme is that at the end of each show, somebody else announces the number of factual errors in their arguments. They are usually numerous! The lesson that teaches me is that a leaking mouth may not always be right! In most cases, it is not. It can amount to talking loud but saying nothing!

How often have you been turned off at a meeting, in social gatherings, at home or in the church when those who monopolise the discussions should actually have kept quiet? Must we always be heard? Can a leaking mouth be cured? These are some of the questions that we shall address in today's lesson.

¹ "Pardon the Interruption with Tony Kornheiser and Michael Wilbon," <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/print?id=1365321&type=page2Story>

1. It is quite easy to be a leaking mouth!

My first semester at graduate school in an American university was an interesting experience for me. Coming from Africa where you are brought up to speak only when you are permitted or have something meaningful to say, I did not speak much in class. At the end of the semester, even though I had scored high grades in all the written tests, my overall grades were moderate. During counseling with my academic advisor, she asked me a pointed question, “how often did you speak in class?” I told her that I did not speak much. Her answer was another question “How can your professors know who you are if you don’t speak in class?”

In deed, what we say and how we say it can reveal so much about who we are. You spend a few minutes with some people and you will know everything about them, their family, work, wealth and all and *vice versa*! On the other hand, you may spend a year with some other people and you may not have a single clue about who they are. Here is what being a leaking mouth tells others about us:

a) *Our human nature*

The word of God says that we are what we think in our hearts [**Prov. 23:7**], and “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” [**Matt. 12: 34**]. Therefore, by merely speaking, people can deduce our human nature. When somebody always has derogatory comments on the success stories of siblings, friends or colleagues, you do not need a psychologist to tell you that that person has the spirit of envy. When somebody speaks admirably of corrupt politicians, white-collar criminals and the mafia, you can easily infer that s(he) desires to be rich by crooked means.

A few days to the Passover, Jesus Christ was at a dinner party in the home of Simon the leper with His disciples. Mary, the sister of Lazarus, came in and anointed His feet with very expensive oil and wiped His feet with her hair. Judas Iscariot who saw it all said, “Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” John, another of the disciples, heard what Judas had said and this is how he recorded it, “This, he said, not that he cared for the poor, but *because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it*” [**Jn 12: 1-6**]. Judah’s leaking mouth revealed his character as a thief!

b) *What is on your mind?*

When some people are caught saying something that is not politically correct, they may say that it was a “slip of the tongue.” The truth is that it is much closer to what they think! An Italian member of the EU Commission, a close friend of the Pope, recently caused a stir when he said that homosexuality is a sin. When he was confronted by EU parliamentarians who threatened to block the approval of the whole

commission unless the Italian member withdrew his comments, he replied that as politicians, they should only be angry if he had said that homosexuality was a crime.² That answer does not mean that he now loves and accepts homosexuality, the import of his earlier controversial statement!

If you are used to cracking dirty and immoral jokes, it is quite easy for others to know where your mind is “for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornication, thefts, false witness (and) blasphemies” [Matt. 15: 19].

c) *Your actions*

Even before a leaking mouth stops speaking, the listeners already know what s(he) does or is going to do. The book of Proverbs reports the story of a young wife who encountered a young single man on the street. This is what she told him [Prov. 7: 14-20]:

I came out to meet you, diligently to seek your face, and I have found you... Come, let us take our fill of love until morning. Let us delight ourselves with love. For my husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey; he has taken a bag of money with him, and will come home on the appointed day.

From her words alone, we can deduce that this young man is not her first victim and that she always solicited for lovers whenever her husband travelled. In deed, other verses of the same chapter confirm, “she was *loud and rebellious, her feet would not stay at home*. At times she was outside, at times in the open square, lurking at every corner” [vv. 11-12]. Our loud mouths can reveal our emptiness inside.

2. Happily, there is a way out!

A leaking mouth is a disease, if not a demonic infection, from which we need deliverance. That was why David prayed, “Set a *guard*, O Lord, over my mouth; *keep watch* over the door of my lips” [Ps. 141: 3].

When a security guard stays at the gatepost of a house, s(he) is not protecting that gate but what is inside the house. Therefore, when God guards our mouths or keeps watch over the door of our lips, He is actually working on the inside of us so that we *only speak when He commands it or when it will glorify His name*. Let us take some examples of how God can turn our leaking mouths around.

a) *The silent treatment*

² His government later withdrew his nomination but he held on to his view!

One of the most difficult things to do is to learn how to say nothing, especially in the face of provocation. There is the story of a man who was constantly nagged by his wife. He tried tit-for-tat and things got worse. He tried reasoning and there was no respite. He then resolved to say nothing, no matter how provoked he was. After a week, his wife came to him with tears in her eyes, pleading, "Please, talk to me, insult me, say anything you like but please, don't ignore me any more!" Silence can in deed be golden.

We saw this approach at the trial of Jesus before Pilate. Here is the record of the event [**Matt. 27: 12-14**]:

And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. Then Pilate said to Him, "Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?" But He answered Him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly.

Another good example can be found in 2 Kings, Chapters 18 and 19. A general of the Assyrian army, Rabshakeh, led a great attack against Judah and King Hezekiah. Speaking loudly in the local language so that Hezekiah's troops would understand, he said, "Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria! Thus says the king: Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he shall not be able to deliver you from his hand; nor let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord, saying, The Lord will surely deliver us; this city shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria" [**2 Kgs 18: 28-30**]. What was the people's response? They held their peace "and answered him not a word; for the king's commandment was, Do not answer him" [**v. 36**]. The king's boldness came from the fact that "the Lord was with him" [**v. 7**]. When God later chose to speak for the king, He sent His angel among the Assyrian troops at night while they were sleeping and 185,000 of them were killed. The following morning, the remnants ran home and never dared to step again outside of Nineveh, the Assyrian capital [**2 Kgs 19: 35-36**]!

b) *The active listener*

Sometimes, we can be more effective by merely listening *actively*. Those speaking with you know that you are not ignoring them, as in the case above. Instead, you are actively paying attention to them, with your eyes and body language, but you hardly speak at all! When you do, it is largely to encourage them to say more or to give clarification.

While Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, were "lecturing" Job on righteousness, little Elihu sat among them, listening actively. After a long while, when the elders had actually exhausted themselves without achieving anything, young Elihu spoke up [**Job 32: 6-12**]:

I am young in years, and you are very old. Therefore, I was afraid, and dared not declare my opinion to you. ...There is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding. ...Therefore, I say, listen to me, I also will declare my opinion. In deed, I waited for your words; I listened to your reasonings, while you searched out what to say. I paid close attention to you; and surely not one of you convinced Job or answered his words.

The young man had missed nothing and the Spirit of God was with him! Examine also what Jesus Christ did when His disciples disputed among themselves who would be the greatest among them. They travelled through Galilee until they reached Capernaum where Jesus entered a house. All the while that they were on the road and disputing, Jesus listened actively but He said nothing. Then, when they came into the house, He asked His disciples, “What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?” Apparently shocked that He knew about it, they kept silent. He gave them the correct answer to their dispute, “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all” [Mk 9: 30-35]. Again, Jesus spoke from a spiritual perspective.

c) *The keynote speaker*

The keynote speaker is somebody who has been officially invited to speak to a designated audience. Invariably, s(he) is an acknowledged authority on the subject. The audience eagerly awaits the speaker. During the period of his/her speech, the audience listens with rapt attention. It is only at the end, during question/discussion time that members of the audience may interrupt the speech. In a sense, we can experience it when we are invited to express our opinion during a discussion. In that case, *we are speaking because we have been invited to do so*. People tend to pay attention to us in such circumstances.

Soon after His temptations in the hands of Satan, Jesus came to the synagogue on a Sabbath day in Nazareth where He was brought up. They gave Him the book of the prophet Isaiah to read. He went straight to the area of the book we now know as Chapter 61 and read, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor” and so on. After He had finished, He closed the book, looked at the congregation and said, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” [Lk 4: 14-21]. He spoke because He was invited and He used the opportunity to speak what God wanted Him to say.

Every now and then, we are given the chance to speak. It may be over a family or work dispute. It may have to do with integrity or morality. Even in such circumstances, it is necessary to seek God’s guidance. Jesus told His disciples as He sent them to preach, teach and heal, “do not worry

about how or what you should speak; for it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; *for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you*" [Matt. 10: 19, 20]. Moses feared to face Pharaoh because he was not eloquent but God assured him, "Go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what to say" [Ex. 4: 10, 12]. God is indeed the guard of our mouths.

3. Conclusion

Without God as the guard to our mouths and the watch over our tongues, we can easily be chatterboxes or leaking mouths without honour, self-respect or integrity. The trouble is not with the mouth. Just as a microphone only says what the speaker says, the mouth says what comes from within us! When we yield our hearts, minds and bodies to God in faith and total obedience, then He gives us the ability to speak His will.

Here are a few hints to help you to deal with a leaking mouth:

- 1) Don't try to impress anybody because you do not know what will impress others! After all, "a man is valued by what others say of him" [Prov. 27: 21].
- 2) First learn to listen. What you hear can influence or shape what you say.
- 3) Only God knows *everything*. Therefore, don't speak on every subject, especially those on which you are ignorant. In fact, it is a sign of strength to be able to say that you don't know!
- 4) Pray for God's wisdom, knowledge and understanding because that is the only guaranty that you are behaving and speaking wisely.
- 5) Speak only to make a quality contribution or to promote a solution. If you are making things worse or inferior, you are a chatterbox or a leaking mouth!

May God set a guard over your mouth and keep watch over the door of your lips, in Jesus' name. Amen.