

You Are Loved
Mark 1:4-11
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“Sticks and Stone may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.”

Who made up that lie?

Every one of us can recall something painful that someone has either said about us or to us, but we'd rather not because that also recalls the pain.

Not only do words hurt, but words kill.

- Words kill our self-esteem, ambition, hopes and dreams.
- Words kill our self-worth.
- Words kill love.
- But words also have the power to give life.

At Jesus' baptism, God spoke to him. God could have said anything to Jesus, so we should pay attention to what God chose to say to him.

Matthew's Gospel records what God said about Jesus. Mark's Gospel has God speaking directly to Jesus:

“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:9-11)

If Jesus needed to hear words of affirmation like these, how much more do we need to hear them?

There is a tremendous amount of negativity in our world.

The news feed is mostly negative. Thankfully, some news networks have recognized this and have designated a small part of the ending of each broadcast for some good news.

Every political season, candidates run negative ads because they work.

Many parents, teachers, and coaches believe that you motivate people more with criticism than with praise.

Many people can only hear those negative voices playing in their heads.

Some of you know what it's like to have five A's and one B and the focus was always on the one B that should have been an A.

Many marriages are plagued with a spouse that is heavy on criticism and negative remarks who rarely praises or expresses gratitude to his or her spouse for the kind things that are done.

You might think that Jesus would have escaped a world of negativity because he had good parents and because they took him to the synagogue and to the religious festivals, but you are wrong.

The amount of negativity that surrounded Jesus' ministry was tremendous.

Nearly everywhere he went and with nearly every miracle and good thing he did, there was opposition.

Have you ever heard the expression, "No good deed goes unpunished?" Jesus understood what that meant.

Members of his hometown synagogue chased him out of town after his first sermon when he preached that God's kingdom could include Gentiles.

The Pharisees wanted to know why he healed on the Sabbath, which they said was against the Law.

They also wanted to know why Jesus and his disciples picked heads of grain and ate them on the Sabbath. They said they had broken the Sabbath.

They complained that Jesus and his disciples didn't obey the ceremonial washing before they ate their meals.

When he went home to have a meal with Zacchaeus the tax collector, people complained that he'd chosen to hang out with the wrong kind of person.

When he allowed a woman with a poor reputation to anoint his feet with oil, a religious man was disgusted because Jesus allowed such a woman to give him that kind of gift.

He was betrayed by one of his own disciples.

Another of his disciples denied knowing him at the most crucial hour of Jesus' life.

People mocked him when he was crucified. "He could save others but he could not save himself," they said.

The fact that such a good man could even be crucified is shocking.

So it was important for Jesus to hear these words from God at the beginning of his ministry. It was important for Jesus to hear that he was loved because the world Jesus lived in was a world that was jealous and unkind.

The world has not changed. This world will tell you quickly that you don't make the grade.

It will tell you that you don't measure up.

The world will tell you that you don't make the cut, that you haven't met the standards, that you didn't get the job, that you are starting material, that you don't have the abilities, that you are too young, that you are too old, that you don't have enough experience, that you are not what we are looking for, that you are not good enough, pretty enough, smart enough, cool enough, rich enough, or connected enough.

The world will tell you that you are not enough.

Sometimes, it's not just the world saying these things to us. Sometimes it's our own family. It's our friends. It's a teacher or a coach. It's someone we have given a lot of power to.

Their words are crushing.

We cannot expect to get every job, position, or role. We cannot expect to be the right fit for every situation.

While we shouldn't expect to live in this world without experiencing some rejection, God does not want any of us to equate the world's rejection with His.

In writing to his friend Timothy, the Apostle Paul said that God "wants all people to be saved and to come to a saving knowledge of the truth."

What is that truth?

The truth begins in much the same way that God's words to Jesus began at the time of his baptism – that we are God's beloved. Why else would Jesus die on the cross for us?

We can either believe God or we can believe all the voices that we are going to hear in our lifetime – voices that are going to tell us that we are no good.

Henry Nouwen wrote: "The negative voices are so loud and so persistent that it is easy to believe them. That's the great trap. It is the trap of self-rejection."

Let me tell you why self-rejection is one of our greatest enemies.

Even if you were the only person left in the world, the trap of self-rejection would still be real.

Even if there were no negative voices present in your life, and some of you may be fortunate enough not to have any, you may still hear the voice of self-rejection because the Bible says, evil lies close at hand.

That's what the Apostle Paul said to the Church at Rome.

“So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. 22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, 23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death. (Romans 7)

Do you see what is happening in Paul's spirit?

“Wretched man that I am!”

It is a voice that is within all of us that says, “I am no good.”

If Paul had stayed there, if he had stayed in that self-rejected state, he would never have become a biblical writer who introduced us to a God of grace.

What happened? What changed?

Paul met Jesus on the Road to Damascus. The same Jesus that turned water into wine turned a wretched man into a man accepted by God who had something to offer the world.

Paul learned to see himself through the eyes of God and not through the eyes of man. That is the secret of accepting ourselves and learning to love ourselves. Unless we first learn to love ourselves, we cannot love others. We cannot love ourselves properly unless we love the one who died for us.

Even though Paul had been making sure that Christians were persecuted for the beliefs and even killed for them, Paul learned on the road to Damascus that he was wrong in what he was doing, but surprisingly, God still loved him.

In fact, Jesus was calling him to be a servant and a witness to the Gentiles. Jesus was sending him to be a light to the Gentiles and to testify about him so they would open their eyes and turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins. (Acts 26:17-18)

This is the gospel. This is the good news. If God could turn Saul's life around and use him in such a powerful way, there is hope for all of us.

But there were still those moments that Paul was tempted to think that he was no good.

There were those moments that he was tempted to believe that voice which said, “Wretched man that I am.”

That voice didn’t win because Paul met Jesus and Jesus changed everything.

We are going to make mistakes, and when we do, the Evil One will be there with a negative voice to say, “See, I told you that you are no good. I knew you couldn’t make it. You can’t stop this problem. You are destined for failure. You should just give up. I know your past. No one cares about you.”

When that happens, we need to turn our attention to Jesus. We need to remember Jesus’ baptism. We need to look at the cross. We need to remember the resurrection. We need to listen to the Holy Spirit speaking to our hearts, for the same Spirit of God that spoke to Jesus at his baptism is the same Spirit of God that comes to us.

It is the same Spirit that seeks to reclaim you and tell you in your spirit that you are loved.

What voice do you need to hear? What voice are you listening to?

Are the negative voices mounting up in your life? Are you questioning whether people around you love or care for you? Is your self-love weak?

This morning, perhaps like Jesus, when he was baptized, you need to hear God’s words that you are loved.

Perhaps you feel lonely in your spirit and no one around you even knows it, but today, you need the reassurance that God loves you.

You are loved so much that God sent Jesus to live and lay down his life for you.

The Lord wants you to experience his grace and his peace. Beyond that, the Lord wants you to hear his call on your life so he can use you to love and minister to others.

If you need to hear and experience God’s grace or if you need us to pray with you so you can audibly hear a word of affirmation and love this morning, come and allow us to minister to you during the invitational song.

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