GETTING RID OF GOSSIP

Three pastors went to a pastor's conference and were all talking together over lunch. During the conversation one pastor said, "Our people come to us and pour out their hearts, confessing sins and needs. Confession is good for the soul. Let's do the same." The first pastor said, "Let me start by confessing my secret sin. I just love to gamble. When I go out of town, I find the nearest casino and its cha-ching cha-ching, let the slot machines ring." The second pastor said, "My secret sin is that I just love to drink. When I go out of town, I find the nearest bar and take a little nip of something." The third pastor just sat there in silence. Finally, at the encouragement of the others, the pastor said, "My secret sin is gossiping and I just can't wait to get out of this room."

Today we are continuing in our series We Are the Church. Last week we talked about the power of encouragement. We can use our words to build others up. Today I want to talk about the fact that we can also use our words to destroy. Words are powerful. They reveal what is in the heart.

James 1:26 If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

This passage says that one of the true tests of our spiritual maturity is what we say with our mouths. If you cannot control your tongue then your faith is 'worthless'. You cannot be kind to another person and claim to be a follower of Christ while at the same time speaking profanity and gossip.

James 3:3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. 4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. 5 Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. 7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, 8 but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

Today I want to talk about 3 things;

1. The PROBLEM of Gossip

Let's start today by trying to define what gossip means. Random House College Dictionary defines gossip as: Idle talk or rumour, especially about the personal or private affairs of others. Webster's dictionary defines a gossip as: a person who habitually reveals personal or sensational facts about others. It is someone who shares rumour or report of an intimate nature.

The English word gossip comes from the Old English word GODSIBB or Godparent. The term was applied to a women's female friends at the birth of a child. It came to mean a person, especially a woman, who was fond of 'light' talk.

The Greek word for Gossip is PSITHURISMOS (*psith-oo-ris-mos)* which comes from the word PSITHOS which means to whisper. It is the picture of a person whispering in the background.

Along with gossip is the word slander. The Greek word for Slander is KATALALOS (*kat-al'-al-os)* which comes from KATA (meaning about or against) and LALEO (coming from the verb 'to talk'). Together they mean to talk about or talk against someone.

The only difference between "gossip" and "slander" is one of degrees. Suppose you wanted to kill someone. There is more than one way you could do it. You could take a shotgun, walk right up to the person and announce that you're going to shoot them, and then blow them away. That is slander. Or, you could take a sniper rifle with a scope. Attach a silencer to it, hide yourself a safe distance away and kill them from long-distance. They would never know what hit them. That's gossip. Both are deadly.

2. The POWER of Gossip

In this passage the tongue is compared to the bit in a horse's mouth. It is small but it can control the entire animal. It is compared to the rudder of a ship. It is small but can turn the entire vessel. It is compared to a small spark that, while small, can destroy an entire forest.

Some people do not think that gossip is really that big of an issue. They might argue that it seems like a small sin when compared to some others. However, it is not a small sin to God

Rom 1:28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. 29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Murder and gossip. The reason God hates gossip is because it hurts His church and His children.

My name is Gossip. I have no respect for justice. I maim without killing. I break hearts and ruin lives. I am cunning and malicious and gather strength with age. The more I am quoted, the more I am believed. I flourish at every level of society. My victims are helpless. They cannot protect themselves against me because I have no face. To track me down is impossible. The harder you try, the more elusive I become. I am nobody's friend. Once I tarnish a reputation, it is never the same. I topple governments, wreck marriages, and ruin careers -- cause sleepless nights, heartaches, and indigestion. I spawn suspicion and generate grief. I make innocent people cry in their pillows. Even my name hisses… I make headlines and headaches.

Eph 4:29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Once we speak a word and it has left our mouths it is impossible to take back. It is like throwing a rock – you cannot stop it once it has left your hands.

There was a man who went to a priest and confessed that the Lord had recently convicted him of gossip. He wanted to know what he could do to make it right. The priest told him to go to the top of a mountain, rip open a feather pillow, turn the feathers loose in the wind, and then come back the next day. So the man did like he was told. He went to the top of a mountain, tore open a feather pillow, and scattered the feathers to the wind. The next day he went back to the priest and asked what he was to do next. The priest told him to go back and collect all of the feathers. The man complained that it would be impossible to collect all of those feathers. They were scattered everywhere.

That, my friend, was the point. Once you begin to gossip, the words you spread scatter to the wind and can never be retrieved. You don't know where they are going to go, where they will land, or whom they will hurt.

3. The PREVENTION of Gossip

James says at the end of this scripture "Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be". There should be no gossip in the church. So how do you prevent it?

a. Watch your ATTITUDE

A positive attitude is essential in overcoming gossip. If you can't say something good about someone then you should not say anything about them at all. If you love someone and want to show kindness then you do not speak about that person behind their back.

Rom 12:10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves.

A woman named Marilyn Helleberg told about being a teenager at church camp. She said an ugly rumour got started there about two of the counsellors and it quickly became the talk of the camp. The next day, at Morning Prayer, the pastor read the story of the adulterous woman. He spoke of Jesus telling the crowd that if any person had no sin that they could cast the first stone. And one by one, those who had come to stoned her to death walked away. Then the minister passed around a bucket of stones and insisted that they each take one and carry it their pocket throughout the remainder of camp. Any time they felt like criticizing someone else or talking behind another's back or passing on an ugly rumour they were to reach into the pocket, touch the stone and ask themselves if they were without sin. That shut down the gossiping. Because true love remembers how much Jesus has forgiven us and - because of that - refuses to "delight in evil" and the spreading of gossip.

Next time you are tempted to talk about another person why not instead play the Reverse Gossip Game. Instead of saying something negative, see how many nice things you can say behind someone's back. E.g. camp Hermosa when I was young.

b. Watch your ACTIONS

That means that we need to be very careful with the words we speak. Words are powerful. Because of that we need to be very selective it the words we choose to say. We need to watch our words.

Col 3:12-15 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

When it says here that the peace of Christ should RULE our hearts the Greek word here is BRABEUO which means "to govern". In today's terms it means "to act as an umpire". Do you understand that picture? The peace of God stands at the door of our hearts deciding what goes in and out. The same can be said of the tongue. The peace of God should act as an umpire over our words to evaluate them and to decide which should be spoken and which should not be spoken.

The next time you want to tell a story about someone else ask yourself, Is it true? Is it fair? Is it necessary? If not then shut up!

c. Watch your ASSOCIATIONS

That means that you watch out for situations where you know that you may be tempted to either hear or share gossip. You all know where that place for you is. For some maybe it is at your family gatherings. Maybe it is your workplace break room or your school lunch table or even in your bible study or your small group.

Pro 11:13 A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.

Pro 25:9 If you argue your case with a neighbour, do not betray another man's confidence, 10 or he who hears it may shame you and you will never lose your bad reputation.

Gossip makes you look bad. Those who share it should be ashamed. Those who listen to it should also be ashamed.

Ann Landers once wrote that "People of high intelligence talk about ideas. People of average intelligence talk about things. People of no intelligence talk about other people." Where are you in that line-up? What do you talk about when you are with others?

Don't hang around with gossips. Don't associate with them. Remember that whoever gossips to you when you are present will also gossip about you when you are absent.

d. Watch your AFFIRMATIONS

That means you have be careful of how you respond to gossip when you hear it. Often, gossip is a problem in the church simply because people do not shut it down before it can begin.

After three years of research, Indiana University sociologist Donna Eder has identified an important dynamic involved in gossip. Eder discovered that the initial negative statement was not the starting point for gossip. The critical turning point was found in the response to the initial negative statement. "She's a real snob" is not the start of gossip. It's when someone else agrees that the gossip fest begins. Eder found that the key is whether or not a negative statement is "seconded." If a second is provided, gossip has begun.

If someone begins to gossip with you about another person than this is how you should respond:

Show Character – say "I am uncomfortable with this conversation"

Show Concern – say "I don't think this person would appreciate us talking about them"

Show Confidentiality – say "have you spoken with this person privately about this issue yet?"

In everything we speak we need to understand the truth that there is always someone listening.

There is an old Chinese proverb that says, "When you speak only well of people you need never whisper."

Before I discovered that my cell phone had a lock screen button I would often accidentally dial the last number in my cell phone's registry. The biggest problem was that I never realized that it had happened. I would go on with normal life and my cell phone would be on for an extended period of time without my knowing that it was on. When I would discover that it was on… either when I picked it up to make a call or when the person on the other end would hang up, and call me back to laugh at me, I would have this strange fear overcome me. What did I say, when I didn't know that someone else was listening? Did I gossip? Did I say something evil? Did I make a joke that I would not want the person on the other end to know about?

Well that it is how it is with the Holy Spirit all the time! It's like your cell phone has accidentally called God and you didn't know it. Would you live your live differently if every conversation and ever thought you ever had was being accidentally broadcast across the cell phone in your pocket to your Pastor? Well it is not being broadcast to your Pastor, but your every thought and the ear of God hears every word!

Harriet, the church gossip and self-appointed supervisor of the church's morals, kept sticking her nose into other people's business. Several residents were unappreciative of her activities, but feared her enough to maintain their silence. She made a mistake, however, when she accused George, a new member, of being an alcoholic after she saw his pickup truck parked all afternoon in front of the town's only bar. She commented to George and others that everyone seeing it there would know that he was an alcoholic. George, a man of few words, stared at her for a moment and then just walked away. He said nothing. Later that evening, George quietly parked his pickup in front of Harriet's house and left it there all night...