

## **Proverbs 10:11** **Sparkling like a fountain**

So the latest warning signs of climate change, we're being told, are the

### **Tropical nights**

That *some* parts of the UK have been experiencing recently. As usual, we missed out on much of the heat at the beginning of the week, down here at the far end of Cornwall. But we did have a video call from our Jo and family on Monday, out in their garden in Kent, the kids wearing next to nothing, and rather enjoying the fun of a

### **Paddling pool**

At one stage, Reuben was zooming up and down the garden on a scooter. And Nate - who has only just turned two - was getting very excited as Mum filled up a water pistol for him. We were amazed that at such a young age he was still able to catch Reuben squarely amidsthips with a jet of water almost every time he went past.

But of course a bit of water play like that is OK in a country which has a fair amount of rain. Even if the pipes around the country leak gazillions of gallons of water each year, many more gazillions make it to our taps and showers and swimming pools and gardens. So we probably think of

### **Fountains**

as wonderfully attractive garden ornaments. But if we read of something like a fountain or a spring in the Bible, it's possible that we forget the difference between

### **England's green and pleasant land**

And the harsh realities of the much more arid Middle Eastern country in which the Bible was written. Here's

### **"The Wilderness"** **Jerusalem to Jericho**

So you can see that people in that culture will have a rather different take on water. You can hear it in the words they speak. Notice the heading of this psalm, for once:

***A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah:***  
***O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you;***  
***my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.***

(Psalms 63:1)

So when we come to today's verse from Proverbs:

***The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.***

(Proverbs 10:11)

It is as if we have to turn up the contrast on our thoughts. "A fountain of life" isn't just "nice", it's wonderful, it's refreshing, it's enlivening, it's invigorating ... it's *saving*, even. Could you imagine being stranded in

### **The desert**

Without a water bottle ... and then coming across

### **An oasis?**

Even if it wasn't full of sparkling water, like the traditional image of an oasis ... even if it was just a muddy puddle, it could be literally life-saving. We need to re-inject that sense of thrill, of relief, of delight, into that verse we have just read.

***The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.***

(Proverbs 10:11)

And we need to consider the rest of the verse in that light. But let's linger a moment longer with the fountain, shall we? It's an image that we see several times in this part of the Bible. Every time, can you see that there is that element of longing and delight there?

***How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.***

(Psalms 36:7-9)

***The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.***

(Proverbs 13:14)

***The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.***

(Proverbs 14:27)

That's an interesting pair of verses, isn't it, with "the teaching of the wise" seeming to function exactly the same as "the fear of the LORD"! We really, really mustn't set teaching Bible truth apart from experiencing God. The Word of God and the Spirit of God work *together* in the life of a believer. Don't think that we will have a true "fear of the LORD" without hearing "the teaching of the wise"!

***Good sense is a fountain of life to him who has it, but the instruction of fools is folly.***

(Proverbs 16:22)

But let's start to put this back into the context of the verse again now. Even though in this last verse that I've put up on screen for you, it talks about "good sense", notice the contrast is something spoken: "the *instruction* of fools". Did you notice that the word "mouth" occurs *twice* in Proverbs 10:11?

***The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.***

(Proverbs 10:11)

It could perhaps be tempting to prefer to think in terms of your *example* alone. We probably think of this as *in contrast* to what we say, but I think that is a mistake that has been foisted upon us by a society that wants to avoid hearing truth. You will sometimes see people touting this quote around:

*Preach the Gospel at all times; use words if necessary*

Francis of Assisi

But, like so many such "quotes", it's a **mis-quote (lines through)**. Those words don't appear in any of his writings. And it doesn't fit with the record of Francis' actions:

"sometimes preaching in up to five villages a day, often outdoors. In the country, Francis often spoke from a bale of straw or a granary doorway. In town, he would climb on a box or up steps in a public building. He preached to . . . any who gathered to hear the strange but fiery little preacher from Assisi." He was sometimes so animated and passionate in his delivery that "his feet moved as if he were dancing."

The fact of the matter is that the Gospel *is* a message: it's *good news*. It is something that has to be told. Lives can back up the truth, or lives can *belie* the truth. But lives alone cannot convey the content of the message. Words will *always* be necessary.

But there is the rub, too. Words can work both ways. As another verse in Proverbs sums it up:

***Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.***

Proverbs 18:21

Just the same kind of thing that Jesus would say, so very challengingly:

***“... out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.”***

(Matthew 12:34-35)

***“I tell you, on the day of judgement people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”***

(Matthew 12:36-37)

See, it is not just the life and death of *others* that is in the power of the tongue, but it is our *own* souls at hazard, too. The words we speak reveal the heart within. And both possible sides of the heart feature in Proverbs 10:11, too, with that repeated word *mouth*:

***The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.***

(Proverbs 10:11)

What kind of words come out of our mouths? And what does that show about our hearts? And then onto what it communicates to those we are speaking to. What we say will feature hugely in determining how a relationship develops ... or doesn't. On whether it's a healthy or an abusive relationship. On whether it gives grace ...

***The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of sense.***

(Proverbs 10:21)

***Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.***

(Ephesians 4:29)

You need both sides of that sentence, both a don't and a do. The question is whether in our words to one another, we will give grace, or give grief. Yes, there is a kind of “gracious grief”, when someone needs to be called to repentance:

***As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.***

(2 Corinthians 7:9)

But I'm speaking more generally here right now. When you meet with someone - when we finally get back to doing church properly, in person - do you go with the conscious intention, perhaps even backed up with a specific prayer, that you may do them some *good* by what you say? What do *you* first of all need to hear ... and then how can you answer with true *grace*?

And wouldn't this be a good prayer, and something good to aim for, from this morning's introductory verses:

***Let those who fear you turn to me, that they may know your testimonies.***

(Psalms 119:79)

May my speech be so reliably gracious and truthful, that people will grow in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ as a result of knowing you. Who we are *will* affect people one way or another. Are you and I going to set ourselves to be a blessing by how we live, and how we speak ... to be a “fountain of life” ... or ...

***Like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked.***

(Proverbs 25:26)

There’s one more thing I’d like to come back to in our verse for today, though, before finishing with one final big question.

***The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.***

(Proverbs 10:11)

I think I see a contrast there between not just about the kind of things that people say, but how they say them. Although the word that we have translated “fountain” could also mean just spring - not actually

### **Squirting out of the ground**

I do think that we have an implied contrast about an openness of health-giving speech, on the one hand, and a much more veiled, dark feel about violent speech.

***The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.***

(Proverbs 10:11)

Do you think there’s an implicit reference not just to life and death there, but light and darkness too? Words of truth need to be shared, and shared *openly*:

***“ ... for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”***

(Acts 4:20)

And see the contrast:

***... for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ...***

(Ephesians 5:8)

And one thing that light does, obviously, is dispel darkness ... just as truth will dispel lies:

***Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.***

(Ephesians 5:11)

So is this a possible test for our speech? Yes, there are times when what you say is not meant to be heard in public. There are private things and there are intimate things. But, for the normal stuff, would you be happy - or at least unashamed - if your words were recorded and transcribed and put up on a

### **Big screen**

At the front of the church? Or do your words, as in our Proverb

***The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.***

(Proverbs 10:11)

“Conceal violence”? Is it something that you have instinctively hidden in a whisper because you know there is something improper and ungracious about it?

Same kind of question about our computer speech. Have you said things behind the anonymity of a computer profile and a name that can't be identified with you, that you would not dare to say in public? Are you happy with sending off those e-mails they call

### **Flames**

Thinking that somehow you're immune from the normal courtesies of speech, just because it's online, and rudeness and unkindness are somehow acceptable there in the cyber equivalent of the Wild West?

***The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.***

(Proverbs 10:11)

Folks, are there ways in which we are *concealing* violence by our speech, appearing all wholesome when we come on screen again on Sunday morning, but there are those words of concealed violence, that bit of mockery of someone else's words or appearance, that disrespect of politicians that Scripture commands us to pray for and to honour?

You see, this brings us onto our final question for this morning. We see this verse, and we probably slip quite easily into thinking, *just try to live this way instead of the other way*. After all, aren't there, as we've been saying over the last few weeks,

### **Two ways to live?**

And yes, of course, there are. But the path we walk is an *outcome* of the heart within us. And we can maybe too easily think that, well, if it's a simple one-or-the-other question, will, I'm one of the *righteous*, aren't I?

Or does this actually point us away from ourselves, when we get to that point?

### **Who is "the righteous"?**

Because, after all, isn't it too big a claim? Think what James says in his letter on the subject of speech:

***... but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.***

(James 3:8-10)

***Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.***

(James 3:11-12)

Actually, it turns out that we are not quite so easily "the righteous" here. That title belongs more properly to someone else.

***The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, ...***

(Proverbs 10:11)

Come on over to the NT, and see if we can find a better fit. Jesus, speaking to Jewish people about himself. Do you see "a fountain of life" here?

***"The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."***

(John 6:63)

Peter's response just a few moments after, when Jesus had challenged those Jews, and some had decided to no longer follow him.

***So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,..."***

(John 6:67-68)

The Gospel being preached around the Roman empire. An angel releases Peter from prison, and commands ...

***"Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life."***

(Acts 5:20)

It's the message about Jesus Christ, living, dead, and then risen again. But it is so much about life that it can be called ...

***... you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, ...***

(Philippians 2:15-16)

***That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us —***

(1 John 1:1-2)

*There* is your true “fountain of life”. There is your *the* righteous.

And against *that* identification, come back with me into the OT, and read Jeremiah with new eyes. What precise spring or “fountain of life” do people neglect at their greatest peril?

***... my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.***

(Jeremiah 2:13)

That's our choice in life, as believers or even as unbelievers. Do you want to drink from a muddy puddle that is in danger of drying up, or from the fountain of living waters ... *Jesus Christ himself*? Will you believe his words?

***On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”***

(John 7:37-38)

That's the only way for *our* words to become “a fountain of life”. If we have first been filled with the true Fountain, capital F, of living water. And that can happen, not just because you choose to accept the invitation of Jesus, but because of the gracious purpose of God. There came a day, getting ever closer to 2000 years ago now, when this OT promise was fulfilled:

***“On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.”***

(Zechariah 13:1)

Just as we sang earlier ... though the image does get a bit grisly, if you think about it too closely. Just hear the poetry, connecting the forgiveness of sins with the shedding of the blood of the perfect Passover lamb:

*There is a fountain filled with blood  
Drawn from Immanuel's veins*



*And sinners plunged beneath that flood  
Lose all their guilty stains*

*And there may I, though vile as he\*  
("the thief on the cross" ~ crucified terrorist)  
Wash all my sins away*

Folks, will you join me at the Fountain, where we are promised

***"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."***

(Revelation 7:16-17)