

**“Taming the Tongue
We Value Accountability”**

2/28/99

Thank you so much Allison Stroud and that song ministry very much to my own heart and life. I know it certainly must have been a great ministry to your own mom and dad. This past week Dana had to go through the experience of burying her grandfather. Many of you know that in the last few months this is the third death she has experienced in her family. I want us to just continue to pray for Dana, Sonny, Allison, and Chip and for the ongoing need in their life for God’s strength and comfort. Certainly the song that has just been sung could not have been a more telling description of what we all need and this is to hold on to Jesus. In holding on to him we hold on to hope.

How many of you this morning are not sitting in the same seats you sat in last Sunday? Good! I just needed to know! Now some of you can say that because you weren’t here last Sunday. You don’t have a clue what I am talking about. That is okay. But for others of you, I am grateful that finally I preached something you found application for in your life. I am proud of you this morning for making an effort to move. I said last Sunday we get so programmed to parking in the same place, sitting in the same seat, talking to the same people, doing the same thing, and sometimes we just need to deprogram ourselves that we might be more available to meet other friends and members who come and to help to be an encouragement to others. So, thank you so very much this morning.

You know, we live in a very wordy world. We Americans like to talk. We have talk shows on television ad infinitum, ad nauseum. We have talk shows on the radios. Everywhere you look in America what you hear is talk, talk, talk. Today in America, on this Sunday, the 28th of February, 55,000,000 Americans will listen to 400,000 people speak over one billion words. When it is all said and done there will be a lot more said than done!

Someone has done a study to learn that the average person speaks enough words in one year to fill up 66 books 800 pages in length. The average man speaks 20,000 words a day. The average woman (you laugh, not me!) speaks 30,000 words a day. So ladies, if he ever comes home and seems to be quiet just when you seem to be getting in the groove to talk, remember that you have 10,000 words more than he does. He may just be completely overwhelmed in his output. It is a great insight for you this morning. It was worth coming to church to learn that if nothing else today.

Today I want to spend some time talking to you about your mouth, about your tongue, and about your talk. In fact, I really would like to title this sermon, though I have not done it, The Sermon on the Mouth, because, frankly, I think we could use a sermon on the mouth because the tongue (the mouth) gets us in a lot of trouble.

Maybe you heard about the young man who was working in the produce department at the local supermarket. Apparently a little lady came in one day and picked up a head of lettuce. She walked over to him and said young man; I would like to buy a half a head of

lettuce. He said, Ma'am, I will have to ask the manager. He took the lettuce and walked to the back of the room not knowing the lady was following very close behind. He looked at the manager and said, some old bag out there wants to buy a half a head of lettuce. About the time he got those words out of his mouth he turned and realized she was standing right there. He said, and this lady, this fine lady, would like to buy the other half of that head of lettuce. Don't you wish you could always think that quickly on your feet? Don't you wish you could cover your tracks that well? But the fact of life is that for most of us our tongue is constantly getting us in trouble. That is why the wise writer of the Book of Proverbs, Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, wrote these words in Proverbs, Chapter 10, and verse 19. "In a multitude of words (read the next three words outloud with me) sin is unavoidable. But he who restrains his lips is wise. In a multitude of words sin is unavoidable." If you open your mouth he promises you are going to get yourself in trouble. I like the way the New Living Translation presents this. I have just read it to you out of the New King James, which is what I speak from every Sunday. But the New Living Translation, I like the way it reads. It says, "Don't talk too much for it fosters sin. Be sensible and turn off the flow." Well spoken!

Well, our friend James, whose book and letter we have been studying now for a number of weeks, will not let go of this issue of the tongue and the mouth. In fact, what James tells us is that if you want the thermometer that will give you the best indicator of the quality of your life and the authenticity of your faith, there is no single reading like that which comes from the tongue, because the tongue will tell you about your spiritual condition. Whether you have been sitting on a church pew for many years or whether you have just walked in this door this morning, if you really want to know what is real about what you believe and where faith hits life, it will hit at the point of your tongue. James makes it very clear that we all must understand that there is accountability for our mouth, for our words, and for what we do. If we are living our lives without accountability at the point of our speech then all that demonstrates is that something is grossly wrong with our faith. Let's see how James presents his case.

In James, Chapter 3, and verse 1, you might want to turn there if you have a Bible with you this morning; James opens with the familiar expression and the warm words of affection, "my brethren". "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgement." He says, now look, we all understand that as a person becomes a leader in the church, whether it be a pastor, such as myself, or even someone who teaches in one of the many platforms of teaching ministry we have in a church, he says, let not many of us become teachers because we know that to be a teacher is to receive stricter judgement. You are going to be held accountable for what you teach. If there is a credibility gap in your life between the things you say and the things you do then you know as a teacher that before God you must give an account for what you do. But he doesn't leave it there. He says, you know that is true of teachers but now let's just stop and let's just take another level lower and let's see that it goes to the fellowship as well. He says in verse 2, "for we all stumble in many things." We all stumble. We all have the tendency to get tripped up. Not just the teacher, not just the one who is kind of walking on the high wire and trying to find balance between teaching and the weaknesses of life, we all stumble in many places. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect

man able to bridle the whole body. A perfect man. The word perfect we have already studied over and over in this study because James likes that word. The word perfect means mature, it means stable, it means someone who is credible as a Christian. He said, if anyone is a perfect man, he is able to control his words. One of the sure signs of maturity, one of the sure signs of authenticity of faith is the ability for one to control their tongue. The fact of the matter is that most of us do not live in that arena. The fact of the matter is that most of us are stumbling with our tongue.

James begins in the succeeding verses to begin to outline some things that we need to understand that are applicable to every one of our lives about the condition of our tongue and about the activity and the use of our tongue. He says in the immediate following verses here beginning in verse 3, that an untamed tongue needs positive control. That is really what he is saying in these next few verses. An untamed tongue needs positive control. That is the first thing I want us to hedge and to hinge our thoughts upon this morning, that an untamed tongue needs positive control.

Let's see what he says. Indeed, verse 3, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us. We turn their whole body. He says, have you ever seen an unbridled horse? What does an unbridled horse look like? They are wild! They are out of control! We call them bucking broncos. I mean they kick and they move and they are erratic. He says, if you have ever seen a horse out of control, you know that for that reason we put a bit and a bridle in their mouth. With that bridle we are able to take that wild horse and we are able to make them a champion stallion. You see, he says, just look at the unbridled horse and you will see a picture of your tongue. There is a tendency for the tongue, the untamed tongue, to be wild. It needs the positive control of a bit, of a bridle.

Then he goes on to say in verse 4, look also at ships. Although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds a very small rudder turns them wherever the pilot desires. He says, look not only at the unbridled horse, look at the undirected ship. You know that the land of the Bible, the land of Israel, borders the Mediterranean Sea. There are many seaports there and the big ships would come in and he was referring to the fact that as you have seen those ships put up their sails and the winds begin to blow them while the winds may be very contrary, that ship can catch the wind and be directed when you use the rudder. It is not what you see above, it is what is beneath that gives direction. He said an undirected ship is adrift. It is just being blown by the wind. In all likelihood it is going to be at the point of catastrophe because it will be washed ashore, washed into the treachery of the rocks. So he said just like a ship needs a rudder, your tongue needs not to be adrift.

Some of you in this room were living May 21, 1941. On that day the unsinkable German battleship called the Bismarck was sighted in the northern Atlantic Ocean. Immediately planes and ships from Great Britain and her allies began to try to intercept this vessel. The German Bismarck, which was known as the unsinkable ship, began to try to make its way back to the shore of France, which was under German control at that time. It seemed that as the ship began to try to make its way back it suddenly changed its course and moved right back into the path of the primary concentration of British battleships. Within

just a matter of moments it began to move erratically and ultimately the unsinkable Bismarck was sunk. What had happened was that a torpedo had hit its rudder and no longer could it be controlled and it sunk right there in the ocean. In the same way a tongue that is uncontrolled is adrift like a ship. Your life will sink.

He not only talks about the unbridled horse and the undirected ship; he goes on to say something else here in verse 5. He says, even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things, see how great a forest a little fire kindles. The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The word how great a forest a little fire, the word little fire there literally means spark, it is amazing how raging a fire can come from just a small spark. That is where James draws his third illustration. He says the undetected spark is dangerous. Just as your tongue can shape, move, and maneuver, tiny words or little sparks, with those sparks we can set in course massive fires that bring destruction.

Last summer before moving here to Boca Raton I was living up in central Florida right at the southern edge of all of the massive fires that burned thousands of acreage in our state last year. It was an incredible thing to have I-95, the primary link between Florida and the Georgia line there, to be closed from just north of where we lived in Mims, Florida all the way up to almost the southern end of Jacksonville. That went on for three or four days. On one occasion I was up in the community of Mims which is a small rural community on the northern edge of Brevard County. One day I was driving on a street and there was a fire on one side and on the other. The smoke was so massive that I had to stop because I could not see to go any further through the fire that was raging. When it was all done there were masses of destruction of forestry, homes, and businesses. The tragedy was that because of dried conditions, because of the condition of the ground and the foliage, it just took sparks to destroy thousands of acres. James says that just as a little spark can set a massive fire, so you need to understand that the tongue out of control is dangerous.

A fire when it is lit in a fireplace or in an oven is a very profitable thing, a very valuable thing. It warms, it cooks, and it helps. But when it is out of control it is dangerous. So James makes the case very clearly – an untamed tongue needs positive control.

There is something else he goes on to say though because he wants to press the issue of what we do with our tongues a little bit further. That is that he says beginning in verse 6, an untamed tongue is a destructive weapon. It is not just something that needs positive control it is a destructive weapon. Listen to the key words that I read as we read through verses 6 through 8. “The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body. It sets on fire the course of nature. It is set on fire by hell for every kind of beast and bird and reptile and creature of the sea is tame and has been tamed by mankind but no man can tame the tongue, it is an unruly evil full of deadly poison.” Do you hear those words? Do you hear the descriptions that he has given? He is saying, in this passage of scripture, that an untamed tongue is a destructive weapon. I just want to read this passage to you one more time but this time I want to read it to you from The Message. In fact, it is found on the front of your worship guide and I believe we will have it on the screen in just a moment. But I want you just to see and

hear these words again. Eugene Peterson writes, “It only takes a spark to set off a forest fire. A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony into chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell. This is scary. You can tame a tiger but you cannot tame a tongue. It has never been done. The tongue runs wild a wanton killer.

I want you to think about the weapon called the tongue. I want you to think about it being a revolver that has, as though it were, five empty chambers. I want you to think of some of the bullets that we put in those chambers. First, I would mention the bullet of gossip. Of gossip. Just being someone who always has to say something about someone else true, false, or otherwise, just constantly passing and disseminating information. The writer of Proverbs, Solomon, once again writes in Proverbs 20:19, “he who goes about as a tale bearer reveals secrets.” Are you a talebearer? Are you a gossip? I tell you, in the church we get real spiritual about this. In the church we say, oh, we need to pray for brother so and so and sister so and so because I hear they are having marital problems, because I hear they are not doing so well financially, because I hear that I hear that I hear.... Now I am not saying there is not a place to share prayer requests and to pray. But I want you to know that sometimes the most subtle way that we do disgrace to God and to his church is when we are constantly gossiping about things that we do not have the facts about and we just cause division and dissemination and character assassination of people who are around us. Most churches split and devour and divide because of the little spark called the tongue in the uncontrollable place called gossip. We must always guard against it.

Not only do we put in the chamber of that weapon the bullet called gossip, another one that we are prone to use is the one called flattery. That same passage of scripture says, “He who goes about as a tale bearer reveals secrets therefore do not associate with one who flatters with the lips.” Someone who flatters you is someone who says to your face what they will not say behind your back. They just simply tell you what they think you want to hear. They are always putting the syrup, always putting the spin on when they are in your presence but it is not true to what they think or how they feel about you. The Bible warns us against flattery because flattery does a great disservice to the lives of people around us. Gossip, flattery.

Spin that chamber one more time and let’s look at another bullet that we put in this weapon called the tongue. Criticism. Proverbs 12:18 says, “There is one who speaks like the piercing of a sword but the tongue of the wise promotes health.” There is one who is like the piercing of a sword. Are you a person who every time you are around other people you are piercing, piercing, and piercing with the sharp pointed instrument called your tongue? But that seems to be the way that you communicate with others is that you are constantly criticizing and complaining and griping and finding fault. What great destruction is done when we are constantly pricking others with the tongue. I don’t mean that there is not a place for constructive criticism. I don’t mean you should never say anything that is perceived as negative or hard because sometimes you have to tell the people the truth. A person who constructively criticizes you points out the weakness and

helps you to make it a strength. The person who destructively criticizes you is the person who just finds fault to find fault.

Listen again to the writer of Proverbs, what he says. Proverbs 26:6 – “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.” Not the piercing of the sword but the wounds of a friend. A friend will tell you the truth. Faithful are the wounds of a friend but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. Learn to be faithful. Learn to be willing to say things and share things that sometimes are hard things that need to be communicated. Do it honestly but do what Paul says in Ephesians, “Speak the truth in love.” So in that one chamber we have the bullet called gossip. In the other we have the bullet called flattery. In the other we have the bullet called criticism.

Then there is another bullet that assassinates and that is lying. Lying, deceiving, not telling the truth. God lists lying as one of the seven sins that he hates. The Bible lists lying along with fornication, immorality, and murder as being one of the things for which we will be judged and for which people will be sent to hell. Lying is a very serious thing with God. That is why the scripture says put away from you a deceitful mouth and let perverse lips be put far from you.

Then there is a fifth chamber. It is abuse. Abuse goes beyond criticism. It is when we simply use our tongue to try to manipulate control over the lives of others by destroying their well being by breaking their spirit. That is the very thing James points out here because as you continue to read he says here in verse 9, “With this tongue we bless our God and Father and with it we curse men.” What the Bible is saying is that you can use your tongue to curse and to destroy others. In contrast Proverbs 15:4 says, “The wholesome tongue is a tree of life.” Just as a tree, when it is in full fruition provides fruit in abundance for everyone to enjoy, it is sweet, it is good, it is delightful, there is an aroma and the Bible says the wholesome tongue is like a tree of life but in perverseness it breaks the spirit. So an untamed tongue needs positive control. An untamed tongue is a destructive weapon. But then he tells us one other thing and this is so very important. He says, an untamed tongue reveals a deceptive heart.

James says the real problem is not the tongue. The real problem is the heart. It is the nature. He goes on to say here in verse 11, “Does a spring bring forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?” I mean, do you have a spring that is bubbling up and on the one hand that is fresh well water but on the other it is dirty and defiled water? No. There is just one kind of water because the nature of a spring is to be full of fresh water. He says in the next verse, “Can a fig tree bare olives or a grape vine bear figs? No spring yields both salt water and fresh water. There is something that is deeper that is wrong. If the tongue is constantly pouring out things and he says here, it is the heart, because the tongue reveals the heart. It shows who you really are and what you really are on the inside. Come to church and sing as loud as you want to and get in Bible study groups and tell all the knowledge you have of the Bible, but if that tongue is not being controlled in the crucial arena of the relationships of your life then ladies and gentlemen, to speak with a forked tongue is to demonstrate a divided and a deceptive heart because there is something wrong with the heart. Jesus said in Matthew 12, verse 34, “Out of the

abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” Out of the abundance of the heart! What is the well from which this water comes forth? Salt water, fresh water, pure water, defiled water? It is the well of the heart. It is so vital that we understand that faith is only as real as our tongue.

It is interesting that if you go back and look in James, Chapter 2, verse 14 James is pounding the point – faith without works is dead, faith without works is dead. Faith and works must come together if faith is real. But then you find in James, Chapter 3, him saying faith and words, faith and words, faith and words. If the words are not the words that are reflective of a heart that knows and loves Jesus Christ then your faith has been discredited.

I love Chuck Swindoll. He is one of the great writers and communicators of our day. Someone this week sent me a piece written by him and I really enjoyed it. It says, “The tongue – what a study in contrast. To the physician it is merely a two-ounce slab of mucous membrane enclosing a complex array of muscles and nerves that enable our bodies to chew, taste, and swallow. How helpful! Equally significant is that it is the major organ of communication that enables us to articulate distinct sounds so that we can understand each other. How essential! But the tongue is as volatile as it is vital. It was George Washington Irving who first said, a sharp tongue is the only tool that grows keener with constant use. It was James, the half-brother of Jesus, who warned that the tongue is a fire and a restless evil full of deadly poison, verbal cyanide, a lethal, relentless, flaming missile which assaults with hellish power blistering and destroying at will. Yet it doesn’t look anything like the brutal beast that it is. Neatly hidden behind the ivory palace gates its movements are an intriguing study of coordination. It can curl itself into a cheery whistle or manipulate a lazy afternoon yawn. With no difficulty it can flick a husk of popcorn between the two jaw teeth or hold a thermometer just so. It is tricky! It can help you enjoy the flavor of a stick of peppermint as it switches from side to side without once getting nipped. Moments later it can follow the directions of a trumpeter allowing him to play the Flight of the Bumblebee without a single miscue. But watch out! Let your thumb get smashed with a hammer, your toe get clobbered on a chair, and that slippery creature in your mouth will suddenly play the flip side of its nature. Not only is the tongue untamed it is untamable, meaning what? Meaning as long as you live you will never gain control of it by yourself. It defies being tamed. Incredible! We can tame Flipper, Trigger, Shamu, and Lassie but the tongue is impossible to train.

conscious muzzle on the muscle in your mouth. Harnessing such a wiley creature requires a determined mindset. It is a project you have put off too long.” I think he says very well what I have been trying to say to you and what James is saying to us this morning.

We must understand that we have to deal with the untamed tongue. But that brings us to a very simple final question. How? How do we do it? What do we do? How are we to deal with this deadly weapon? This thing in us that needs positive control? This thing that demonstrates a deceptive heart? How are we to deal with this thing called the tongue? Let me just answer that question by saying that an untamed tongue requires some active measures. Let me suggest four measures that all of us need to take.

1. First and foremost, recognize the source of the problem. The source of the problem is not the tongue. The source of the problem is the heart. Until you deal with issues of your heart you will never deal with issues of your mouth because it all begins in the heart. I cannot control what is my nature. Not the nature that I have from God being made in his image and his likeness but the nature that I have from my earthly father, Adam, Adam who sinned. I have a sin nature and because of that sin nature there is within me and within you a natural directness toward selfishness, toward pride, toward arrogance, toward anger, toward vindictiveness, and because of that, welling up inside of us the tongue just gives expression to it. So the problem is the heart. There is only one person who can fix the heart. His name is Jesus Christ. Only Jesus can change your heart. Frankly, what needs to happen in many a person's life in this building this morning is that you need Jesus Christ to come into your heart and to give you a new heart and to make you a new creature.

I don't know if you have ever read this verse in this context before but listen to it very carefully this morning. Romans, Chapter 10, verses 9 and 10. "If you will confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart man believes unto righteousness." When my heart gets right with God and I become a righteous person on the inside then salvation is made with the confession of the mouth for the mouth makes confession unto salvation. Do you see the link between the heart and the mouth? I receive Jesus Christ into my heart. I confess him as Lord with my mouth. I believe he is the Son of God. I believe he died for my sins. I believe he rose again and when I put my faith and my trust in Jesus Christ he gives me a new heart and then when my mouth opens it is constantly the confession of salvation. I am not the same person because Christ is in me.

2. There is another thing we need to do and that is not only to recognize that the source of the problem is the heart. We need to request God's help. Ask God to help you. If you are a follower of Christ, if you have received Christ, then ask God to help you because you can't tame your tongue, I can't tame my tongue, but God can. Listen to the prayer of the psalmist. What a great prayer! You ought to write this in your Bible, write this on a notepad, pray it every morning! Psalm 141, verse 3, "Set a guard oh Lord over my mouth and keep watch over the door of my lips." Set a guard over my mouth and keep watch over the door of my lips! Listen again to the psalmist. Psalm 19 and verse 4. "Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord." Who is he? "My strength and my redeemer." I can't redeem myself. I can't strengthen myself. But, oh God, who knows my meditations of my heart can then in turn let the words of my mouth be acceptable to him.
3. Not only do you need to recognize the source and request God's help, reflect on what you say. Don't just open your mouth and just start speaking. Analyze before you verbalize. Let the mind be the muzzle that moves between the heart and the mouth so that when something comes up from the heart it is processed in the mind, you know what you are about to say, and then you say it. Not just opening and pouring out. Listen to what Proverbs 15:28 says. "The heart of the

wise studies how to answer but the mouth of fools pours forth wicked things.” The heart of the wise studies. The heart and the mind get together and consider what is about to be said and process it. The fool just opens the mouth and just pours it all out. You need to think. You need to think before you speak.

I don’t know where I first got this or where I first heard this but I have found it to be a very valuable practical tool in my life. Use the word, THINK, as an acrostic of questions to ask myself before I speak:

T – Ask yourself before you say something, is it true? Is what I am about to say true? Do I know it to be true?

H – Honest. It may be true but is it really being honest? Am I being honest in the way I am communicating this to a person? Am I being honest with what I am trying to say?

I – Important. Is it important? The bottom line is we just talk about a lot of stuff that isn’t important. The more you spend time just talking about stuff that is not important go back to the first verse I showed you today where there is a multitude of words sin is unavoidable. Ask yourself is it true? Is it honest? Is it important?

N – Is it necessary? You know we just say a lot of things that are unnecessary. Ask yourself that question. Is it necessary?

K – Is it kind? Is what I am about to say a reflection of kindness? It may be true. It may be honest. I just tell people what I think. But it may not be kind. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Consider the importance of asking yourself, is it true? Is it honest? Is it important? Is it necessary? Is it kind?

4. Remember. Remember that you will give an account to God for what you say. I know here we just pour out words. I know here we forget half of what we say. I know we get in conflict with people and say I don’t even remember saying that. I didn’t mean anything by that. But I want you to know the omniscient God knows everything and he never misses a word. You say, that is pretty strong! I want you to know that I am not the one telling you that this morning. I want you to hear the words of Jesus in Matthew, Chapter 12, verse 36 and following. “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak they will give account of it in the day of judgement for by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned.” It is true. That is Jesus being honest with us. That is Jesus telling us something important and necessary and, yes, it is even kind because he is telling us how to escape the judgement. Every idle word. I am accountable for what I say before God and because I am accountable before God I must be accountable within the relationship known in the context of the church and the family and every arena of life because what I say is important. We must understand that ultimately we must give an account to God. If that is true, then everything I have had to say today while it is practical and while it is valuable, is ultimately of no use to you unless ultimately in your life there has been a moment in time when you have said, yes to Jesus Christ. Because if you have never said yes to Jesus Christ and you have never been justified by confessing with your mouth that Lord Jesus Christ, then the other side of that coin is that you are condemned already. You have said no to God. You say what do I have to do to be lost? Absolutely nothing. For God sent his son into the world not to condemn

the world but that the world through him might be saved. He who has the son has life. He who has not believed on the name of the Son of God is condemned already because he has not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God. Either we say yes to Jesus Christ or we say no to Jesus Christ. Frankly, everything else is just earthly wisdom without heavenly power. You cannot tame your tongue, only God can. The starting point is when with your tongue you confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and your Savior.

I want to ask that heads be bowed and eyes closed. I want to ask that no one be moving your Bibles and notepads. Just sit still. Just bow your head and close your eyes. I want to ask you a very important question this morning. I want to ask you how many of you in this building this morning can say, Pastor, I have confessed Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I am a follower of Jesus Christ. I have followed him in the waters of baptism. I am following him as a committed member of a local church. I am confessing Jesus in my daily life. I am grateful for his love and that I can make that confession. If that is where you are this morning and you can make that confession while heads are bowed and eyes are closed, please no one be looking. It is between you and me and the Lord this morning. I have a role in this because I am God's spokesperson this morning. If you can make that confession, I want to ask you to just hold your hand up all over this building. If you can confess that Christ is your Lord and your Savior, that you love him, you are following him, you are serving him, hold your hand up right now. Hold your hand up, put it down.

Others of you in this building could not raise your hand because you are not clear about your confession of Jesus Christ. Either you have never invited him into your heart, you have never made it public through the demonstration of baptism, you are not living it out in some fashion by serving him in his church, so this morning I want to give you an opportunity to confess Jesus Christ. I am not going to ask you to stand up where you are and shout it out. But I am going to ask you in the quietness and tenderness of this moment to draw a circle around your heart and life. Right now if you have never done it and you want to do it, simply pray this prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. Lord I need to be saved. Jesus you died on the cross for my sins. You were buried. You rose again. Come into my heart dear Jesus. I receive you as my Savior and Lord. Give me a new heart. Make me the person you want me to be.

Did you pray that prayer? If you did, just put your hand up this morning and let me see it. Just put your hand up confessing Christ today. God bless you as you do. Just put your hand up. Thank God for you. How many others of you in this building would say, Pastor, I prayed that prayer but I am still struggling with the need to either follow Christ in the area of baptism or to get committed to a church. I love the church I attend but I need to get settled in that area of commitment. Pastor, would you pray for me today as I am dealing with that in my life? If that is where you are this morning would you slip your hand up and let me know that. That you are praying about one of those areas of your life. So many this morning. Thank you. Thank you all over this building.

Lord, I can see hands but you know the hearts. I thank you in this holy moment for the fact that you are working in the hearts of people in this place. Father, I pray that we would not hear words this morning, that we would simply compartmentalize into the Sunday segment but that Lord the word of truth would begin to take root in our life and Lord that there would be a fruitfulness in our life either in faith or in practice and works and words that would make a difference in these days ahead. Father I pray that even in this moment there might be a confession to Christ. Someone who would say, because I have made this commitment or because there is a commitment I want to make that I want to let it be known today. Father I commit this time of decision and invitation to you in Jesus' name. Amen.

I want you to look up here with me if you will, for just a moment. We are going to close the service by standing to sing a song of invitation. The invitation is that today if you have prayed to receive Christ, today if you want to know more about how to follow Christ, being identified publicly in the waters of baptism, being identified with Christ through church membership, if we can help you in one of those areas, I just want to ask you from wherever you are in this building in a minute, when we stand, to just slip to the end of the aisle to the steps or to the aisleway and to make your way right here to the front. Our pastors are going to be hosts just to meet you here. We are not going to turn you around, point you out publicly, we are not going to embarrass you, we just want to gather you that we might share with you and help you in a spiritual decision this morning. So wherever you may be today I want to ask you to do what may have been the hardest thing your feet have ever had to do but what may be the greatest reflection of what is happening in your heart and with your mouth this morning. It won't be just talk it will be walk in this moment as you follow Jesus Christ.

Let's stand to our feet together. Please no one leaving unless it is an absolute emergency. Let's sing. Let's come. Pastors, you be here to help me to stand with these as they come and make decisions for Christ today.

Just come. Maybe as a Christian you need to come and kneel at the altar and say, God, I have had a critical time. I have devoured and destroyed people's lives with my tongue. Deliver me, oh God. Let there be brokenness in your life and in your heart. Let God heal you and renew you and restore you. Will you come? God bless you. Surely there is another and another who needs to come.

Lord, I just want to say thank you for these who have come. Thank you, Lord, for the visible evidence of you working and moving and touching hearts today. Lord, thank you for many others who have lifted their hands, who are at a point of decision and need guidance and direction. Father, I pray the wicked one would not steal the seed that has been implanted this morning but that Lord, it will take root and grow fruit in their life. Father, we celebrate with joy your love and your grace, your power, and your presence in this place this morning. Lord, we want to go from this place as we are not to be the same, to go forth confessing salvation in Jesus Christ in works and in words that the world may

know that Jesus lives and that he lives in us. We pray in his wonderful name today.
Amen.

Sermon presented by David McKinley
2/28/99