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# [Week 6] War of Words - Following The King for All the Wrong Reasons Manuscript

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# Introduction

Good morning and welcome to the 6th class in this AM seminar series, *War of Words*. If this is your first time joining us, we are glad that you are here. This AM seminar series aims to show us how the gospel transforms our talk. If you are like me, without a doubt you have been injured by words and you have also injured others by words. Whether it is a hurtful remark, a white lie, a strong rebuke, gossip, slander, flattery, blasphemy, mockery or disrespect, our speech has often failed to mirror God’s perfect purposes for it. Our words have been used as weapons to bring others down while selfishly propping ourselves up. We use words to advance ourselves at the expense of others. But this doesn’t have to be the case. The gospel offers us a way of escape through Christ. And so, this seminar aims to provide a gospel-based solution that gets to the heart of our communication problems – which is our hearts; as it is said, the problem of the heart is the heart of the problem. So do not think of these classes as a quick fix to our communication problems. These are not classes to train on how to speak with the right tone or use the right vocabulary. As important as those skills might be, they are inconsequential in producing a heart that flows out with life. In Luke 6:45, Jesus teaches that *“out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”* And so our aim ought to be a transformed heart that produces a transformed speech; otherwise it would be hypocritical to have polished speech and not a polished heart. Therefore as we go through these classes, ask yourself, *“How can I, by the grace of God, develop a heart that reflects the beauty of Christ – A heart that flows out with life that is seen in how we talk?”* It is to this question that these classes are designed.

And so last week, we started the second part of the series, *A New Agenda for our Talk*. We said that this section aims to spell out God’s grand plan for our talk. It seeks to put before us a biblical vision for our talk that we can aim toward by the grace of God. We also started out by saying that understanding God’s grand plan for our speech begins by understanding and loving His sovereignty. If you will recall, this was the main point of last week’s class.

[Perhaps even before we dive into today’s class, we could hear from a few of us on some of the highlights from last week’s class. What stood out to you from learning about the sovereignty of God and our speech? *\*Give time for a few people to* ***respond***]

Thank you all for your responses. So important to our communication is grasping the sovereignty of God that we will learn about it again today. We will however look at it from a different angle. Last week we looked at the subject of sovereignty positively in the sense that God is actively and presently ruling over all things in our lives (and even outside our lives) for His glory and pleasure. Today we will consider the topic in negative terms: we are NOT sovereign over our lives. If last week’s class was *He [Christ] is King*, today’s class is: *we are NOT*. There is benefit in understanding the sovereignty and ruleship of God by looking at it negatively through the lenses of how we are not sovereign. On your handouts, the class is titled: *Following The King for All the Wrong Reasons*. What this seeks to convey is that one can sadly be in a state of deception where they affirm God’s sovereignty, yet in practice live as though they are sovereign. Yes, they will follow the King and even acknowledge Him as King… but only to the extent that the King serves their purposes and dreams. In this case, who is ruling who? Who is calling the shots? An honest reflection will reveal that more often than not, we say that God is calling the shots but in reality He only calls the shots as far as our “rule”, agenda and purposes will allow. In theory, He is King. In practice, we are King. And so, we follow Him [Christ] to establish our rule rather than His. We follow Him for the wrong reasons.

And so, our class today will help highlight some of these wrong reasons and how they affect our communication. The hope is that the Lord will help us to repent from these wrong reasons and instead cause us to entrust ourselves much deeper to His sovereign rule. (DISCLAIMER: the class may initially seem like it has nothing to do with the War of Words but at the conclusion all that will be mentioned in the class will be related to our speech)

And so let us dive into it by considering the passage in John 6 that reveals to us two kinds of bread, which is the second point in our handout *[Have someone read from* ***verse 11-15*** *and* ***25-36****]*

# Two Kinds of Bread

***John 6:11–15 (ESV)***

*[11] Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. [12] And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.” [13] So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. [14] When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”*

*[15] Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.*

***John 6:25–36 (ESV)***

*“[25] When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” [26] Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. [27]* ***Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.*** *For on him God the Father has set his seal.” [28] Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” [29] Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” [30] So they said to him, “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? [31] Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” [32] Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. [33] For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” [34] They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”*

*[35] Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. [36] But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.”*

What do we notice from the first portion of the text, vs 11-15?

1. Jesus fed a crowd that followed him because of the signs of healing they saw Him perform. We can see this earlier in the text in verse 2: *“And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick.”*
2. The people then ate physical bread *“... to their fill” [Verse 12]* such that they filled twelve baskets with fragments of the loaves left over (Vs 13)
3. In vs 14 it seems as though they understand the purpose of the signs of the healings earlier and even more specifically the sign of the loaves of bread. They even make a true confession about Jesus, *“[14] When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!””* (The Prophet Moses says will come in Deut 18:15 – The Messiah)
4. In vs 15, they want to make Jesus King forcefully and submit to His rule but Jesus withdraws.

It is easy to imagine that Jesus would be thrilled that the people He has come to redeem finally recognize His Messiah-ship. Contrary to this Jesus withdraws from them because he sees right through them.

In the next section that follows, vs 25-36, the crowd goes to much trouble in seeking Jesus such that they get on boats to follow Him, only for Jesus to expose their warped motives. Notice vs 26, *“... Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.”* Then in the next verse he tells them, ***“[27] Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.”***

What is Jesus doing here? Two things: (1) He wants them to know that it is not their knowledge that He is the Messiah that motivated them to follow Him; rather it is their hungry stomachs. (2) He introduces them to spiritual Bread which endures forever as what they should be desiring ultimately. Further on in vs 35, Jesus makes it explicit that He is the Spiritual Bread – The Bread of Life. This is what the sign of the loaves was to point to. The people interpreted the sign as meaning that they will never go hungry again physically. Perhaps they even thought that they can be saving on costs because they now have one who can provide an endless supply of bread. And so, these people were not seeking Christ out of a humble submission to his messiahship and a willingness to follow Him wherever He would lead. Their pursuit of Christ was born instead out of a love for self and the hope that Jesus would be the one who would meet their felt needs. They were excited about following the King – but for all the wrong reasons.

Well, before we wonder what is wrong with these people, let us remember that we are not any different from these people. Many of us respond to Jesus in the same way. What moves and motivates everything we do is not a submission to God’s will and a burning desire for His glory, but our own set of personal dreams and desires. We are excited about the King because we see Him as the most efficient delivery system for those dreams. Jesus is our personal “Genie-in-a-bottle” ready to grant us what we want. Jesus is a means to an end.

This is quite heavy to hear: that we can be making a true profession of Jesus by our lips and even going to a lot of trouble to follow Him, only to find that it is our own desires and felt needs that have pushed us towards Christ.

*[Perhaps as we ruminate on this we could benefit from hearing from each other some initial reflection on this. Any comments or questions from what has been shared? Also, in what ways do we see this posture of pursuing physical bread in our lives today?]*

Thank you for your responses. Next we will consider…

# Physical Bread and Spiritual Deception

The term *“physical bread”* refers to more than actual bread. It is symbolic of our felt needs. It is symbolic of things in the created order that are actually good and improve our state of living. Some examples are: a dream job, a friendship restored, a romantic relationship, well-mannered children, an economic state, good grades at school… The list is endless.

The struggle of which bread holds our deepest affections is a core struggle of the Christian life. Forsaking our pursuit of physical bread in favor of spiritual bread that endures forever is a life-long battle. Sin in the world and in us makes us short-sighted in our thinking. The Devil likewise is always spewing his deception to have us devalue spiritual bread and prize physical bread. In this section we will consider 4 subtle and persuasive lies on physical bread that seek to ensnare us in its pursuit. We will consider these lies through the parable of the Rich Fool. Let us read Luke 12:13-23

***Luke 12:15–23 (ESV)***

*[15] And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” [16] And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, [17] and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ [18] And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. [19] And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ [20] But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ [21] So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”*

*[22] And he said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. [23] For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.*

1. Lie 1: Physical things are permanent

The parable of the rich fool is a classic example of what it means to stake our entire existence in what is passing away. The man lives to store up physical riches so that he can enjoy them later in his retirement. Lo and behold! The owner of his life, The Lord requires his soul even before he gets a chance to enjoy his stored up possessions. Neither him nor his possessions are permanent. They will all pass away.

In many ways we live like the Rich Fool, who thinks that he will live forever (or at least until the time he desires) and his possessions will be sufficient to sustain him. The testimony of nature and the scripture show otherwise. Consider what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2:16-18:

***2 Corinthians 4:16–18 (ESV)***

*[16] So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. [17] For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, [18] as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

John further on says in his epistle that  *“the world is passing away along with its desires…”* (1 John 2:17). So this is why Christ tells us to *“provide ourselves with money bags that don’t grow old, a treasure in heaven that does not fail.”* (Lk 12:33) In other words, let your investment be in that which is eternal.

1. Lie 2: Physical bread is the only bread

The lifestyle of the Rich Fool seemed to suggest that only physical wealth mattered. There was absolute disregard for the spiritual wealth, being rich toward God who made his soul. In vs 23 Jesus affirms that *“ life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.”* (Luke 12:23 ESV)

1. Lie 3: Human success is defined by the amount of physical bread one possesses

In Verse 18 the Rich fool said, “*‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.”* So consumed by his possessions was this man that he tore down his store houses to build bigger ones for the purpose of amassing more wealth.

Consider what Christ says, *“what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?”* (Matthew 16:26 ESV) True wealth is being rich toward God. True success is having treasure in heaven. Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell his possessions, give to the poor and he will have treasure in heaven (Matt 19:20-22). Success is not a life of amassing property, popularity, positions and power. Success is a life of giving away property, forsaking popularity, relinquishing positions and using our power in the humble service of God and fellow men. This is storing up treasures in heaven.

1. Lie 4: Life is found in physical bread

This is the lie of all lies. In verse 15 of Luke 12, Jesus says, *“Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”* Feeding on physical bread will only lead to more hunger. It is only when we feed on Christ by faith that we can be truly satisfied. John 1:4 testifies of Christ as the one in whom there is Life. In John 4:13-14, Jesus says that the water he gives is able to permanently quench thirst and even be a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

And so, in what ways have our lives been marked by these lies? It is so easy to believe that nothing satisfies like romantic love. It is easy to believe that your life is only meaningful when you’re pursuing a particular career or living out your idea of “your purpose”. It is so easy to imagine that the status of being a parent is the highest prestige in the world especially if God is yet to bless you with children. It is so easy to be caught up in the pursuit of our idols of luxury and comfort. It is so easy to be intoxicated with rage and a need for vengeance, thinking that hurting those who hurt us will somehow be the healing to our wounds. It is so easy to pursue physical bread that perishes.

And it is on the basis of some of these lies that we pursue Christ. We come to church not to seek Christ, but a suitable mate. We seek for ways to plug into fellowships not to grow in our knowledge of Christ, but to network and expand our customer base. We listen to sermons not to be transformed by the Word, but to use it as a weapon against our spouses or children when we get back home. We enthusiastically follow the King – but for all the wrong reasons.

And so I ask, Which bread are you pursuing? Is Christ truly King in your heart or is he simply a means to an end that you want? The truth is that our lives will be shaped by what bread we pursue. If we hunger after physical bread we will surely perish together with the bread. But if we hunger and thirst for righteousness, if we hunger for Christ we will be satisfied.

What does it mean to pursue Spiritual Bread daily? What does it mean to have Christ truly reign in our hearts in the present? Consider the 4th point in our handouts…

# Christ The King – The Bread of Life

Let us read 1 Peter 1:3-9

***1 Peter 1:3–5 (ESV)***

*[3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [4] to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, [5] who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time…*

This is wonderful news, right? Peter talks about how we have been saved and how there is an inheritance waiting for us. Until this point, notice, Peter has talked about our past (being saved by God in Christ) and our future inheritance. But what about the present? Let us read on till verse 9 …

***1 Peter 1:6–9 (ESV)***

*[6] In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, [7] so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. [8] Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, [9] obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

So what is happening in the present? Various trials are grieving our souls for the purpose of our faith being tested and tried in order to be found to be true. What is the point being made here? The point is this: To be under the rule of Christ is to recognize that God is willing and ready to compromise on the creature comforts and pleasures to produce in us genuine faith. This is his ultimate goal for us: the salvation of our souls; conformity to Christ. Therefore, God will bring all manner of trials and tribulations our way with this aim in mind. And so instead of asking God, “Why me?” in the face of trials, our response ought to be, “Thank you God, I want more of your salvation.” The struggles we face are not mistakes, they are tokens of God’s redemptive love toward us.

As shocking as this may sound, this is what it means for Christ to rule over us. We follow him in joy and we follow him in sorrow because we know that true peace is not the absence of conflict, it is not the absence of pain or suffering. True peace is Christ. And just in the same way one cannot fully appreciate the beauty of the stars and the moon during the day when the sun is blazing, so it is with the joy and satisfaction that comes from being in Christ. When the joys of physical bread are shining brightly, seeing the beauty of spiritual bread becomes impossible to see. Therefore, God in His love dims the shine of the physical bread that we may see him as the true Spiritual Bread that satisfies and endures forever. A time is coming when we will not need to see the beauty of Christ through the lenses of suffering for our faith will become sight. But until then, God has apportioned for all his children trials whose goal is to conform us to Christ-likeness. How else will we emulate Christ in the way he did not revile back when he was reviled if we are not reviled ourselves? How else will we emulate Christ in praying for those who persecuted him if we ourselves are not persecuted? If we suffer with him it is certain that we will be glorified with Him. Amen.

This indeed is a hard saying to take in. The idols of our hearts are frantically fighting the Lordship of Jesus as we speak. No king is dethroned without waging a war. Therefore, wage war with your idols. This is why the seminar is aptly titled the *War of Words*. Following Jesus is a war – a war against our idols of self.

Perhaps you are here and you were not expecting to hear this this morning. You are not alone. The disciples of Jesus stood where you are standing. The 5th point on your handouts…

# Disillusioned Disciples

Going back to where we started the class with the feeding of the crowd, we noticed the disillusionment that struck the disciples when Jesus taught that He was the bread of life. Turn back to John 6. Notice vs 51…

***John 6:51–52 (ESV)***

*[51] I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”[52] The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”*

Drop down to vs 60…

***John 6:60–61 (ESV)***

*[60] When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” [61] But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, “Do you take offense at this?*

Last of all notice vs 66…

***John 6:66–67 (ESV)***

*[66] After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. [67] So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?”*

Many of those who followed Jesus for physical bread turned back and followed him no longer. Maybe you are here this morning and this describes you. You have seen the demand it takes to follow Jesus and you are considering turning back. Let me encourage you by letting you know the physical bread you are after is not worth it. Jesus the Bread of Life is able to make up a thousand times over for what is lacking in physical bread. May your response be like that of Peter in vs 68, there is nowhere else to go for Christ has the Words of eternal life.

# Conclusion: Transforming Our Talk

So what has all this to do with our talk? As we conclude we will consider 2 major points:

1. Grumbling will cease as thanksgiving increases. Whatever circumstances we find ourselves in will not be an opportunity to complain and ask “why me?”. Rather it will be a cause to celebrate in praise and thanksgiving that one has the opportunity to participate in the sufferings of Christ.
2. Selfishness will cease as selflessness will dominate. Unity in a church in pursuing Christ's dream will prevail. Unity in marriage and with family will prevail pursuing Christ’s dream. Quarrels that emerge from pursuing our own physical bread will subside.

**Getting Personal: Getting to the Heart of Your Talk**

How well can you tell what is really ruling your heart? Ask yourself these questions:

1. What happens to my prayers and my talk about God when I don't get what I want?
2. How do I speak to others when they seem to stand in the way of my dream?
3. What happens to my talk when circumstances are difficult and unpleasant?
4. What happens to my talk when I see others blessed while I struggle?
5. How much do my prayers focus on the deeper heart changes that God is working within me and the wider concerns of his kingdom work?
6. How much does my talk express a spirit of thankfulness and contentment?
7. Do my words encourage others to put their trust and rest in the Lord?
8. How often is grumbling and complaining a regular part of my everyday conversation?
9. Does my speech evidence gentleness, kindness, and patience?
10. Is my communication infected with demanding, critical, impatient, accusatory, or condemning words?
11. What happens to my talk when others sin against me?
12. What happens when my prayers are not answered as I would expect?
13. As I seek to humbly answer these questions, what dreams of my heart are revealed? What do I do with them?