**Psalm 12: The Lord Keeps.**

At primary school, some of my classmates used to say, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.”

It stuck with me because it was not true: sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can cut to the heart.

We all know the power of words. Power for great good and power for terrible evil.

Our new Prime Minister Keir Starmer, in his first speech after winning the election, spoke about how “the fight for trust is the battle that defines our age.”

We live in a world of untruth and insincerity, of speech used to manipulate, of words used to snatch things from others.

We see it on the school playground, we see it in our governments, we see it on our TV screens and on social media, we see it in our offices, and in our homes, and in our church.

And before we start yearning for the ‘good old days’ we have to remember that this is not just a modern phenomenon.

David wrote Psalm 12 many centuries ago, but it could have been written this very week. It’s a lament – a cry of anguish and pain in the midst of a lying world. A cry to God for help.

And a cry that is answered. And as we shall see, words can bring great good, bearing hope and joy and promise.

Three things come out. Let’s look at them in turn.

1. **David’s prayer v1-4**

This Psalm starts sharply!

“Save, O LORD!”

Why? David looks around and feels like he is all alone.

V1. “The godly one is gone / the faithful have vanished from among the children of man.”

Whether they’ve been killed off, or whether they’ve been seduced and given up, we don’t know. But we do know that David feels like he’s on his own.

What’s going on?

Look at v.2.

“Everyone utters lie to his neighbour.” The Hebrew poetry calls them empty words.

They speak (2b) “with flattering lips” - the Hebrew poetry says smooth words – and with “a double heart” – they say one thing but mean another.

David is surrounded by people who manipulate each other with their mouths – using their words to gain things from each other.

* Lying, twisting, speaking words empty of truth;
* Saying flattering thing to a person’s face in order to gain something from them;
* Saying one thing, but actually meaning something else entirely…

David’s in danger so he cries out: v1, “Save, O LORD!”

It’s short, it’s sharp, there are no pleasantries here, no religious words – literally just HELP!

But David doesn’t stop there – he cries out (v3) “May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts…”

He’s not calling for some form of grotesque mutilation. This is poetry, and the flattering lips and boasting tongues are poetic ways of referring to people who have flattering lips and boasting tongues.

David is asking God to rescue by judging those who are manipulating others with empty, smooth and deceptive words.

He’s asking God to remove these people – to cut them out from his people with force in an almighty show of justice.

Which all sounds a bit extreme, doesn’t it? I mean – these are only words, right?

James 3:5 – 8 talks about the tongue.

**3:5b** How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!

**3:6** And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.

**3:7** For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind,

**3:8** but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words don’t just cut to the heart. They can set the forest on fire. They can poison whole communities.

Look down to Psalm 12:4 –

“With our tongue we will prevail / our lips are with us; who is master over us?”

These people are arrogant, boastful – and v.5, they plunder the poor, they make the needy groan.

These are not “just words” that are spoken – these empty, smooth, tricksy words are weaponised. The downtrodden in society are being trodden down even more.

Did you spot the arrogance – “With our tongue we will prevail … who is master over us?”

David is the King at the time – and yet these people think they’re in control, that they’ll get away with it.

“Our lips are with us” – they will just talk our way out of it.

This could all have been written in our day and age.

Back in 2017 we were introduced to the phrase “alternative facts” by Kellyanne Conway who was then Counsellor to President Trump. A few days beforehand, Sean Spicer, White House Press Secretary had described the crowd at Trump’s inauguration as being greater in number than that at Obama’s.

During a later interview, Conway was asked why the White House Press Secretary would "utter a provable falsehood", to which Conway replied that he was giving "alternative facts".

But let’s not beat up on them – because it happens in the UK as well.

The stoking and stirring up of numbers and twisting of facts to create a hysteria around those seeking asylum here – some of whom are here amongst us.

We join - rightly – with David and say, “Lord, please uphold justice – save us and our country from those who use their words to manipulate and gain power. Please right the wrongs and help us!”

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But it’s not just out there that this happens is it?

* Flattering words we’ve spoken in the workplace to make things a bit easier for us, or to get that promotion.
* Lies we’ve told to protect ourselves.
* Clever, deceptive spoken to make it a bit better for us in our friendships, our families, our marriages, our gospel teams.

James 3:9 continues, and we see our own tongues in the reflection:

**3:9** With [our tongue] we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.

**3:10** From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers [and sisters], these things ought not to be so.

This isn’t just an out-there problem. It’s ours too.

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The great cry of our age is that, when we’re faced with power plays like we’re reading about here, we should just reject anyone who claims to speak truth – how can we trust them? What are they trying to do to us?

That’s the way many feel towards politicians. People who say, “I don’t vote, I can’t trust them – they are all a bunch of liars.”

And that’s the way many feel towards church. Perhaps it’s been your experience?

What’s really interesting is that in this Psalm, the people who are using their words in this destructive way are probably God’s people.

And what David does here is turn to God – and say, ‘God, rescue me, right these wrongs.’

And God gloriously replies.

1. **The LORD’s promise v5-6**

The Lord hears David and speaks to him.

**Psalm 11:5** “Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan, I will now arise,” says the LORD; / “I will place him in the safety for which he longs.”

Those who speak with flattering lips and boasting tongues believed that they were the masters of their own destiny – “who is master over us?”

But here the true Master speaks.

They thought they were gods of their own existence, but now the God of the universe speaks.

He will act “because the poor are plundered, because the needy [including David] groan.”

The LORD says, “I will now arise” and “I will place him [the poor and the needy and David] in the safety for which he longs.” -- that safety that he cried out for at the very start of our Psalm.

We’re not told what that will look like – but God promises that it will happen: ‘he will do these things…’

And here’s the thing: the LORD’s words are utterly different to those other words spoken to David.

Have a look at v.6.

**12:6** The words of the LORD are pure words,

 like silver refined in a furnace on the ground,

 purified seven times.

In the ancient world, silver was mined out of the ground where it was often found in lead ore.

This lead ore, with silver in it, was then smelted - heated - repeatedly in furnaces, where the silver would be separated from the lead.

As you did this heating over and over, you would increase the purity of the silver as all the impurities were removed. What would be left at the end is pure, precious silver.

V6 talks about purifying that silver seven times over. That’s a poetic way of saying it’s been done completely. This silver is completely perfect. Absolutely pure.

That’s what the LORD’s words are like: they’re pure.

We need to be careful to not misread this verse.

The LORD’s words don’t need purification like dirty silver! No, we don’t need to filter out and improve things that God has said. No, they have always been and always will be like perfectly purified silver.

The people around David spoke words that were dirty with lies, flattery and insincerity, but the LORD’s words – these promises he has just made to arise and rescue – are perfect and pure and good.

The people around David made arrogant boasts about what they could do and that no one could stop them. The LORD’s words – these promises he has just made – they are the words of him who can do all things, who can keep the promises he makes.

But more than that – these pure words are precious.

V5 talk about how the poor are plundered by those who use their tongues to prevail. But those who hear and receive the promises of the LORD are rich beyond comparison.

The LORD’s silver words, as pure as silver purified seven times over, are infinitely precious.

They’re infinitely precious because of whom they promise.

2 Corinthians 1:20a says, “For all the promises of God find their Yes in [Jesus Christ].”

You see, Jesus Christ is the Word of God.

In Jesus Christ, God kept his promise and arose.

In Jesus Christ, God kept his promise and placed us in the safety for which we long.

Jesus came, and like David and like us, walked amongst people who used their tongues to try and trick him and manipulate and catch him out. Behind all that lying stood Satan, the Father of lies (John 8:44).

Psalm 12 was written by David, but it was sung by our Lord Jesus Christ.

At Jesus’ arrest, everyone fled from him. Just like David said in v.1, the faithful had vanished from around Jesus. He stood alone.

At Jesus’ trial, the authorities lied and spoke empty words, spoke smooth words, spoke with double truth to try and catch him out.

“Who is master over us?” they asked. “King of the Jews!? We have no king but Caesar,” they said.

Outside in the courtyard, Peter, Jesus’ great follower, spoke with a double heart, with flattering lips, and uttered a lie: “No, I don’t know Jesus.”

That’s where we are in this Psalm – we’re with Peter. Peter who often didn’t have control of his mouth. Peter who messed up.

We’re on the wrong side of this Psalm. We have all used our tongues in ways that we shouldn’t.

But wonderfully, the Lord Jesus’ silver words *are words of grace*.

On the cross, Jesus spoke these silver words: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34)

And so, like Peter we are not cut off. Even though we deserve it.

On Easter Sunday, the Lord Jesus did not arise from the tomb in judgment, but he arose with forgiveness on his lips.

Peter may have used his tongue to disown Jesus, but those same words that Jesus spoke to Peter, he speaks to you again this morning: words of welcome, words of forgiveness, words of mercy and words of a fresh start – words of grace.

And because he spoke those words, we know that we will be placed in the safety for which we long.

All God’s promises are yes and amen in Jesus.

Isn’t that good news – words of pure and precious silver!

1. **The Lord Jesus Keeps v7-8**

This morning, the Lord asks us through this Psalm, “Who will you listen to?”

David answers in v.7. And this is our third point.

“You, O LORD, will keep them.”

You, O LORD, will keep your promises – those silver words of mercy spoken, those pure promises that are yes and amen in Jesus. You, O Lord, will keep your promises.

Though I might be surrounded by lying lips, though I am in the minority, though I groan in my neediness, You O LORD will keep me.

“You will guard us from this generation forever.”

But look at v.8, the situation does not change.

**12:8** On every side the wicked prowl,

 as vileness is exalted among the children of man.

We’re back in v.1. The situation is the same. Or is it?

David steps out – we step out of here – resting in these silver words that the LORD has spoken.

Though the wicked prowl, though wickedness is exalted, we can be confident in the Lord’s pure promises that we have been placed in safety in the Lord Jesus. We are guarded in him.

Though plundered and groaning, we can be confident because we are rich beyond all measure because we’ve heard the Lord’s pure and precious voice.

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Who will you listen to this week?

V6. “The Words of the LORD are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace of the ground, purified seven times.”

Hear those words:

V5. In Jesus Christ, I have arisen – I have placed you in him in the safety for which you long.

All my promises are yes and amen in Jesus Christ.