

Series: Ruin to Renovation	Reference: Proverbs 4:23	Title: Beyond Within	Date: 01.14.18
Website Writeup: Proverbs 4:23 urges us to watch over our hearts (our thoughts), since our life is shaped by it (them). How important this is for us in this day & age, as it has always been, let's explore this idea further today.			

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-SLIDE PERSON: PLEASE RECORD THE SERMON-

Proverbs 4:23, *“Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.” (NASB)*

Sometimes it's good to read a verse in numerous translations, it gives a more well-rounded meaning.

The NIV says it this way, *“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”*

The ERV, *“Above all, be careful what you think because your thoughts control your life.”*

Or this, *“Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts.” (GNT)*

Or, *“Be very careful about what you think. Your thoughts run your life.” (ICB)*

Or, *Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life. (NLT)*

These various translations help us to remember what we've said in the past that our mind & heart are one & the same. The mind is the seat of emotion & logic, desire & reason. Heart & thought, synonymous - to guard your heart, you guard your thinking.

So to begin with today, let's wrap our mind around this verse by saying it slowly & prayerfully phrase by phrase, meditating quietly over each element...(pray).

Last week we looked specifically at John 4:13-14, *“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”*

And John 7:37-38 *“...Let anyone who is thirsty come to me & drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.”*

We talked about how we can increasingly live in wholeness, holiness & kingdom power. There's no reason we should walk in despair, fear, or defeat. Rather, a life overflowing with Christ is attainable, with victory over sin & circumstance available to us who follow Jesus with a whole heart. Believing with full assurance He's the Source of life & living water welling up within us.

Jesus refers to Living Water welling up in our heart & mind, flowing outward to attitudes & actions towards others & the environment around us. We live from our heart, or out of it, we might say. It's not the physical which drives us, but our heart

drives & organizes life; our thought. It's true of all people everywhere at any point in time - we have a spirit within us which has been formed, and is always being formed. And in that, we take on a certain character.

Character's formed by all the various choices large & small, and the experiences we undergo as a result of those choices. So, in talking about our spirit, will, or heart, we must realize, where we find ourselves in life, and how we view reality, including our future, is almost totally a result of who, or what we've become in our character. What we've become in our inner being. How our heart has been formed. We share a world view as Western Americans, there's some groupthink which happens. However, from each of our unique character perspectives we interpret reality individually.

Always interpreting everything which comes at us, and as we do, we make further choices committing to certain actions trying always to alter our reality if we feel it doesn't suit us. We operate out of this almost without thinking about it...we don't understand our own hearts. We don't think about why or how we think, or many times what's best to think, although our heart is setting our life's course all the time. We many times don't intentionally drink the water Jesus offers, rather only that of which we provide ourselves unwittingly. We don't let him define our reality. It's as if we float on the ocean of culture in the boat of our thinking without oars, steering or engine - blown & tossed by every wave & current. But in the Scriptures & this intimate tie with Jesus, we have an outboard engine to navigate culture & get us to our desired designation, and we still don't use them.

This is why Jeremiah 17:9 says, *"The heart is deceitful above all things & beyond cure. Who can understand it?"* The human heart is a touchy complex thing. It's both wonderful & deceitful at the same time. You'll hear the wise person say, "I don't trust myself," in any given situation where they know their desire may take control rather than logic. I don't trust myself around potato chips. Someone may not trust themselves around alcohol, or with someone of the opposite sex. We are fearfully & wonderfully made, creatures which can think through our own thinking! Evaluate ourselves!

So, Proverbs instructs to *watch over your heart with all diligence*. And Jeremiah says the heart's deceitful above all things - but *from it flow the springs of life*. In other words, from it flow all the course setting & direction for present & future. That can be a fulfilling life, if our hearts are tended rightly under the guidance of the Holy Spirit & governed by the directional Word of God. Or, it can lead us astray if we don't practice self-restraint, allowing our hearts to be governed by unchecked desire.

The good news is that Jesus has 'justified' us by his work on the cross. A legal term meaning he's paid our debt before the Judge. A debt we were unable to pay, because like Jeremiah says, our hearts are beyond cure. So no matter where our deceitful hearts have led us before, Jesus' death has paid the necessary price for those infractions against God's perfect & holy Law.

And as we're justified, Jesus gives us a new heart (the engine in our boat); the ability to walk with him in the victory we've mentioned. But living in this interim time of the

Already & Not Yet, we do battle with our sinful nature which still holds residence in our weak frames.

Which means, as we're justified positionally with Jesus, we're also set on a path of sanctification, or spiritual transformation. And that's a path on which we must engage with Jesus. Taking our hearts back to Jesus, our thoughts captive to him for full direction in life. But many don't. They may be *at peace* with Jesus, but aren't in the habit of living *in peace* with Him. He becomes fire insurance, not Lord.

This line of thinking can be seen in CS Lewis's oft-quoted words: *"It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink, sex & ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what's meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We're far too easily pleased."*

Most Christians spend their lives making mud-pies in the slum instead of following Jesus into a wonderful holiday at the beach. And we wonder why we lack peace, or are stressed, depressed, and overwhelmed.

When we say our reality is dictated by our heart, formed into a character which makes choices & takes on actions in this world...it implies responsibility. Could we even go so far as saying the disasters, both individual & collective, which fill the human landscape aren't just imposed upon us from without - that they don't just happen to us?

Yes. If you think through it, almost all things humankind experiences in this world are a direct result of human choice - which are all expressions of our spirit. Famine. War. Epidemics. Economic instability. Even our climate is vastly affected by human choice. The Dustbowl which added a great deal of burden during the Great Depression was largely due to over-farming; human choice.

We see this choice & consequence on the corporate level. Political parties generate more extreme candidates given their reaction to the extremes of the other side. Compromise & camaraderie lost. Both sides have closed their ears to the other, increasing polarity & as a result people make choices which the other side has somehow forced them to make.

But this is the way fo the world. Hearts reacting. Making choices. Governed by desire. Setting course. Affecting everyone & everything. Trying to control our destiny, but in reality just letting life happen to us. Reacting. It's false-intelligence. The deceived hearts of mankind who think they're thinking, but in actuality are just caught up in the current of culture & the violence of its speech. And Satan, the father of lies, stands on his conductors stand before it all with a grin on his face directing everything to culminate in an inevitable clash which could've been avoided by responding to Jesus.

This is why Christians are called the salt of the world. We're the bearer of the thoughts of God; which is the heart of God. Which is what preserves & nourishes life.

This choice & consequence can be seen on the individual level. For instance, when I was younger people might've said, "Trouble follows that kid around." Notice how that's said,

as if I weren't responsible for the trouble I found myself in; as if Murphy's Law had just set upon my life. But the truth of the matter was, I wasn't walking with Jesus at a young age, and my heart led me into situations where trouble was readily available, came at a discount & I had a pocket full of money to spend.

My demeanor, persona, or how I carried myself, invited trouble. My knee-jerk responses to situations & people invited it. My impatient selfish heart invited it. The places I put myself in, rife with it. I could blame everyone else, the cops, authority, girlfriends & enemies, but I made my decisions & was responsible for them. Does that absolve anyone else of their responsibility if they reacted badly towards me? No. But their behavior doesn't absolve me of the consequences of my choices either. This absence of personal responsibility is quickly being lost in society, and as soon as it is, anarchy is only left.

We saw this choice & consequence in the 1987 movie *Fatal Attraction* starring Glenn Close & Michael Douglas, the movie which scared the pants off of every man in America. A married man cheats on his wife with a woman who refuses to allow him to use then forget her. She becomes his living nightmare tormenting him & threatening to tell his wife. It doesn't end well for either...the heart led to choices, choices led to consequences.

We see it in the parent who can't seem to control their child. They say things like, "Well, he's just high-strung. There's no controlling him." But there's little discipline, nor direction, going on in the household. Tired parents, exhausted because the system they've created chips away at their resolve & wears them out further. They're caught in the cycle they created. They simply overlook a child's bad behavior, given they don't want to deal, which just adds to the problem. Angry outbursts & lofty threats proclaimed, but a child knows, wait a few minutes & threats prove empty. Mom or Dad won't follow through. Or, one parent largely checks out overwhelming the spouse.

Largely this dilemma in parenting has come about in recent history in the thought that punitive measures, or strong boundaries, are harmful, or too limiting to a child, when in reality they aren't. In comes Super Nanny to the rescue, building a whole business on telling & modeling to parents commonsense notions which have been expressed in the Scriptures & Christian households for centuries.

As Proverbs 13:24 teaches, *Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them.* In the end parents making choices based in fear, or worldly wisdom disregarding God's directive wisdom, end up doing harm to their children in an effort not to do harm to their children - their own hearts have deceived them.

Many of our heart issues in life are like keeping your walkway clear in a blizzard. If you periodically clear it throughout the storm, it's manageable. But if you just sit inside ignoring it, then try to shovel snow drifts 4 feet high later when it's wet & heavy, you have a heart attack, or throw out your back. We'd like to blame the outside world for most of what we suffer under, but the truth is most of what we suffer under is self-inflicted. *"Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life." Your thoughts shape your life.*

Sometimes trouble is simply a result of someone else. I innocently walk down Lancaster Ave., someone robs me at gunpoint & shoots me dead. I did nothing to invite that, however, it's still an issue of human choice on someone else's part (although we are really focusing on the choices we personally make today as it concerns our character). The Kingdom of God remember, is a kingdom of righteousness & justice, when it rules in a community peace reigns, given human choice concerning one another is one of love & care under the umbrella of God's character & values. Responsible Kingdom minded people don't rob others at gunpoint, and there's no reason to do so either...

But often times with people who aren't walking with Jesus we see the opposite, maybe not to the point of shooting someone in a robbery, but in violent, angry ways nonetheless. *We see it as written in James 4:1-3, What causes fights & quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel & fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

A picture of people who've not watched over their hearts with diligence. They've allowed life to just happen. They've not thought it through, and as a result their hearts are governed by desire, not Christ's character. Hearts governed only by desire & not Christ are damaging not only to self, but to others in community.

I love what Dallas Willard says concerning these issues... *"A carefully cultivated heart will, assisted by the grace of God, foresee, forestall, or transform most of the painful situations before which others stand like helpless children saying, 'Why?'"*¹ As our spiritual lives have been formed, no matter where we are, they can be transformed by the power of God. And in that transformation, we can stand strong in the face of adversity, and avoid much of the unnecessary pain which our hearts would normally lead us into.

Have you seen *The Last Jedi*, the very latest installment of the Star Wars series? If so, you would've seen Yoda burn up all the ancient Jedi religious texts. Then looking at Luke Skywalker he says something to the effect of, "Page-turners they were not. Wisdom they held, but that library contained nothing that the girl Rey does not already possess." And we're led to believe, at least in that moment, that Yoda believes the ancient texts only reveal what is already in our hearts (although we see later Rey has the texts).

But that would be very bad advice if I were to burn up my Bible on this stage & tell you that it's already within your hearts. It's not. Our first inclination is usually not the godly inclination. The Judeo-Christian belief system as based on Scripture is wholly & absolutely unique in comparison with all other religious thought. The idea of self-sacrifice, dying to self, losing your life to find it, a god who'd die for His creation, a god of grace & mercy, etc., are all counterintuitive ideas. All while retaining his lordship, and standards of holiness & purity. Human logic would not create a god-construct like this.

We call many of the books of the Old Testament 'Wisdom Literature' - but it's all wisdom literature. Remember Jesus revealed his devotion to the Scriptures by saying in

Matthew 5:17-18, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”

Remembering that, there’s a great passage in 1 Corinthians 1 which takes it further claiming Christ is the wisdom of God. A little lengthy but worth the read...

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”

20 Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

22 Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

26 Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.

27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him.

30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

The simple & honest pursuit of Christ brings with it the wisdom & power of God. If you wanted to know how a computer worked, you’d ask a computer programmer, or a manufacturer. You’d go straight to the source who created the machine & knows all it’s inner workings. The one person who could dispel the myths surrounding the machine. I was talking with someone once about my Phone, she was new to hers. My friend was standing there, who was an Apple employee. I said, “Isn’t it true that....” then I went off pontificating as if I knew something about the inner workings of the iPhone. He simply laughed & said, “Nope, that’s a common misbelief, here’s how it really works...” then explained how it really worked to us.

This is why Jesus directs in Mt 6:33, *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”* And in 7:24-27, *“Therefore everyone*

who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

Wisdom & life are there to be had in Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, and the revealed Word of God which Jesus embodies. We've all been formed by experience, philosophies, loved ones, friends, societies, gurus & shamans. The murderer, banker, drug addict, garbageman, accountant, mother & father, etc., all hearts/thoughts have been formed & for the most part not in the direction of God's character, but not necessarily all in bad ways.

Proverbs 4:23, *"Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life."* Life shaped by your thoughts. The good news is, that no matter how far we've gone down that road, just letting life happen to us, our hearts & thoughts can still be transformed into the likeness of Christ's character. God is pursuing you, wanting this for you. We simply must respond with true belief = faith followed by action (trust) = our obedience. We must choose healthy spiritually formative habits.

Simply put, we come to Jesus to drink Living Water (John 7:37-38). We spend time with him, we read his Word to us & follow the direction of His Spirit through the ministrations of the church body (Lectio Divina Journals/R2R guides/Books). We pray & don't demand, but seek guidance instead. When we disagree with His Word, we choose to believe he has the best in mind, and knows best for us & the world. And we make our choices & form our thoughts around him.

We follow the sound advice of Colossians 2:8, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ."

Followed by the sound advice of 2 Corinthians 10:5, *"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."*