

Diligent Defense for the Wellspring of Life

Proverbs 4:23

*Keep your **heart** with all vigilance, for from it flow the **springs of life**.*

Introduction: We often spend little time thinking about *why* people live in certain places or even *how* it's possible for a civilization to exist in a particular locale. We move into a house that has running water, electricity, and flush toilets (most of the time). But for most of history, in most places, issues of **defense and sustainability** dominated the consideration. That meant putting cities on an elevated site, with the ability to build walls around them, mounting a defense against any foe. In November, we are going to see this up close as we tour *ancient cities* in Israel, where archaeological digs have revealed that cities were not placed at random, but each had to meet strategic thresholds.

Beyond defensibility, perhaps the MOST IMPORTANT issue in an arid climate that lacked a plethora of rivers was to find a **water source**. Before aqueducts and pipelines, setting down a home without a water source created a non-tenable situation. What a place like Israel has, however, are natural **springs** that flow underground and provide life-giving water for consumption and farming. In fact, the city of **Jerusalem**, which is NOT by a major river, has such a spring, called the **Gihon Spring**, one that has flowed for thousands of years. Every civilization that possessed Jerusalem **guarded the spring** carefully. You'll remember when we studied 2 Samuel that the **Jebusites** had constructed a defense system around and above the spring, which David's men navigated (2 Sam. 5:8; 1 Chron. 11:6) and got access to the city and the place where David established the kingdom.

What does this have to do with Proverbs? By the time of the **Divided Kingdom** in Israel ---- after **722 B.C.** when Assyria finished their conquest of the 10 Northern Tribes of Israel and culminating in the destruction of Samaria --- the Southern Kingdom of Judah was weak. Idolatry, false worship, rebellion, and seeking help from foreign nations like Egypt dominated the king of Israel and Judah, and God continued to raise up enemies around them. But **Hezekiah** stood out as both a reformer and Godly leader. He got rid of idolatrous worship, trusted in the LORD, and held fast to Him (see 2 Kings 18:1-8). He decided to STOP PAYING ASSYRIA tribute, and trust the LORD, but this prompted **Sennacherib** to wage war against Judah. According to Assyrian records, he destroyed 46 walled cities (including the siege at Lachish --- with a siege ramp and sling stones found) and "caged Hezekiah up like a bird" in a siege of Jerusalem. (According to the *Taylor Prism* and *Lachish Relief*). It was here that Hezekiah's trust in the LORD and ingenuity shined through.

A siege's goal as to wait out a city, draining resources and forcing a surrender. Knowing this, Hezekiah knew that the vulnerability of Jerusalem was its water source. If Assyria could secure it, poison it, shut it off, or use it themselves, defeat would be swift. So Judah's brilliant and diligent engineers did the unthinkable ---- and unbelievable: in *short order*, they build a tunnel through rock, diverting the **Gihon Spring** INTO the city, flowing into the **Pool of Siloam** (where Jesus healed the man born blind in John 9:1-7). Starting on opposite sides, men dug the **1750-foot tunnel** that curved multiple times under the city (see pictures). All of this without modern sounding devices, the tunnel had a downward grade of only 12 inches, which meant the water would flow slowly but consistently. At the meeting spot, as axes clashed on the final swing, they put up an inscription stone (discovered in 1880 but dating back to **701 B.C**) commemorated the achievement.

Now, it is abundantly clear that God Himself had to deliver Hezekiah from Assyria, and did so in dramatic fashion ---- striking down **185,000** soldiers by the hand of the Angel of the Lord in a single night (2 Kings 19:35; Isa. 37:36) ---- but the fact that the Bible highlights the construction of the tunnel (2 Kings 20:20 2 Chron. 32:2-4) showed the importance of **guarding the Gihon spring: protect the spring, protect the whole city.**

This is an apt illustration of what we will be looking at this morning. We will not only look at **the nature of our heart, its condition and change needed, but we will contemplate why it's imperative that we PROTECT it at all cost.** Our goal is that you will not only see the importance of this protection but that you begin to commit to memory this verse that will remind you of the fight that is needed to ultimately do what we were designed for: *to love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind.* In order for that to happen, we must:

*Keep your **heart** with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.*
Proverbs 4:23

THE NATURE OF THE HEART

When God crafted mankind in His image (Gen. 1:26-28), He made us with both **material and immaterial parts.** We have physical, material parts like our organs and limbs that are used to glorify God, like obeying Him and lifting of holy hands (1 Tim. 2:8). But we also are made with the immaterial, non-physical parts that are also who we are. These are the parts that cannot be treated with medical breakthrough, but encompass our thoughts, emotions, conscience, and feelings. This is what the Bible references when it talks about worshipping God NOT only with our lips (physical) but our hearts (immaterial – Matt. 15:8; Isa. 29:13).

The Bible gives us a clear picture of the immaterial part of the **heart** and why it's so important. Our **MIND and HEART are very similar but distinctly different.** We love God with our minds when we love Him in the truth (John 4:24) and do what we've already seen in Proverbs, to be attentive to instruction and gaining insight so that we can grow in wisdom. The mind is the faculty of reasoning and understanding. It processes thoughts, beliefs, and worldviews. It involves intellectual cognition, analytical thought, and what you choose to dwell on. A believer's spiritual growth is heavily tied to renewing their way of thinking, as Romans 12:2 says that our mind can be **renewed** by God's Word and thus our whole lives **transformed.** There is a DIRECT CONNECTION between living obediently, joyfully, and contentedly, and that has to do with **what we think about.** In between dealing with rejoicing in anxiety and rejoicing with contentment, Paul addresses the **mind exclusively:**

Philippians 4:8-9 *"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, **think about these things.** 9 What you have **learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you"***

Our hearts are closely tied to our minds, but vastly different. Our heart functions like a **command center,** the seat of our will, emotions, desires, affections, motives, and moral choices. It is NOT the mind but it also encompasses our intellect and mind, as we will see a bit later. It is NOT an overstatement to say that your heart is who you are at the core, a reflection on your true self. **Proverbs 27:19** says it like this:

*As in water face reflects face, so the **heart of man reflects the man**.*

This means our behavior simply **reveals** the state of our heart, since we DO what is actually IN our heart. Think about the NASA command center on a space shuttle launch. They can control what happens to the flight, informing, shaping, determining the plan, actions, and outcome of the mission itself. Our heart is where words flow ---- and why we can say things that our minds did not 'mean' or intend. Our heart is where attitudes and motives flow. This is why we can say one thing but mean another. Our heart is the place where thoughts come and can follow or defy the wisdom we have received. There is a reason that Solomon said that **from the heart FLOW THE SPRINGS OF LIFE** ---- this can either be life giving or poisoned and tainted water. The problem we have is that our **hearts are NOT neutral, but are already stained and corrupted by sin**. This is where Proverbs and the rest of Scripture gives clarity as to the **problem with our heart**.

THE PROBLEM WITH OUR HEART

"Trust me. If you knew my heart, you would believe what I'm saying." "Listen to your heart, there's nothing else you can do" (Thanks, Roxette). *"Trust yourself and follow what you feel"*. Some version of this has been true of every generation. Since there are things outside of us that we cannot control or we frankly do not like, we believe that the one true and constant thing to help us is found **within or inside us**, and believe that our feelings and emotions should guide. This is not just the plight of youthful ignorance, but plagues people who are unwilling to forgive because it does not FEEL right, or who will not commit to obedience because they do not WANT to. Here is what Proverbs says about our heart:

Proverbs 21:2 *"Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart"*

This means that our default setting is to trust ourselves, having an over-actualized view of our own goodness and righteousness. We become experts at self-justification. We believe we are RIGHT, and can rationalize almost any behavior and mask selfishness with altruism. This is what happened with Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, which lead to **blame-shifting, victimhood, a lack of taking responsibility in life, and a blurred view of who we truly are**.

Proverbs 28:26 *"Whoever trusts in his own **mind** (heart in Hebrew) is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered"*

Proverbs 20:9 *"Who can say, **'I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin'**?"*

As a default setting, our hearts CANNOT be trusted, and when we miss the source of where our problems originate we miss out on the opportunity to truly change from the inside out. The biggest problem we have is not found in our **upbringing or environment**, not in how we've been treated or trauma in our background, or from a bad experience in the church. Our problem is the **bent of our heart is NOT neutral nor good**, and the longer we think that the solution to our woes is something **external**, we will never truly experience peace and joy. That is because ALL of our hearts are deceitful and sick:

Jeremiah 17:9 *"The **heart is deceitful above all things**, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"*

Matthew 15:19 *"For out of the **heart** come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander."*

When Jeremiah assessed the heart, he said it was both **deceitful**, or deliberately deceptive, and **sick**, which means both 'disastrous' and 'incurable'. *Why do people DO, THINK, and ACT the way they do? It's because of the condition of their heart!* The problem is we THINK we are not the problem, that we do not have to change, that everyone else has wronged us, and that we deserve some sort of better treatment. Our hearts actively deceive us, keeping us away from true solutions and true change, choosing to live in a misery we can control rather than the banquet feast of Christ's sovereign rule. That is why we need a greater solution than trying to change our own heart or make ourselves clean.

THE SOLUTION FOR OUR HEARTS

Because of the nature of our hearts and the depth of depravity we face ---- *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 3:23) ---- we need a solution for the *immaterial* part of us that could not be found in the *material* alone. In other words, the true answer to our heart problem is NOT by improving ourselves **externally** but rather being transformed **internally**. This truth has been missed by countless people throughout the generations, with people believing that salvation can be found by **doing better, obeying more, or trying harder**. Salvation is not about **MORALISM**, or defining ourselves by what we do or do not do, but rather that we have been changed at a heart level by Jesus alone.

Mark 7 and Matthew 15 tell a parallel story about Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees and scribes. These religious leaders were notorious for their zeal in practicing the Law, and for creating *tradition* around the Law in the name of not violating the Law. They were well studied, knew the Old Testament, were revered (and feared) by the common people, and ruled the religious life of synagogue attending Jewish citizens of Jesus day. Jesus shared a meal with this group and His own disciples, leading to a throw down of not only practice, but true vs. false worship. The Pharisees, in an attempt to gain salvation through **moral effort** rather than **acknowledging the reality that they had NO ABILITY to save themselves**, had elevated their tradition and practice beyond the Word of God (Mark 7:13), becoming their own judge and jury.

The situation was over the defilements of eating practices. God gave certain ceremonial practices in the OT to show His holiness and the reverence with which we must approach Him, but the point of the Law was to display our inability to keep the Law and come to God in faith. But the Pharisees kept laws around the Law, but missed the most important part: **they did not worship God with a new heart**. So Jesus rightly called them hypocrites and quoted Isaiah:

Mark 7:6-7 *"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;
in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."*

What a condemning statement! Moralism cannot save!!! When we fail to see the true condition of our heart, we think that we can do enough to save ourselves, but Jesus blew that whole concept out of the water. The Pharisees were so concerned about what was happening **outside of themselves** (better wash those hands) and what they were eating that they neglected the real issue: they were woefully sinful **inside**, moral people who were rotten to the core. This prompted an important statement by Jesus:

Mark 7:18-23 *"Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, 19 since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) 20 And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. 21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder,*

adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.

Notice that when we look **within** ourselves, we find all kinds of evil and wickedness, that are both issues of our **thoughts AND actions**. Our heart produces evil thoughts and desires, which lead to action step of murder (James 4:2). Our heart produces covetousness, which lead to quarrels and theft. We envy others so we are willing to slander them. Our words reveal what is in our heart (Matt. 12:34), and our actions betray what is truly inside of us. This all culminates in the idea that because our heart within needs to change, this cannot be done outside in, but inside out.

An **important note before the solution**. Moralism is so attractive because it is easier for us, since we stay in control. We like the idea that we can do something to fix ourselves. It is appealing since it gives tangible results (see, I'm obedient because I don't _____; or because I do _____). But moralism comes out of a self-righteous and prideful heart, and produces despair, judgmentalism, a focus on externals only, superficiality, vain worship, a lack of joy and graciousness, and absolutely hinders our ability to reach the nations with the gospel. Moralism paints a better picture of ourselves than is true, and we begin to see others through a lens of works rather than grace, waiting until they "get it right" to interact with them rather than seeking them out of love.

What is the solution to our depraved heart? A brand new one! This is what was promised in the New Covenant which was ratified by Jesus on the cross:

Ezekiel 36:26 *"And I will give you **a new heart**, and a new spirit I will put **within you**. And I will remove the **heart of stone** from your flesh and give you a **heart of flesh**."*

Do you see the importance of what Jesus did? In Christ, we are NEW CREATIONS (2 Cor. 5:17), which means the problem of our old heart has been solved by Him on the cross. When we believe in the work of Jesus on our behalf, that He fulfilled all righteousness and took our place along with the wrath of God, repenting and turning from our sin, we are given **new hearts**, forgiveness, and the Holy Spirit! This means that all of our motives, thoughts, desires, direction, emotions, feelings, and bent are changed! We now can worship God from a transformed heart that actually loves God, relinquishes control, and can truly **fear Him in joy**.

THE PROTECTION OF THE HEART

To bring this full circle, Proverbs 4:23 reminds us that since our heart is so important, can be swayed so easily, and is highly susceptible to corruption, we must guard it. The word connotes an intense weight of a military blockade. What do we need to know and understand to guard our heart with all diligence:

- **Watch what enters the gate** – This is where our mind and heart work in unity. What we expose ourselves to, especially over time, can absolutely begin to affect our heart. Satan wants to poison the source of our mind with what is false, with half-truth, with worldly wisdom, and human philosophies. If I have a problem with coveting in my heart, I should not spend time looking at all the other homes I wish I had or the kind of marriage someone else poses on social media. The counter to this is filling my mind with truth, which is known but far too often NOT practiced. But the Bible puts it plainly:

Psalms 119:11 *"I have stored up **your word in my heart**, that I might not sin against you."*

- **Check the Spring for debris** – Our hearts are complex and mysterious, but that does not mean we cannot seek to understand them. We must seek to understand our **motives and hidden thoughts**, rather than just focusing on the externals. We ask ourselves probing questions: *Why am I so angry right now? Why did that thing my spouse said cause me to say that, or give the silent treatment? Why am I seeking so much overtime? Is it for the glory of God or for financial comfort, or simply to be out of the house? Why am I neglecting the means of God's grace --- preaching of God's Word, commitment to the community of the church, prayer, and service? Why am I so discontent with how I look, or how much I have, or my stage of life?*
- **Make sure the Spring does not become a cistern** – Cisterns were holes dug in the ground or rock to capture rain water. The water would stagnate, and though it was wet and could sustain life, it wouldn't allow it to thrive. Our hearts thrive when we properly, whole-heartedly, and joyfully **fear the Lord!** When Isaiah called out the hypocrisy of Israel, he said, **"their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men"** (Isa. 29:13). Their fear of God was mere fear of man, losing the awe and amazement that the Fear of the Lord breeds. The fear of the Lord is not a neat addition to our life, it is **essential for us to maintain a heart that trusts Him with everything we have, depends on Him, and believes every single one of His promises.**

So that is our challenge this morning: **guard our heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.**

Over 100 years ago, renowned English writer, journalist, and Christian apologist G.K Chesterton answered a newspaper article that posed the question *"What is wrong with the world?"* If that question were put forth today, there would be a myriad of answers: *politics* (especially the other side), *youth*, *technology*, *lack of family values*, *financial disparity*, *laziness*, *godlessness*, etc. Each of these have some validity for sure. But Chesterton, in his wisdom and candor, simply said:

"DEAR SIRs, I AM"

That response is actually the foundation of true change and ability to guard our hearts. Our greatest problem is the sin that resides IN us, and that needs to be dealt with in Jesus Christ, and then guarded the rest of our lives, so that we operate in joy, graciousness, faith, and dependency, rather than self-righteous moralism.