

Series: A More Excellent Way**Today's Message: Above All Else: Guarding Your Heart and Mind; Proverbs 4:20-27**

If you have children, you will relate to the urgency of Solomon as he teaches his son to learn to treasure his heart. You can feel with him because you know yourself, from your own experience, just how fragile the heart and mind of your children is. You would probably even say that if you could effectively guard the heart of your babies (even your grown children) you would guard it unto your own hurt and death. But you know you can't. You can only teach and train in hopes that a firm foundation has been laid so that as they grow up and come to faith in Christ that they will live wisely, faithfully pursuing the glory of God in Christ Jesus.

Solomon, teaching by way of the Holy Spirit says with all-urgency, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."

I'm sure many of you are familiar with the great Baptist preacher John Bunyan who wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress* from prison. But John Bunyan also wrote a riveting story called *The Holy War*. In that story he pictures the heart of man as a city called *Mansoul*. *Mansoul* can be accessed but only through five gates. Bunyan named the gates *Eye-gate*, *Ear-gate* (where the enemy Diabolus first attacks, *Mouth-gate*, *Feel-gate*, and *Nose-gate*. Surprisingly, none of these gates can be opened from the outside; Diabolus could not force his way through these gates, he could only influence those citizens who lived inside the city to rise up in rebellion against the great leader named, King Shaddai. Bunyan writes that the gates "could never be opened nor forced but by the will and leave of those within." Thankfully there is a faithful servant named, Mr. Godly-Fear who is in charge of keeping the gates secure. And as long as Mr. Godly-Fear was the gates-keeper the inhabitants of the city were safe, living under the blessing of King Shaddai and able to repel the subtle threats and vicious attacks of Diabolus!

We learn from this that it is essential to have the right watchman guarding the gates to your heart. In the case of *Mansoul* it was the gates-keeper named Mr. Godly-Fear that strongly protected the city. And here in Proverbs 4:23, the Holy Spirit speaks through Solomon, "Above all else, guard your heart..." Guard it against all threats of evil. Whatever you do, guard it above all else. We need to hear this today.

Like *Mansoul* we, too, are in a holy war. A battle for control of the heart and mind. Even as Christians, our battle is a daily, hourly, moment by moment battle for supremacy of the heart. Will our hearts incline toward God and His full and abundant life experienced through faith in Jesus Christ? Or will our hearts incline toward the corrupting influence of the world, the flesh and the devil dragging us away and stealing our allegiance away from our Good King, the Lord Jesus Christ?

Today I want to urge you to renew your commitment to guarding your heart. First by remembering the value of the heart you are guarding; Second, to reactivate your desire to listen and learn from the Word of God; and third, to repent from folly and run toward Wisdom's reward.

1) (Proverbs 4:23) Remember the value of the heart you are guarding.

A) Your heart is valuable. It is a gift from God.

1) When you were born again you were given a new heart.

(a) You were created a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) born of God (John 1:13) by the Spirit of God (John 3: 6-8) and saved unto eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:16).

(b) 2 Corinthians 3:3 affirms that we are of Christ: "You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with in but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts." (His Name is written on our hearts!)

B) "The wellspring of life"

- 1) The heart is the seat of life and salvation which comes through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - (a) Romans 10:9-10: “That if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you shall be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”
 - (b) The heart nourishes the mind: Ephesians 1:18: “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints.”
 - 2) The heart is the seat of worship.
 - (a) Ephesians 5:19: “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.”
 - (b) And of thanksgiving and gratitude to the Lord: Eph. 5:20: “Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
 - 3) The heart is the seat of true service to Christ:
 - (a) Eph. 6:6b: “...but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.”
 - (b) Col. 3:23: “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord...”
 - 4) The heart is the seat of a sincere personal pursuit of Christ and of unity among believers.
 - (a) 2 Tim. 2:22: “Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”
 - 5) The heart is the seat of our thoughts and attitudes. Heb. 4:12: “For the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (The secret place where the Spirit works through the Word.)
- C) If you are born again your heart is valuable because God made it valuable in Christ!
- II) **(Proverbs 4:20-22) Reactivate your desire to listen and learn from the Word of God.**
- A) Heed Divine Admonition; don't ignore it!
 - 1) “My son! Pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words.”
 - (a) Hebrews 12:5-6 speaks of the Lord's discipline. He disciplines those He loves!
 - (i) Prov. 4:20 is an admonition; a corrective (how to get right) command.
 - (b) Psalm 141:5: “Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it.”
 - (i) Read **Prov. 5:11-14** which speaks of the disgrace of anyone who rejects discipline!
 - 2) An admonition to guard the Word of God with prayer and by the use of it!
 - (a) Psalm 119:9-11: “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to Your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from Your commands. I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You.”
 - B) What are you doing to actively guard your spiritual health? How will reactivate your desire to listen and learn how to guard your heart? (Bible study: What does God say to believe and do? Prayer: Pray! Pray the Scripture verses that give clear direction on how to guard. Fellowship: Accountability.)
- III) **(Proverbs 4:23-27) Run toward Wisdom's reward.**
- A) The first thing to notice is that this is a prescription for “heart care.”
 - 1) (v24) Guard your mouth. Luke 6:45b: “Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.”
 - (a) Ephesians 4:29: “Let NO unwholesome talk come out of your mouths... (but build up).”
 - 2) (v25) Guard your eyes. Determine to fix your eyes on worthy things, things good for the soul.
 - (a) Hebrews 12:2: “So let us fix our eyes on Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith...”
 - 3) (v26) Guard your steps. Exercise yourself building *spiritual muscle*. Hebrews 12:12-13 admonishes us to strengthen ourselves that we would then strengthen others!
 - 4) (v27) Guard your pursuit. Let nothing hinder you from knowing and obeying Christ! (Heb.12:1)

B) Wisdom's reward is Christ. Our hearts were made by Him and for Him! Guard it diligently!