

## Sermon 54, It Is What You Make It, Proverbs 15:13-19

**Proposition:** Your heart's attitude determines what you'll experience in life.

- I. The Heart Controls Your Happiness, v. 13
- II. The Heart Controls Your Learning, v. 14
- III. The Heart Triumphs Over Affliction, v. 15
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### **Introduction**

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, during my seminary days I worked Walmart produce. It's a great job if you love produce. Anyway, one of my coworkers would consistently say, whenever any experience, event, or activity came up, "It is what you make it." Now, you all know me and how passive I am and how I hate to rock the boat. Well, I tried. I really tried to not say anything. But one night, it was too much and I confronted Wanda with the accusation that she was a full-blown relativist who didn't believe in any objective reality at all! Wanda was very taken aback, and in her own way explained to me, with a lot more words than I thought necessary, that she only meant that one's attitude determines the content of one's experience. Put another way, the attitude you bring generally predetermines how you're going to feel about an experience, and even, in some sense, how you're going to experience that experience. It doesn't change or negate objective reality — but it very much tells you how you're going to feel about that objective reality. That truth, enunciated so frequently by my co-worker Wanda, is the same truth that we find in the Proverbs of Solomon this morning. The attitude of your heart will always be victorious over the realities of your circumstances. The ultimate implication of this truth, as we'll see, is that you and I need to have our hearts right with God, filled with Christ and His Spirit who is the Spirit of joy that makes our hearts merry so that, even in the midst of suffering, we learn to enjoy the continual feast of our Father's favor.

### **I. The Heart Controls Your Happiness, v. 13**

The first thing your heart controls is the look on your face. A joyful heart is obvious just by looking at you. Meanwhile, a sad heart breaks the spirit. How you feel is reflected in your body language and in your spirit, which as we all know, can soar, crash, or float along steadily somewhere in between.

So what's the point? Just this: the heart is the center of your being. It is the deepest level of your being. If it's up, you're up. If it's down, you're down. So guard your heart. Watch over it. How do you keep it up? By listening to your Father and learning to walk in His wisdom. This

verse doesn't talk about that, but it's clear from the rest of the book. You can't handle your heart on your own. It is the path of wisdom to commit it to your Father's safekeeping. Have you given your heart to Jesus?

## **II. The Heart Controls Your Learning, v. 14**

Secondly, though, the heart of a wise person seeks understanding. If you're content with not getting it, with not understanding life, then you are not wise. Also, if you're content with listening to folly all day long, you are similarly not wise. To make the metaphor like our cliché, we could say that the fool eats up folly with a big spoon. But notice again the connection between the heart and mouth. If the heart is right, the mouth is right — and if the mouth is wrong, the heart is wrong too. What's the best way to know whether your heart is right? By what your mouth says and by what it loves to consume. Do you love folly? Then your heart is definitely not right. Do you love understanding? Then your heart is wise.

What did Jesus seek? Wisdom or folly? What did His mouth say, and what did He love to hear? Brothers and sisters, if we don't speak like Jesus did, if we don't love to listen to the Father's word like He did, then we are in trouble. Again, how do you get your heart right? By entrusting it to your Heavenly Father. Give it to Him, and you will become one who loves wisdom. Why is that? Because the Father loves Jesus, and if you belong to the Father you will love Jesus too. To love Jesus is to love wisdom is to have one's heart right.

## **III. The Heart Triumphs Over Affliction, v. 15**

Well, the afflicted person sees many evil days. We can easily think of someone suffering from a chronic illness or long-term debilitating pain. We can think of someone dealing with a broken marriage or a wayward child. Every single day of that person's life is tough, is brutal. But even in those circumstances, the heart can feel like it's constantly sitting down to a feast.

What do I mean? Well, as one Auschwitz survivor noted, the one thing they cannot take from you is the freedom to choose your own attitude. In other words, even on the merely human plane, the presence of affliction, fear, torment and loss emphatically does not condemn you to a life of bitterness and anger. Am I saying that those with enough faith can have a merry heart, even as they pull the dead bodies out of the gas chambers of Treblinka? God forbid. Evil is real, and it's appalling, and we do right to be appalled. But even there, God is still in control and joy is still one of the fruits of the Spirit. It may manifest itself more as hope and faith for the future than as joy for the present. But even there, amid the brutality of the Nazi death machine, the Christian is commanded to live in faith, hope, and love. Even if every day of your life is evil, even if you by some horrific turn of events become a kapo in a concentration camp, you will be called to live in the certainty that God will do ultimate justice (what we call faith) and in the joy that comes from knowing that even this wrong will someday be put right (what we call hope).

Now, the chances of any of us going into a concentration camp this week are thankfully infinitesimal. But the chances of some of us interacting with an afflicted person to whom all his days seem evil are near 100%. How can this proverb encourage that person? First of all, it does *not* encourage him to say, "Well, your wife left you and took the kids and you have no rights, no

recourse, and little in the way of financial stability. But a merry heart has a continual feast. Why don't you try being cheerful?"

Such an approach is frankly offensive. Rather, this proverb can be an encouragement if you point your suffering friend to the same faith, hope, and love that in Corrie and Betsie Ten Boom triumphed over Ravensbruck. No one's heart is going to be merry all the time. Jesus Himself was a man of sorrows. But when the heart is merry — as it should be when we think about what our Father has prepared for us — no circumstances can obliterate that.

#### **IV. The Heart's Fear of God Trumps Wealth, v. 16**

Fear of God in the heart is also better than wealth. Great treasure is great, but the trouble that comes from not fearing God will poison all worldly possession. On the other hand, the blessing that comes from fearing God will make even the smallest amount of money a true blessing. Brothers and sisters, our hearts are naturally tuned in to wealth and status. We are all familiar with status-symbol cars, houses, clothes, and addresses. We are alert to class distinctions, and we pay attention to the signals that people send about how much money they have. But Solomon is telling us to reprogram our hearts and to truly believe that the fear of God is better than money. Indeed, even if you don't have any trouble with your great treasure, the fear of God is *still* better than that treasure. Wealth is not worth as much as fearing God.

Psa 37:16 Better is the little of the righteous Than the abundance of many wicked.

Pro 16:8 Better is a little with righteousness Than great income with injustice.

1Ti 6:6 But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment.

Ecc 4:6 One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind.

Ecc 8:12 Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly.

Isa 33:6 And He shall be the stability of your times, A wealth of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; The fear of the LORD is his treasure.

#### **V. The Heart's Love Trumps Roast Beef, v. 17**

Along with the fear of God is the love of God. An ox that's been put in the stall to be fattened is not worth the cost of broken relationships and hatred between you and your family. If you can have a good marriage living on chicken and rice, or a bad marriage but eat steak every night, which should you choose? Brothers and sisters, once again, we see that the heart's attitude decides how you and I will experience our circumstances. A loving heart will love even under financial stress. An unloving heart will hate even when there's plenty to go around. We certainly see this in our own nation every day, as people with more money than they know what to do with openly practice the politics of envy and denounce those with more than themselves.

The point, as always, is that love is better than hate, the fear of God is better than money. Your relationship with God, summed up by fearing Him and loving Him, is much more important than your bank account, cars, houses, RVs, toys, clothes, and all the rest of the shiny things this world dangles in front of you.

So if we believed this, how would we live?

First of all, we would not worship money. We would be generous and give it away to God's work and to help the poor. It would not have a hold over our hearts or our imaginations. Our default attitude toward money would not be one of fear but one of joy as we see it as God's loving gift to us.

Secondly, we would not harm or attack people for the sake of money. When your two-year-old dumps his bottle into your laptop, you won't freak out. You will love him, not yell at him. When your sixteen-year-old totals the car, you won't scream at him. You will show that you love him and that your relationship with him is far more important than any car could ever be. When God calls you to take a pay cut for His kingdom, you'll do it without fussing about how much you need the salary you were making. Basically, whenever the opportunity comes up you will choose God and His people over money every time. This includes especially hospitality. You will open your home to God's people because it's God's home and it's to be used for His purposes.

Finally, if we really believed this we would not look down on those with less money. We would stop judging people by the contents of their bank accounts. The flip side is true too: No more will we honor the rich because they have lots of cash! It's just money. But what really counts is the fear and love of God. Jesus showed us that by living without a place to lay His head and entrusting His donations to Judas Iscariot.

#### **VI. The Heart's Calmness Overcomes Strife, v. 18**

Fights and quarrels are the result of a person who enjoys them. Someone who refuses to fight will amazingly avoid all kinds of fights! Now, Solomon is not urging passivity. Rather, he is telling us that the peacemaker is blessed.

So how about it? Do you defuse situations or escalate situations? Yes, some of this is personality. But even the most aggressive of type A's can learn to be slow to anger. Brothers and sisters, I'm serious when I say that this is the single most notable area of sanctification in my own life. By nature and personality, I love to escalate situations. But I don't think it's bragging to say that God has given me the ability (one I wasn't born with) to defuse the situation, to find a path of peace without compromise in the bad sense. How is this possible? Because Jesus, the self-controlled man, has poured out on us His Spirit whose fruit is self-control. Do you want to fight all the time? Or do you want to live in peace? If you want peace, train your heart to follow Jesus.

#### **VII. The Heart's Uprightness Receives a Smooth Path, v. 19**

Finally, our Father rewards those who approach life with an upright heart. If your heart is lazy, you will refuse to work. But if your heart is eager and upright, you will love to work.

The sluggard's life is like a thorn hedge. Progress is impossible. Any move he makes, he feels the pricking of pain because he hates work and work is painful to him. So he doesn't make any moves. He just does what's easy, what's lazy, because his heart is lazy. Sound familiar? We've all done this at times. But when you fear God and walk with Christ, your path is magically smoothed in front of you. It's easier to travel on a highway than through the thick

underbrush. Now, does that mean that life is easy for the believer? Not necessarily. But it is certainly easier to make progress as a believer than as a slacker.

So brothers and sisters, give your heart to God. The results will be good. Your life will be better; your activities will be better. Maybe your outward circumstances won't improve at all; maybe they'll even get worse. But when your heart belongs to Him, you can walk in faith, hope, and love at all times because your Father is trustworthy. He loves you so you can love Him back. And He will put everything right at the end. Walk with Him, then. Give Him your heart, and He will make it sing. Amen.