

Sermon Outline

KEEP YOUR HEART (PROVERBS 4:23)

I. Introduction

II. Get Wisdom

- A. The book of Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings that are designed to teach godly “life skills” to the people of God.
- B. The words of the Proverbs come from the heart of a loving heavenly Father to his children.
- C. This is illustrated for us in Proverbs 4, where the wise sayings are given in the context of a father’s relationship to his son.
 - Prov 4:1-2: “Hear, O sons, a father’s instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight,
² for I give you good precepts;
do not forsake my teaching.”
- D. Since we are all *sons* of the Father in Jesus Christ, men and women, boys and girls are included in these words. All of us do well to heed the wisdom of Proverbs.
- E. So the father goes on to say:
 - Prov 4:3-5: “When I was a son with my father,
tender, the only one in the sight of my mother,
⁴ he taught me and said to me,
“Let your heart hold fast my words;
keep my commandments, and live.
⁵ Get wisdom; get insight;
do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth.”
- F. Here is a tender picture of the father telling his son about when he, the father, was a little boy. And when he was a little boy, the dad too was instructed by his own dad. And he was taught to value wisdom very highly. He was taught to “Get wisdom; get insight.”
- G. The emphasis on wisdom in Proverbs is rather different from various emphases we hear from the world today (grades, success, money, physical beauty, etc.).
- H. Proverbs reminds us that acquiring moral wisdom is of paramount importance. The father’s advice to his son echoes the heavenly Father’s advice to all his children, at all times and places:
 - Prov 4:5: “Get wisdom; get insight;
do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth.”

III. Keep Your Heart

- A. Prov 4:23 has but one simple instruction: “Keep your heart.”
- B. To “keep” (Heb: *shamar*) = to guard, to protect, or to keep guard over something.
- C. Adam was called to guard the garden.
 - Gen 2:15: “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and *keep it*.”
- D. The Levites and priests were called to guard the sacred spaces and things.
 - Num 1:53: “But the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the testimony, so that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the people of Israel. And the Levites shall *keep guard* over the tabernacle of the testimony.”
 - Num 3:8: “They shall *guard* all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, and *keep guard* over the people of Israel as they minister at the tabernacle.”
- E. The fact that “keep guard” was used for Adam in the Garden and then later for the Levites and the priests in the tabernacle has led interpreters to argue that Adam was, in fact, the very first priest and Eden the very first temple on earth. It was a garden-sanctuary to the Lord.
- F. Now, in Proverbs 4, we find “keep guard” applied to the human heart. The heart is a person’s mini Garden of Eden, little Holy of holies.
- G. The heart is precious to God, because it is the place that generates our thoughts and actions.
 - Lk 6:43-45: “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴ for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”
- H. To “keep your heart” is very simply to protect your heart from evil influences, both from within and from without.

IV. Vigilance

- A. How often are we to keep our hearts? “...with all vigilance”; i.e., all the time.
- B. Too often, we simply allow ourselves to be led away and swept up by the busyness of life.
 - 1. When that happens, we find ourselves caught up by all the expectations and standards that are placed upon us every day, whether by ourselves or by others.
 - 2. But when this happens, we are not always careful...
 - what *influences* we allow into our hearts;
 - what *values* we allow to become a part of who we are;
 - or even what *beliefs* and *doctrines* we allow to shape our assumptions of the world.

3. When we are swept up into the noise of the world, we don't always take the time to pause so that we detach ourselves from the influences that are around us.
 4. Keeping our hearts means that we learn to be attentive to the stuff that tries to come in from the outside.
- C. Often, the enemy doesn't tell us to value evil things. Instead, he tells us to place greater value on lesser things, secondary things.
- D. So we have to keep our hearts the way the priests guarded the temple. We have to guard our hearts the way Adam guarded (or should have guarded) Eden: "with all vigilance." That too is one of the good works God calls us to do in Jesus Christ.

V. The Springs of Life

- A. Why do we keep our hearts? "...for from it flow the springs of life."
- B. The heart...
1. gives birth to all our actions, internal and external, physical or purely mental.
 2. forms our value systems.
 3. creates our sense of identity.
 4. shapes what we think are primary concerns in life.
- C. From this web of beliefs, values, and attitudes come the actions, a word of encouragement or a condescending sneer; a cup of cold water or an insult.
- D. From the heart flows "the springs of life." Whether these springs are healthy or polluted depends on whether you are doing the hard work of keeping your heart.

VI. The Little Holy of Holies

- A. Since keeping our hearts is about making sure bad influences don't get in, then a large part of keeping our hearts involves filling our hearts with good influences, the influences that God wants us to have.
- B. To guard our hearts, we need to fill it with the Word of God. (Think of your heart as a mini Ark of the Covenant or little Holy of Holies.)
- Psalm 119:11: "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."
 - Philippians 4:4-7: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
- C. To guard our hearts, we need to be mindful of the company that we keep.
1. Scripture texts:

- 1 Cor 15:33: “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’”
 - Prov 22:24-25: “Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man,
25 lest you learn his ways
and entangle yourself in a snare.”
 - 2 Cor 10:5: “We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,”
2. So we need to be mindful of:
 - a. The kinds of friends we let close to our hearts
 - b. The kinds of teachers, gurus, artists, philosophers, leaders, “great men,” heroes, etc. we let speak to the deepest recesses of our hearts.
 3. While the image of God can be seen in all human beings, and aspects of God’s Law shine in the teachings and works of our best teachers, sages, statesmen, and artists, we still need to be careful to test all things according to the Word of God; accept what is good and reject what is evil; and adhere to God’s priorities.

VII. The Keeper of Our Hearts

- A. It is hard to keep our hearts, because wickedness is not only on the outside. It’s on the inside as well. The sin in us likes the sin that it sees and hears on the outside.
- B. For us who condemn the world as secular, godless, or pagan, are we so sure that we don’t have those snakes in our hearts as well?
 1. If God were to judge the thoughts of each of our hearts, what will he find?
 2. If God were to make Proverbs 4:23 alone the criteria on which we stand or fall on the Day of Judgment, how would we fare?

God has actually provided Someone to stand in our place before him; Someone whose own heart was never once compromised by the world. This Human Being is his own holy and perfect Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus fits the bill of the faithful son in Proverbs 4 who takes his father’s advice seriously. Jesus is the Son who prizes sacred wisdom instead of wealth. Because Jesus guarded his heart so well, because he enshrined the Word of God so completely in his heart, Jesus could become the Source of salvation for all who trust in him.

- C. Instead of relying on our own wisdom to save us, we can rely on the springs of life that flow from Jesus’ heart. Those springs include:
 1. The life of Jesus that was lived on our behalf.
 2. The blood of Jesus that flowed from his limbs and side, washing our sins away.

3. The Holy Spirit of Jesus who draws near to us and quenches our deepest thirsts.
- D. When we believe in the Lord Jesus, when we come to him in humility, fully aware of how very often we still fall short of what God wants of us, God looks on us in Jesus Christ—and he counts us as those who have kept our hearts “with all vigilance.”
- E. So we can strive to get closer to what Proverbs 4 is asking of us, and not be discouraged by our failures in the process, because we know that at the end of the day, our hearts are guarded by Someone greater than ourselves.
- Jn 10:27-28: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”

Questions for Reflection

1. Was there anything in particular about today’s sermon that blessed and encouraged you?
2. Was there anything with which you disagree or found difficult to accept?
3. What is the purpose of the book of Proverbs?
4. Based on Prov 4:1-5, what is our heavenly Father’s desire for us?
5. “Get wisdom; get insight...” How much do we value wisdom? Where does wisdom rank on your scale of values?
6. What does it mean to “Keep your heart”?
7. How does Gen 2:15, Num 1:53, and Num 3:8 shed light on Prov 4:23?
8. Based on Prov 4:23 and Lk 6:43-45, why is it so important to guard our hearts?
9. We are to keep our hearts “with all vigilance.” What does this tell us about the frequency with which we guard our hearts?
10. What concrete steps can we take to be more diligent to keep our hearts? (Consider Ps 119:11; Phil 4:4-7; Prov 22:24-25; 1 Cor 15:33; 2 Cor 10:5).
11. Think of your heart as a mini Ark of the Covenant or little Holy of Holies. How does this awaken you to your duty to keep your heart?
12. How does Prov 4:23 direct us to the Lord Jesus Christ? How does the Lord Jesus fulfill Prov 4:23?
13. According to Jn 10:27-28, who is the ultimate keeper of our hearts?