

MATTERS OF THE HEART **(Matthew 6, 13, 22)**

Two weeks ago today, Wade Burleson preached for me while Ruth Ann and I were making our way to California. We listened to the service in the Phoenix airport while we were waiting for our flight to the John Wayne airport in Santa Ana. On Wednesday, I attended the Leader's Luncheon at our Cherokee Strip Baptist Association office here in Enid. Wade gave a presentation on Artificial Intelligence which is commonly referred to as A.I. He said there are two ways we can deal with the emergence of A.I. We can say, "That's bad. I don't to have anything to do with it," in which case we will leave it into the hands of those who have a very different agenda than do we. Or we can embrace it and work to see that it is used in a responsible manner that honors our Christian faith.

He provided several handouts. One dealt with how to use A.I. in sermon preparation. Let me be quick to point out that I would never ask A.I. to write my sermon. Spiritual truth is spiritually discerned, and as helpful as it might be, I don't believe artificial intelligence has the indwelling Sprit of God.

However, A.I. can be a very effective research assistant. Microsoft has produced an A.I. service called Copilot. Without my asking, they put a preview of CoPilot on my computer. I decided to take it for a spin, so to speak. To use A.I., you must provide a prompt, in which you ask it to do something specific. I typed, "Provide a humorous story to illustrate the truth that the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. The following story is what the A.I. service called Copilot wrote. I use it as the introduction to this message. It is a funny but perceptive story.

Once upon a time in the bustling city of Medville, there existed a quirky hospital named St. Chuckles. It was renowned for its unconventional staff and its commitment to healing both bodies and spirits.

Dr. Amelia Heartfelt, a brilliant cardiologist, was the heartbeat of St. Chuckles. She had a knack for diagnosing heart conditions and a penchant for humor. Her office was adorned with heart-shaped balloons, and her stethoscope played a jazzy tune when she listened to patients' chests.

One fateful day, Mr. Walter Grumbleton shuffled into Dr. Heartfelt's office. He was a notorious curmudgeon, known for complaining about everything—from cafeteria food to the hospital's elevator music.

"Doc," Walter grumbled, "I've got a problem. My ticker's acting up."

Dr. Heartfelt leaned in, her eyes twinkling. "Ah, Mr. Grumbleton, the heart—the epicenter of emotions and life itself! Tell me more."

Walter scowled. "It's skipping beats, Doc. Feels like a squirrel tap-dancing in there."

Dr. Heartfelt nodded sagely. "A squirrel, you say? Fascinating. Let's run some tests."

She hooked Walter up to the heart monitor, which blinked and beeped like a disco ball at a cardiac party. Walter's heart rhythms danced chaotically across the

screen.

“Now, Mr. Grumbleton,” Dr. Heartfelt said, “I want you to think happy thoughts. Imagine a field of daffodils, a puppy chasing its tail, or winning the lottery.”

Walter grunted. “Lottery? Doc, I’ve never won a scratch-off ticket in my life.”

Undeterred, Dr. Heartfelt adjusted her stethoscope. “Just humor me.”

As Walter focused on imaginary daffodils, the heart monitor went haywire. Beeps turned into salsa beats, and the squirrel tap-dancing escalated to a full-blown conga line.

Dr. Heartfelt gasped. “Mr. Grumbleton, your heart is doing the Macarena! This is unprecedented!”

Walter squinted at the monitor. “Macarena? Doc, I just wanted a prescription for my acid reflux.”

But Dr. Heartfelt was on a mission. She summoned the hospital staff—the nurses, janitors, even the cafeteria chef. They formed a heart-shaped conga line around Walter’s bed, hips swaying, and sang, “Hey, Macarena!”

Walter’s face turned crimson. “What madness is this?”

Dr. Heartfelt twirled. “It’s a heart intervention, Mr. Grumbleton! Your heart needs joy, laughter, and a dash of absurdity.”

And so, they danced—the grumpy patient, the cardiologist, and the hospital staff. The heart monitor beeped in rhythm, and Walter’s heart joined the conga line, doing the electric slide.

In the end, Walter’s heart settled into a steady beat. Dr. Heartfelt prescribed a daily dose of dad jokes, a sprinkle of puns, and a mandatory laughter yoga class.

As Walter left St. Chuckles, he muttered, “Doc, you’re nuts.”

Dr. Heartfelt winked. “Remember, Mr. Grumbleton, the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. And sometimes, a conga line is the best medicine.”

And so, in the heartwarming halls of St. Chuckles, laughter echoed, and Walter Grumbleton learned that healing begins with a joyful heart.

And King Solomon wrote, “Laughter does good like a medicine” (Proverbs 17:22).

The Bible says much about the heart. There are about 850 references to the heart in both the Old and New Testaments. Dr. Heartfelt was right. The heart is the epicenter of our emotions and life itself. The Bible portrays the heart as the control of center of what we say, do, and think. Jesus said, “Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.” Our words reveal what is in our heart, as do our actions and thoughts.

The Bible speaks of a hard heart, an unbelieving heart, and an evil heart, but Jesus taught, “Blessed are those who are pure in heart.” A pure heart is an undivided heart, an unadulterated heart, a heart that is wholly focused on obeying and pleasing the Lord.

Last Wednesday was Valentine’s Day. At our Business Meeting, I mentioned that I had gone through the Braum’s Drive-thru that afternoon. When I stopped at the first window to pay, the lady at the window looked at me, smiled, and said, “Happy heart day.” I smiled back and said, “Happy heart day to you.”

Every day is a heart day because we live from our hearts. The question we must answer is, “What kind of heart do we have?” We are going to survey several passages from the Gospel of Matthew that deal with the heart, as we consider, “Matters of the Heart.”

What Matters is the Location of Our Heart

Look at Matthew 6:19-21. The word *heart* in Hebrew means “center.” The heart is the center or core of a person’s being. The best part of a watermelon is the heart of the melon. The best and worst part of you is your heart.

According to our passage, there are two kinds of treasures: 1) Material (Temporal), and 2) Spiritual (Eternal).

As far as material treasures are concerned, either time will destroy them or thieves will steal them. If one of those two things doesn’t happen, then death will separate you from them. One person said, “I’ve never seen a hearse pulling a U-Haul.”

Spiritual treasures are far different. Spiritual treasures include salvation, service, and souls.

One man paraphrased v. 21 to read, “The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.” Another wrote, “Just as a sunflower follows the sun or a compass follows a magnet, your heart will follow your treasure.”

In the movies, whenever someone is searching for a hidden treasure, he will have a map, and X always marks the spot as to the location of the treasure. In life, your treasure marks the spot as to where your heart is.

Where is your treasure? Is it physical or spiritual, earthly or heavenly? Whatever it is will determine the location of your heart.

Listen to Colossians 3:1-2.

¹If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Location is the first matter of the heart.

What Matters is the Condition of Our Heart

Consider Matthew 13:1-8, 18-23. The seed = God’s word while the different soils = the various hearts God’s word encounters. There are four possibilities as to the kind of heart we can have, the condition of our heart. Let me pose those as questions.

1. Do You Have a Hard Heart?

According to v. 4, the seed went on but not in. If God’s word does not find entrance into your life, you are in danger of God’s word being taken away from you. A person who has a hard heart is not open to receiving God’s word.

In the summer, when there is little rain, the ground gets hard, but not all at once. It

happens little by little. So it is with the human heart. You are not born with a hard heart, but the more you ignore God, turn away from God, disobey God, the harder your heart becomes. If you continue to do so, eventually, your heart will be like stone. God's word will not enter in where it can do its work. Instead, Satan will just take it away. That is a dangerous, pitiful position in which to be.

The opposite of a hard heart is a tender heart. Keep your heart well-watered with prayer and the reading of God's word, and obeying Him whenever He speaks.

2. Do You Have a Shallow Heart?

Look again at vv. 5-6, 20-21. Here, the seed goes on and in, but not down. Such a person has no spiritual depth. At some point, he or she likely had more an emotional than a spiritual experience, but it didn't take. It didn't stick.

Have you ever wondered about people who walk an aisle, who say a prayer at a revival meeting, or made a decision at Falls Creek, etc.? You thought they were serious. You thought they meant business. Instead, they were caught up in the emotion of the moment. There was no real surrender of their lives to God.

The opposite of a shallow heart is a committed heart. What is needed is not an experience but a commitment.

3. Do You Have a Crowded Heart?

According to vv. 7 & 22, it is possible for the seed to go on, in, and down but not up. When we become preoccupied with other things, we are in danger of choking and crowding out the word of God. Thus, it will not grow and bear fruit.

I asked Copilot to give me some examples of the crowded heart Jesus warned about in Matthew 13:22. It gave examples under the headings of Distractions, Deceptions, and Desires for Other Things.

Under Distractions, it mentioned: "Imagine a heart cluttered with to-do lists, deadlines, and constant busyness. The Word struggles to find space amidst the noise."

Under Deceptions, it claimed, "Material wealth can subtly deceive us, promising security and happiness." It added, "Picture a heart entangled in the pursuit of wealth, blinded to eternal realities."

Desires for Other Things is the third example of a crowded heart. Copilot wrote, "These desires compete for our heart's affection. Whether it's fame, comfort, or worldly success, they vie for priority."

Unexpectedly, it added:

The remedy? Cultivate a heart that prioritizes God's Word, seeks His kingdom, and prunes away distraction. Let's guard against the crowded heart, making room for the Word to flourish and bear abundant fruit.

So, the opposite of a crowded heart is an open heart. Evict the things that don't belong and make room for Jesus.

4. *Do You Have a Receptive Heart?*

In v. 23, we see that the seed goes on, in, down, and up. The soil of the heart is such that it receives, understands, and yields to the life-giving work of the seed. As a result, fruit is produced. The soil is productive and fertile.

When I was a young man, I saw the black and white film, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. It is based on an Oscar Wilde novel of the same name. In the story, Dorian sees a portrait of himself. He is enamored with his own good looks and makes a wish that he would never age, that he would always look the same. As the years pass, he always remains handsome and youthful looking, but as he engages in worldly, sensual pleasures, his portrait reflects the corruption of his heart. Embarrassed, he takes down and hides the portrait.

The message of the film is that unchecked desires ruin the soul and lead to spiritual decay.

If you had a picture of your heart, your soul, what would it look like? God's word is like a mirror. As we read it, it reflects back to us the true condition of our heart. May God give us a receptive heart.

What Matters is the Possession of Our Heart

Look at Matthew 22:37-38. According to Jesus, this is the greatest commandment. We are to love God with all our being and all our ability. God is not content with half-hearted commitment.

The Bible teaches us to serve God with all our heart (Deut. 26), to walk before God with all our heart (1 Kings 2), and to trust God with all our heart (Proverbs 3).

There is only one throne in your heart. Who are you going to let sit on that throne?

When I was in school, I learned it was the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie that led to the beginning of the first World War. Ferdinand was heir to the Austrian throne. There was much more to the story of Ferdinand and Sophie.

Ferdinand was in love with Sophie, but she was not born of royal blood. The emperor, Franz Joseph was not happy with Ferdinand's choice and tried to get him to choose someone else to be his wife. The heart wants what the heart wants, and Ferdinand's heart wanted Sophie, not someone else. The emperor finally gave his permission for Ferdinand to marry Sophie with one stipulation: the empress and her children would never inherit the throne. Ferdinand agreed. For the sake of love, he gave up the right for his children to sit upon the throne.

I asked Copilot how this story illustrates Jesus' love for us. Here is what it wrote:

The love story of **Franz Ferdinand d'Este** and **Sophie Chotek** is both tragic and profound, echoing themes of love, sacrifice, and defiance. Let's explore how their relationship illustrates Jesus' love for us:

1. **Defying Expectations:**

- Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian empire, fell in love with Sophie

Chotek, a Czech countess. Their union breached royal protocol because Sophie was not of royal blood.

- Similarly, Jesus defied expectations by associating with sinners, outcasts, and those considered unworthy. His love transcended social norms and religious boundaries.

2. **Undying Devotion:**

- Despite opposition, Franz and Sophie remained devoted to each other. They faced humiliation, shunning, and threats from the emperor, yet their love endured.
- Jesus' love for humanity is unwavering. He willingly left His heavenly throne, endured rejection, and faced the cross—all to rescue us from sin and death. His devotion knows no bounds.

3. **Sacrifice and Redemption:**

- Franz and Sophie's tragic deaths in Sarajevo became a catalyst for World War I. Their love story intersected with history, leaving a lasting impact.
- Jesus' sacrificial love on the cross changed the course of eternity. He laid down His life to redeem us, offering forgiveness and eternal life. His love brings hope and reconciliation.

4. **Personal Connection:**

- Franz and Sophie's love was personal—a bond between two individuals. Their marriage defied conventions, emphasizing the power of love over status.
- Jesus' love is deeply personal. He knows us individually, calls us by name, and desires a relationship with each of us. His love transforms lives and hearts.

In both stories, love triumphs over obstacles, sacrifice leads to redemption, and personal connections reveal the depth of affection. Just as Franz and Sophie's love impacted history, Jesus' love transforms our lives, offering hope, forgiveness, and eternal significance.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16) ✨❤🙏

I ask you, today . . .

1. Where is the Location of Your Heart?
2. What is the Condition of Your Heart?
3. Who is in Possession of Your Heart?

The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. Only Jesus can address and heal the problem of your heart and mine.