

IS JESUS LORD OF YOUR HEART?

Luke 6:43-49

Key Verse: 46 “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”

How is your heart? I don’t mean your blood pressure or your cardio. But how is your heart? Peter Scazzero in his book “Emotionally Healthy Christianity” says that Christians are taught that “the heart is deceptive above all things” (Jer 17:9); so, don’t trust your heart, just push through. But a lack of contemplation and introspection is the root of why there is so much burnout, and also inconsistency and scandal in the church. Proverbs says, “Keep your heart with all vigilance,” “for everything you do flows from it” (Pr 4:23ESV & NIV). The Psalmist invites God, “Search me, God, and know my heart; test me ... See if there is any offensive way in me” (Ps 139:23-24). This passage is meant to help us to examine our own heart, whether we are a new follower or we have followed for many years and assess our heart health.

This passage is not just the last teaching of the sermon on the plain, but it is also the main point of the entire sermon. Jesus has been teaching radical discipleship and we might be tempted to think that this is just what Jesus ideally wants us to do not what he practically expects. But Jesus says anyone who would call him “Lord, Lord”—that’s us—must do what he says. So, today we’re going to think about just the one central question of this passage: Is Jesus Lord of your heart? And we’re going to answer this with two indicators Jesus gives us: 1. what does the fruit that I am bearing say about my heart? and 2. what does my attitude about obeying the commands say about my heart?

1. What does the fruit I’m bearing say about my life? (43-45)

The passage begins in the ESV translation, “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit...” (43 ESV). Simply that what is hidden on the inside will be revealed by what comes on the outside. If you look at your NIV translation you don’t see the word “for” at the beginning of verse 43, many translations drop the connective word γάρ (gar), but over half of major translations include the connective word. This is because many think this sermon is the same as the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew (Mt 5-7) and want to make it line up better. But if we look closely the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain are delivered to different audiences from different parts of the region (Mt 4:25 vs Lk 6:17), delivered in different locations (Mt 5:1 vs Lk 6:17), on completely different occasions (Lk 6:12 vs Mt 9:9), with a completely different focus in each of the major teachings—it’s because they are different sermons. I only mention this to point out that in Matthew’s gospel Jesus’ teaching about good and bad trees and their fruit is meant to be applied to others as a litmus test for recognizing

false teachers. But this passage is meant to be applied to ourselves. The Sermon on the Plain was delivered to a large crowd of disciples, 12 of whom were just appointed teachers. Beginning in verse 39 Jesus challenges them that they must deal with themselves first before they try to teach others.

Then verse 43, “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit...” What is on the inside is what will really bear out on the outside. You can’t have a corrupt inner person and bear good outward fruit or have a good inner person and bear corrupt outer fruit. The two will be consistent. What is the fruit that Jesus has in mind here? It is not the good works we do, it is not how hard we work, or how many disciples we raise all of these are apart from ourselves, sometimes even unbelievers or corrupt charismatic preachers do these things much better than us. Fruit is the outer manifestation of what is inside the tree. In this context, Jesus has taught that it is to become a person whose love is overflowing such that they even love their enemies, who does good and blesses those who hate and mistreat them. It is to become forgiving, not to judgmental and condemning. To be so generous in grace and mercy, that you are a delight to everyone around you—they feel loved, they feel the hope of God that they can grow to be a child of God. Don’t you want to be around people like that? Don’t you want to become such people? That is such sweet, tasty, fragrant fruit!

In short good fruit, is to become like Jesus (Ro 8:29). We can fake good deeds, working hard, even making disciples can be faked—people who are not really believers can put on a good show for years. But no one can fake becoming like Jesus. As we studied last week, Jesus’ love, Jesus’ compassion, Jesus’ forgiveness—bleeding and broken on the cross praying for just the most vile enemies—is beyond our human ability, it is a supernatural miracle that only God can do within us. A bad tree cannot bear good fruit. And so Jesus says, Yes, “Each tree is recognized by its own fruit” (44a). We can’t see what is in a person, but when we taste the fruit of their life we know what is on the inside. All the trees in an orchard might all look the same, in a peach orchard all the trees will have the same kind of green, glossy, cat’s-eye shaped leaves, and produce all the same kind of fruit: yellow peaches. But if one or more of the trees in that orchard is blighted, dwarfed, or diseased, then any such tree is fundamentally different than the others. When you taste its identical fruit it will be bitter. Bitter root bitter fruit. Yes, we can try by our willpower to love grudgingly and forgive with a plastic smile and bless others while hating them in our heart but we will eventually wear out and our true nature will come out—when we are squeezed our real character will show.

When you see tasty grapes growing, you know that is a grape vine. You know to the core what that is by the fruit. When you see Jesus’ character shining out of person you know that Jesus is in them because only he could produce that fruit. But when you see

a vine with thorns (a brier), you don't expect to find grapes there (44b). Farmers can do amazing things through cross-pollination, like the tangelo or broccoflower but no genius farmer has ever enabled a thornbush to produce figs. To grow figs, the thornbush would need to be transformed into a fig tree. Regardless of how you modify or fertilize it on the outside, as long as its DNA on the inside is a thornbush, it will continually produce thorns. As long as a person is unchanged they can never bear good fruit. If I had a dog, can I say to him, "stop barking all the time speak like me." I can try all my life, he won't learn a single word. He would have to become a human first to talk. We can try to dress up our lives with works and deeds, like hanging figs on a thornbush but as soon as people reach in they'll get poked. 1 Jn 3:9, "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God." In order to bear good fruit we must be born again through faith in Jesus Christ, through the transformative work of the Holy Spirit.

So, we've spent a lot of time thinking about the idea that no bad tree can bear good fruit. That is rather obvious unless we are born again we cannot become like Jesus. But what about "no good tree can bear bad fruit"? Really? Actually, if you've been thinking about this probably like me you asked "But what about the good tree that bears both good and bad fruit?" People aren't so simple, good people still do a lot of bad things. Actually at one point in preparing this message I got on my knees, "Lord, I'm not really a Christian!" I cried—I'm not kidding. Then I came to my senses, I love Jesus, I do have some fruit of his character but I also have a long way to go—its really good to have such an honest self-examination. We're all in process, we're all going to do good and bad. But what is the trajectory of your character? Are you growing to be more like Jesus? Are you growing in love for him, his word, his people, his work? Then we are a good tree. But if not we need to take a hard look at the condition of our heart

Verse 45 says, "A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of." Biblically, the heart is the seat or the throne of the will and emotions. It's the control center that guides all our words and actions. Many things go into our head but it is the heart that really controls what we do. Knowing right things does not change our behavior. If we see that we are producing the bad fruit of worldly character, unbelief, and no desire to repent, it means we have a bad heart. Jesus says that our good or bad behavior comes from what is stored up in our heart. The word stored up, is literally treasure. Treasure is valuable to us. We don't just store it up but we hoard it because we value it and covet it and we would die defending it. What do you treasure? What can you not imagine living without? Well whatever that is, it is what is causing our fruit.

Specifically, Jesus says that our mouth will speak what our heart is full of. Usually the strongest indicator of our heart condition are our words. When random words of anger and pride sneak out of our mouth, we should stop and ask “what is going on in my heart?” Trash in trash out, the saying goes—there’s truth in that. In the same way when a person is just full to the brim with Jesus’ love and grace upon their life, it just leaks out through their words in profound, highly influential ways.

From the time we began our prayer series, reading a number of books on prayer really ignited me to deepen my devotion time, which inspired me to wake earlier and earlier in the morning to have a full time for study and prayer. I’m coming to the end of Isaiah after several months and it is probably illegible to anyone but me at this point—it became my favorite book. I began to treasure that time. So, when my children wake up early, I was like a dragon curled up on my gold, “ok sit down with your Bible read and pray. I need my devotion time.” As this became a treasure in my heart, I found that my deep seated sins of selfishness, pride and unforgiveness became very troubling to me.

You know culture experts say that Korean and American culture are the two most extreme opposites. And so over the years I heard so many negative comments about American culture that I began to feel that older Koreans hate Americans. And as a result in my heart I really began to hate the older generation of our church. My heart became corrupt because of this. This produced such bad fruit that spilled out of my mouth in arguing, accusing, judging, always seeing the older generation as having a crooked motive that was not true to reality. I’ve behaved so badly over the years that as I mentioned I looked at myself and wondered ‘Am I really a Christian?’ For this I am so sorry. I am not like Jesus, but I want to be. One verse has continually guided me, that P. Ron gave to our staff, is 1 Timothy 4:15 which says, “Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.” It wasn’t until lately that I began to understand that this is not about my accomplishments or works, but about growing in the character of Jesus. I am so immature please pray for me to grow in the character of Jesus.

I pray we can all examine our hearts like this but we all lean towards self-deception concerning ourselves. This is why we need people around us who can call out and rebuke our bad fruit and help us see the condition of our heart. The Bible says that we need each other. None of us can grow in isolation. May God help us as a body to look together at the word and help each other to grow in Jesus’ character.

This moves us into our second indicator:

2. What does my attitude about obeying Jesus' commands say about my heart? (46-49).

Clearly Jesus' words through this section are meant to be a challenge for disciples. You can't live badly and expect good, you can't expect people to come to you for fruit if you're producing thorns, you can't have a heart that's treasuring evil and expect good teachings to come out (blind, hypocrites). Now he puts all the metaphors aside and he comes right out and says it. "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (46) The first question we may ask is: Is Jesus talking to his disciples here? Surely his disciples who were following him and learning from him were doing what he said, right? The text clearly says he was speaking to those who call him "Lord, Lord." The word "Lord" (Greek:kurios) means "master" or "owner" and was the highest title of respect, in Greek the repetition added more emphasis "master of masters." It implied that they acknowledged his ownership and they were his humble servants. The confession of their lips was excellent. However, they didn't actually behave as a servant does for their master.

It's a lot easier to stand up here and tell others to love their enemies than for us to do it. And through our very convincing words we could give people the impression that we're really experts at loving our enemies. In this way we could completely circumvent God's purpose for our lives and ministry. And worse eventually it would become clear that we are hypocrites and we'd teach people, that Christianity is just about making a good show with your words. Paul said, "The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power."

Jesus sent his disciples saying, "go into all the world make disciples...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19). It implies that early on in his ministry, the disciples themselves had to absolutely work this out: to be a disciple means to obey everything that Jesus commands, period. A servant who doesn't obey his owner is not a servant, a disciple who does not obey Jesus is not a disciple.

Phillip Jensen, Tony Payne wrote the very popular gospel tract 2 Ways to Live (2WTL) in which they give a very simple presentation of the gospel as our rebellion against God's rightful rule bringing God's justice. And God in his mercy sending Jesus to take that justice in order to become ruler and judge of the world. So there are 2 ways to live, either I continue to reject God and live as the ruler of my life and face death and judgement or I submit to Jesus as our ruler, rely on him and receive the new life that lasts forever.¹

¹ Twowaystolive.com

Our attitude towards God's word is decided by our attitude towards God's rule. When we approach the Bible thinking "can I obey this?" or "do I want to obey this?" or "do I have to obey this?" we are still the one wearing the crown. When I put the crown on Jesus' head where it belongs, then I no longer have a choice to obey. Don't give yourself a choice. Do you know why our older missionaries live such pure and devoted lives? They sing at the top of their lungs "All hail the power of Jesus name, let angels prostrate fall, bring forth the royal diadem, and crown him Lord of all." David Platt, in his book "Radical" says, "Everything in all creation responds in obedience to the Creator...until we get to you and me. We have the audacity to look God in the face and say, 'No.' ... We are settling for a Christianity that revolves around catering to ourselves when the central message of Christianity is actually about abandoning ourselves."

Jesus has been teaching some pretty radical discipleship. We should feel the weight of it, we should not try to over-interpret his commands to make them more palatable. Jesus meant his words literally and he expected them to be obeyed literally. But we should understand that this is a lifelong process. We all need healing, we're all in the process. We will all fail, we will make many mistakes and fall short, and for this we need a lot of grace from God and toward each other. But is it possible to attain Jesus' standard? It is possible because of the grace Jesus gives us. So, Jesus can rightly command us to do what he says. So by the grace of Jesus, it is possible to expect it from others as well. Are there enemies among us? Are there those causing division? Are we looking at someone with a judgmental heart? Is there someone we refuse to love? By the grace of Jesus, this must stop today. If Jesus is our king we have no choice but to obey.

Look at verses 47-48 say, "As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built." Jesus says that putting his words into practice is work. We have to keep at it, digging and digging into it and eventually we will hit the kind of solid rock we can build our house securely upon. Practicing Jesus' word to love builds our life in a particular way. Practicing Jesus word to serve builds our life in a particular way. Practicing his word to give, to deny ourself, to be pure, to have faith in God, builds foundational character in our life brick by brick, shovel by shovel until we become a person, until we build a life that is noble, powerful, deep and influential. We can step back and say that is a life well built. It takes a long view of our life to do that kind of work every day. A person who does the work to build their house on rock is thinking about making the kind of house that will stand for a lifetime, that will bless his children and even multiple generations, that can be a refuge many others in the storms. When the inevitable floods and torrents of life hit such a

house they cannot shake it. Their godly character gives them fortitude that is not affected by their situation.

Verse 49 says, “But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.” As Jesus has been repeating throughout the passage, if we follow Jesus but we never do the work to do what he says, we’re building our life upon nothing. We may make a really gorgeous life with many good things, lots of fun and fulfillment and success, but ultimately we will not have anything that supports our faith and eventually it will begin to erode and sink. Our worldly life may be very successful but our faith will not last. Like the seed on shallow soil it will shrivel up and die under the blazing heat of life’s troubles.

How are you building your life? What are you going to do with the word you heard today? Young people come up and tell me they like my messages, great, thank you, you like it, how did you apply it? Maybe you wonder why people make such a big deal about testimony writing and daily bread in our church. We write Sunday testimonies, one-to-one testimonies, life testimonies, daily bread, even message writing. Why all this writing? It can feel so dry, or even so legalistic. But why do we do it? As we struggle and struggle with the word of God, there’s a chance that at some moment the Spirit may touch our heart and we may have a breakthrough and see our sin and see Jesus and be transformed and put the word into practice—that’s the UBF method. If we don’t write then where in our life are we consistently, publically confessing our sins as the Bible commands us to do? Where are we wrestling with applying the word of God, digging, digging, digging down till we hit rock? Where? I shared earlier my repentance about hating our older generation—again I’m sorry—but I didn’t start out writing the message with that in mind. But in the intense struggle with the living and active word of God, God showed me I really need to repent about this I can’t avoid this. I wouldn’t have faced that if I didn’t have to struggle with God’s word. Only God’s word can do that. Putting one word of God into practice can be life-altering, it can change the trajectory of your entire life, an entire ministry, an entire community.

So, is Jesus the Lord of your heart? What is your fruit and your attitude towards his commands? Luke 3:8 says “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.” But a caution: the Israelites said we are secure because we are children of Abraham and so they didn’t feel the need to repent and the ax was at the root of the tree. We can say the same, “I’m a child of God, I’m secure by grace alone my works don’t matter.” But in light of this passage, our fruit is saying something about our real nature. Paul told us to examine and test ourselves (2 Co 13:5). Let’s take a good hard look at our heart this

week. Let's write a testimony and actually do what it says. Let's be more like Jesus as we grow as good trees. Amen.