

Open Line Bible Study Lesson Eight January 16, 2018

Scripture Texts: Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20, Luke 8:4-15

Tonight's Subject: The Story. What is the heart referring to?

In tonight's lesson we are going to go back to the story and continue to further examine its content. This will take approximately four to seven weeks. We're going to see more in this story than we probably ever imagined was there! Please remember this from the story. While Jesus goes into great detail describing the challenges & frustrations of cultivating a garden and what the observant farmer and gardener learns about horticulture those facts aren't the point. ALL THIS INFORMATION IS GIVEN TO MAKE A PARELLEL COMPARISON to the state and nature of the human beings ability or inability to receive the gospel's work and influence within their heart! JESUS takes the natural and compares it to the spiritual realm of reality. JESUS is not giving a lesson in how to grow your garden. He is revealing how complex the heart is. When looking into the sower parable notice that JESUS does not use the word heart until after the parable is given. Then heart is referred to in verses 15 & 19 in M. In Mk, the word heart is not referred to at all in the sower parable! Lk treats the story the same way M does. The heart is referred to in the explanation but not the story. Is there anything we can immediately learn from that fact? What should we consider/remember that as the sower parable is told the heart is not referred to but then in the explanation it is the central focus of JESUS explanation? In order to discuss that question more thoroughly let's first define what heart often means in the Biblical narrative.

In both the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT) the word "heart" is used to refer to the whole of the innermost part of the human, NOT merely the emotions. However, in the twenty-first century English the word "heart" is used to express the emotions as an individual compartment of the inner part of the human. It is common for Americans to divide humans into the physical and the metaphysical. While this is a widespread insight, the way most Americans compartmentalize the internal (metaphysical) aspect of humans is diverse from many other cultures. We Americans tend to see people as having two separate parts, wherein one part is the emotions, which we refer to as the heart, then a brain, which houses the mind.

The Bible does not divide man so easily – it focuses on all three making up the whole of a being – this is Biblically called the "heart." When both the Old and New Testaments speak about the heart, it never means merely human feelings (emotions). The Biblical word "heart," is the inner aspect of a man, made of three parts all together, with the primary part: the Brain (The Mind).

First we have the mental process, which is the major part (where action & reaction take place), which is to lead a person in their life. Second, we have emotions which only process as reaction to enrich or hinder our lives. Third, we have the will where decisions are made between the rational and the emotions.

According to Vine's New Testament Dictionary the Greek word *kardia* (2588), rendered "heart" (English, "cardiac,"), is the chief organ of physical life ("for the life of the flesh is in the blood," Lev. 17:11), occupies the most important place in the human system. By an easy transition, the word came to stand for man's entire mental and moral activity, both the rational and the emotional elements. In other words, the heart is used figuratively for the hidden springs of the personal life. The Bible describes human depravity as in the "heart", because sin is a principle which has its seat in the center of man's inward life, and then 'defiles' the whole circuit of his action, Matt. 15:19, 20. On the other hand, Scripture regards the heart as the sphere of Divine influence, Rom. 2:15; Acts 15:9....

The heart, as lying deep within, contains "the hidden man," 1 Pet. 3:4, the real man. It represents the true character but conceals it. As to its usage in the NT it denotes (a) the seat of physical life, Acts 14:17; Jas. 5:5; (b) the seat of moral nature and spiritual life, the seat of grief, John 14:1; Rom. 9:2; 2 Cor. 2:4; joy, John 16:22; Eph. 5:19; the desires, Matt. 5:28; 2 Pet. 2:14; the affections, Luke 24:32; Acts 21:13; the perceptions, John 12:40; Eph. 4:18; the thoughts, Matt. 9:4; Heb. 4:12; the understanding, Matt. 13:15; Rom. 1:21; the reasoning powers, Mark 2:6; Luke 24:38; the imagination, Luke 1:51; conscience, Acts 2:37; 1 John 3:20; the intentions, Heb. 4:12, (cf.) 1 Pet. 4:1; purpose, Acts 11:23; 2 Cor. 9:7; the will, Rom. 6:17; Col. 3:15; faith, Mark 11:23; Rom. 10:10; Heb. 3:12. The heart, in its moral significance in the OT, includes the emotions, the reason, and the will.

The Holman Bible Dictionary gives the most thorough explanation concerning the definition of the English word "heart," when it states: The heart is the center of the physical, mental, and spiritual life of humans. This contrasts to the normal use of *kardia* ("heart") in Greek literature outside the Scriptures. The New Testament follows the Old Testament usage when referring to the human heart in that it gives *kardia* a wider range of meaning than it was generally accustomed to have.

First, the word heart refers to the physical organ and is considered to be the center of the physical life. Eating and drinking are spoken of as strengthening the heart (Gen. 18:5; Judg. 19:5; Acts 14:17). As the center of physical life, the heart came to stand for the person as a whole. The heart became the focus for all the vital functions of the body; including both intellectual and spiritual life. The heart and the intellect are closely connected, the heart being the seat of intelligence: "For this people's heart is waxed gross ... lest at any time they should ... understand with their heart, and should be converted" (Matt. 13:15).

All moral conditions from the highest to the lowest are said to center in the heart. Sometimes the heart is used to represent a person's true nature or character. Samson told Delilah "all his heart" (Judg. 16:17). This true nature is contrasted with the outward appearance: "man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7 RSV).

On the negative side, depravity is said to issue from the heart: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). Jesus said that out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander (Matt. 15:19). In other words, defilement comes from within rather than from without.

Because the heart is at the root of the problem, this is the place where God does His work in the individual. For instance, the work of the law is “written in their hearts,” and conscience is the proof of this (Rom. 2:15). The heart is the field where seed (the Word of God) is sown (Matt. 13:19; Luke 8:15). In addition to being the place where the natural laws of God are written, the heart is the place of renewal. Before Saul became king, God gave him a new heart (1 Sam. 10:9). God promised Israel that He would give them a new spirit within, take away their “stony heart” and give them a “heart of flesh” (Ezek. 11:19). Paul said that a person must believe in the heart to be saved, “for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness” (Rom. 10:10)

Finally, the heart is the dwelling place of God. Two persons of the Trinity are said to reside in the heart of the believer. God has given us the “earnest of the Spirit in our hearts” (2 Cor. 1:22). Ephesians 3:17 expresses the desire that “Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.” The love of God “is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Rom. 5:5).

Conclusion

Hopefully from the plethora of references cited, it is beyond dispute that when the Bible refers to the heart it is not referring to the emotions solely. While the emotions are a blessing of God, that lend exuberance and passion, both in the negative and positive aspects of sensation; they are never meant as the sole device of discretion. This is the place of the seat of the will, but always according to the intellect in response to what God has said. And while we should consider the emotions in any decisions we make, this is always in a subservient role, never taking preeminence. There is an abundance of references to the heart as having the lead role in decision-making. Both the Old and New Testaments present the word “heart” as always used to include the mental process (rational and reason), and the will (volition), as well as the emotions.

Personally, I believe the best definition of heart, is the focus and determination of the mind, and the response of the emotions. We must always remember, what God says about the human heart, that it: “... is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,”⁸ because man is a fallen creature, subject to sin; however, it is also with our heart that we exercise faith unto salvation.

Next week we will begin answering the question we started with. Why is the heart the central focus of the sower parable but never referred to until the explanation is given?