

Follow Jesus, Not Your Heart

Part 1: Deceitful and Wicked

(preached 4/28/24)

HAVE KIDS BLOW UP BALLOONS

Please turn to *Jeremiah 17*.

The world says “follow your heart” but what does the Lord say?

What happens when we follow our hearts?

What or Whom does the Lord tell us to follow?

Is it possible that some of our greatest problems lie with following our hearts?

What is the role of the heart and how should we deal with it?

Several times in my life someone has approached me and told me they were **in love with someone they meant online**. I had a fellow show me a picture of an attractive blonde woman that he called his fiancée and said they were getting married in 6 months. Separately and later on, I had a woman show me a picture of a fellow who looked like GI Joe and said the same thing.

THEY BOTH CLAIMED TO BE “IN LOVE” and “the happiest they’d been in years.” They were both moving to some state far away to settle down once and for all. My heart broke because I knew **I had to DISILLUSION them**. I knew they were being “catfished”—deceived by people online who weren’t at all who they said they were and weren’t returning their “love.”

DEFINE ILLUSION:

[An illusion is something that appears to exist or be a particular thing but does not actually exist or is in reality something else.](#)

Intellectual/Emotional Illusion: Perception of something objectively existing in a way that deceives or misleads intellectually or emotionally. It’s when we believe something to be true, but it turns out to be false.

Let's define disillusionment: **Disillusionment** refers to the **feeling of disappointment and unhappiness** that arises when one discovers the truth about something or someone they previously admired or respected. It occurs when illusions or idealistic beliefs are shattered, revealing a less favorable reality.

Let's look at it one more way: **we create a fantasy that isn't real**, but it's what our heart wants.

WE IMAGINE A PERSON OR EVENT TO BE SOMETHING THEY AREN'T AND ISN'T REALISTIC OR FAIR.

The man and the woman in my examples above **DELUDED themselves into thinking their "love"** and soon to be nuptials were real when they never were.

Deception is something someone else can do to us (and we can do to ourselves).

DELUSION is something only we can do to ourselves.

It contains the word illusion and means: A **delusion** is a **strongly-held or fixed false belief** that conflicts with reality.

There's a divide in the examples I gave today, one that we all need to bridge or we risk getting no revelations from this sermon.

When I shared the examples, **did you feel some compassion** for the people who were catfished?

As soon as I started sharing what happened, did **you immediately discern that these people were deluding themselves?**

Did you say to yourself: *"that would never happen to me"* or maybe *"I'm too wise to fall for that"*?

If you did, then the divide I just talked about exists and therefore **WE RUN THE RISK OF BEING DELUDED OURSELVES.**

I will even go on to say that it's **possible for anyone to create illusions** in our imaginations and live according to them, therefore deceived.

The **illusions we might be living under aren't harmless** by any means but *quenches our relationship with God and can ruin our marriages and families.*

OUR HEARTS ARE THE PART OF US THAT CREATES FANTASIES.

- Our imaginations & fantasies are the products of our hearts.
- Our hearts are the aspect of us that's the MOST EASILY deceived.
- And of all the parts that make us up, **our hearts are the most deceitful...to us.**

We may point at Satan, but truth is **its our own beating heart that deludes us.**

Jeremiah was known as the Weeping Prophet, because he was shown his people's falling away from God AND the terrible consequences that would follow: destruction, death, and slavery. Although God's people knew the impending threat from Babylon, they'd made a treaty with Egypt to protect them instead of crying out to the Lord to be their Protector (as He promised He would). The Lord responds:

[Jer 17:5-8 ESV] 5 Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, **whose HEART turns away** from the LORD. 6 He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. 7 "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. 8 He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."

Verse 7: Which part of us is responsible for “trusting in the Lord”?

Which part of us is that which STOPS trusting God?

OUR HEARTS.

Let's read on:

[Jer 17:9-10 ESV] 9 **The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick**; who can understand it? 10 "I the LORD **search the heart** and test the mind, to **give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.**"

My heart and yours deceives us. Not just when we were younger and more naïve. Not merely before we were Saved. Now. It deludes us. It creates fantasies and what the Lord in the Bible calls “vain imaginations.”

The Hebrew word Jeremiah used for deceitful means **“sly, insidious, crooked, and puffed up.”**

SHOW BALLOON

The balloon **appears to have size and volume doesn't it?** It takes up space. Yet, what is it full of? Popping it makes a loud noise seemingly giving it more “power” but what really happens? *It all but disappears instantly and loses everything it APPEARED to be.*

POP BALLOON

That's what fantasies and “vain imaginations” are. They appear to have life, volume, and size that takes up space in our lives but are, in fact, illusions full of hot air.

Part of the purpose of this sermon series is to pop those balloons and as we defined “disillusionment” earlier, the **result is us being disappointed.** Why?

The fantasy we created in our hearts met its needs because it convinced (deceived!) us that reality hasn't (met its needs).

Back to Jeremiah 17:9. The heart is not just deceived **BUT DECEIVES US MORE THAN ANY OTHER PART OF US.** “Above all things” is what God said to Jeremiah.

In the case of God's people in the days of Jeremiah, they stopped trusting in God because their *hearts convinced them God wasn't and wouldn't meet their needs.* So they turned to a human power to provide and protect them: Egypt.

Next in the same verse the Lord says the heart is *“desperately sick”* and your KJV says “desperately wicked.” What does that mean?

“Desperately sick/wicked” is a word-phrase with one translation, meaning: *“woeful, frail, feeble, melancholy, VULNERABLE.”*

Therefore Jeremiah 17:9 might read: *“The heart is sly and insidious, deceiving us more than our other parts because its so weak and vulnerable.”*

NOT WEAK AND VULNERABLE LIKE A BABY who can’t defend itself.

The vulnerability of the heart is **its desperate seeking to have its emotional needs met.**

- The need to be loved, wanted, affirmed, desired, sought after, valued, and cherished.
- Our hearts can and will do anything for these.
- The more “starved” it feels of these things, the more vulnerable it is.

Even a self-proclaimed Christian will lie, steal, commit adultery, divorce, deceive, cover up, have lustful fantasies, threaten, and intimidate to meet the desperate needs of the heart.

Jesus said the same thing:

[Mat 15:18-20 ESV] 18 “But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. 20 These are what defile a person.”

Neither Jesus nor I are saying **that’s ALL that comes from the heart**, but that’s for a different sermon in this series and I’m not addressing that today.

Today we need to recognize that **although our hearts may be starved, hurt, and vulnerable that it’s deceiving us.**

It’s inspiring us to imagine and fantasize people and events that are just like balloons: puffed up and appearing to have substance, when in fact its full of hot air. *Empty illusions that need to be popped even if we experience disappointment.*

POP BALLOON

We must recognize that *our delusions are not fair to God or others* because they *don't represent the truth*.

Let's realize **it's our hearts** saying that "this is the way things **SHOULD be**" and when they aren't, we start to mistrust God and others...and start looking elsewhere.

Some think our flesh is our biggest problem and indeed, Paul says our flesh is at war with our spirit. The flesh openly rebels against God's commands and Paul goes on to explain that sin takes advantage of said rebellion and makes everything worse.

Yet it's the heart that the OT prophets, Jesus, and the NT Apostles spent more time on. In another sermon we'll see that it's the heart that believes in the Gospel and is capable of having "rivers of living water" flow from it.

Conversely, it's the **HEART THAT HARDENS ITSELF AND REFUSES TO BELIEVE EVEN UNTO DAMNATION**.

Thus says the Lord:

[Act 28:27 ESV] 27 For this people's ***HEART has grown dull***, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand ***with their HEART*** and turn, and I would heal them.'

God didn't blame their flesh and its passions and He didn't point the finger at their minds.

It's with the HEART that one either believes (trust) or doesn't.

What does it mean to "go astray"? The image is sheep following their shepherd and the one who goes astray is they stop following their shepherd and start following something else. Jesus is our Good Shepherd and we can go astray from Him, in our marriages, and elsewhere. Whichever one it is, ***guess which part of us LEADS us astray?***

[Heb 3:10, 12 ESV] 10 Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always ***go astray in their heart***; they have not known my ways.' Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you ***an evil, unbelieving HEART, leading you to fall away from the living God***.

It's **the heart that tries to be the shepherd** in our lives and lead us into deceit like Jeremiah said, and into the very things Jesus warned us about: evil thoughts, hate, adultery, theft, lies, and slander.

We are not ever to follow our hearts.

- It's not our shepherd.
- It's not interested in the truth.
- It's a frail, vulnerable, and weak part of ourselves that will do anything to get what it wants.
- It doesn't care about God's commandments or promises, especially when its feeling starved and neglected.

It will convince us that God isn't meeting our needs or answering our prayers. That He's holding something back from us that would fulfill us in some way. Why do you think Eve listened to the Serpent even though she quoted God's commandment correctly?

- Why hasn't God made us more financially stable or changed our spouse?
- Why hasn't He freed us from our addiction or delivered us from our fears?
- Why hasn't He healed us and taken our pain away?

Like ancient Israel in the days of Jeremiah, *have we reached out to an "Egypt"* to cover for us where we feel God has let us down?

Our hearts deceive us when it comes to "love" in more ways than I have time to cover in this sermon. I gave you one example at the beginning: the people who were catfished by an online deceiver *believed WITH ALL THEIR HEARTS that they were "in love."* Was that true?

For anyone who wants to say: *"but their feelings were real and need to be acknowledged!"* My response is this: they were 1) presented with an illusion by a deceiver and 2) deluded themselves by accepting this illusion as true which resulted in all manner of tender feelings they falsely called "love."

Here is **what God says about love** and I quote it at most every wedding I perform:

[1Co 13:4-6 ESV] 4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, **but rejoices with the TRUTH.**

WE MAY HAVE TENDER AFFECTIONATE FEELINGS toward a person or something else, but if it's deception on the part of someone else or us deluding ourselves, **it's not love**. Call it infatuation, a crush, lust (which simply means "desire") but it's not love. If we're married it's adultery.

Are we following our hearts? These questions will help us determine if we are or aren't:

- Do you feel that God has let you down and you've felt tempted toward another source of fulfillment or relief? An "Egypt"?
- If you're married and you've been led toward fantasies, imaginations, and inappropriate affection toward someone else?
- Have you felt let down by a person that you had an idealized image of? Were you disappointed when that illusion was shattered?
- Are you doing something you know is against God's commandments, but have justified it in some way because your needs aren't being met by God, a spouse, or family?

OUR HEART IS NOT OUR SHEPHERD AND WE NEED TO STOP FOLLOWING IT, RIGHT NOW.

There is only one Shepherd:

[Jhn 10:11, 14 ESV] (JESUS SAID) "**I am the good shepherd.** The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ... 14 **I am the good shepherd.** I know my own and my own know me,

Let's pray and declare today that despite our wants and needs, we will only follow our Lord Jesus!