

WHERE LIES THE HEART?

Matthew 6:21

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”



Special Music: “Treasure”

Pinelake Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvxqAZYjCwM>

REFLECTION OF THE HEART

Tony Stapleton loved to fish. While many of his friends would hit the links or putter around in their gardens on Saturday, Tony would often get up early to put his fishing boat in the water and wet his line before the sun was up. He seldom invited anyone along. This was his special time, and he chose not to be distracted by idle chatter or playing nursemaid to novices. He just wanted to fish.

His wife, Julieanne, gave him his space. She enjoyed having time to herself on Saturdays now that Tony had retired from the accounting department at City Hall. Having Tony around all the time had left her feeling like she needed to keep him entertained. She had a honey-do list for him, but she found herself adding unnecessary items to the list just to keep Tony out from under her feet. Julieanne felt a small pang of guilt when she did that, because she loved Tony. She just needed her space as well.

Unfortunately, Tony's fishing hobby had taken an obsessive turn as of late. Saturday mornings just weren't enough for him anymore. Julianne was beginning to think that Tony may have discovered her little plan to keep him busy. The once-a-week fishing trips had turned into four and five days a week. She often found herself sitting alone at the First Community Church on Sunday morning. Julianne had found it increasingly difficult to explain Tony's absence to Pastor Chuck. It embarrassed her, and she found herself resenting how she felt forced to make up excuses each week.

Tony stopped playing poker with his buddies on Friday night so that he could get an earlier start on Saturday mornings. He stopped taking Julieanne out for date-night on Tuesday so that he could get to bed earlier, for the Wednesday fishing trips. He stopped attending Rotary Club meetings and quit going to breakfast at Daisy's Diner on Friday morning with his old gang from City Services. He started making excuses for Sunday lunch with his son and grandsons so that he could spend more time with a rod in his hand. Before long, when Tony wasn't out fishing, he was spending his time planning his next fishing trip. There was little time for anything or anyone else in his life. He stopped visiting with friends or inviting them along on his excursions because, well, they were not as dedicated to the sport like he was.

Although Tony had a nice pension from the city, Julianne noticed that the balance on the retirement account started to drop rapidly. She also observed that along with the reduction in retirement funds, there came the arrival of new tackle boxes, more high-end rods and reels, and fishing excursions, which included guides and appropriate equipment. Then there was the new Johnson for Tony's boat and a top-of-the-line fish finder.

He began to slide on the honey-do list because if one thing was unnecessary, then they were probably all unnecessary. Tony's little retirement hobby was now taking its toll on Julieanne's peace of mind. She became alarmed as the retirement funds dwindled. If something wasn't done soon, Julieanne might be forced to start working again to support Tony and his increasing appetite for fishing adventures. She could see dark days ahead.

And to make matters worse, Tony had stopped listening to her when she tried to broach the subject. His go-to response was, "I deserve this. I worked hard my whole life, and it is time I finally get to enjoy what I have coming to me." Julieanne slowly came to realize that her marriage to Tony had become all about... well... Tony. It was no longer about the both of them. Tony's obsession had taken over both of their lives. She only saw him a few days a week, and when he was home, he wasn't really there.

One Sunday, Julieanne broke down after church and told Pastor Chuck what was actually going on. She had finally reached a point where she had had enough and was thinking of leaving Tony. She hardly saw him anymore and was beginning to feel that Tony no longer loved her, that she had been cast aside, that there was no longer any room for her in Tony's life. It seemed to her that Tony's hobby was all he needed to make him happy anymore. Saying it out loud brought all the emotions to the surface and she cried heavily as the pastor fed her one tissue after another.

When she regained her composure, the pastor spoke gently to her saying, "Julieanne, I want you to tell Tony that I'd like him to join me in the morning around nine for a little fishing down at the low dam."

"Pastor, you haven't heard a word I said. I want him to stop fishing. I don't need you encouraging him," said Julieanne somewhat indignantly.

"Trust me," said Pastor Chuck. "And tell him he doesn't need to bring anything with him. I will have everything we need."

“I’ll tell him, pastor, but he really likes to sleep in on Monday after his trips on the weekend,” replied Julieanne.

“Just tell him I will be there waiting on him. I’m pretty sure he will join me,” said the preacher.

Julieanne thanked the preacher and headed home. Later that evening, after supper, she told Tony about the preacher’s request. He said he would think about it.

As much as he wanted to sleep in, Tony couldn’t resist the opportunity to share his love for fishing with his pastor. He put his favorite rod and reel in the car to take with him, even though he had been told not to. When he arrived at the dam, the preacher was waiting for him. Tony parked his car and started to get his rod from the trunk along with one of his tackle boxes.

The preacher approached him and said, “You won’t be needing those, Tony. I have everything we need.”

“But preacher, this is my best rig.”

“You won’t need it, Tony,” the pastor insisted.

“Well, alright preacher,” said Tony as he slammed the trunk lid. “But it is obvious you don’t know a lot about fishing, preacher. The sun’s already up and the fish probably won’t be biting.”

“It’s all good, Tony,” the pastor said as he led the way to the high side of the dam.

When they arrived at the spot Pastor Chuck had picked out, Tony could see that this was going to be a little different from his other fishing trips. The pastor handed him a cane pole that had a line attached. At the end of the line was a fishing weight heavy enough to sink the line and at about the six foot mark was a plastic bobber. There was no hook. Tony didn't see evidence of a bait can or a tackle box anywhere.

"Preacher, we can't catch any fish with these rigs."

"Who said anything about catching fish?" queried the preacher.

"But I thought..."

"Hush, Tony. Just sit here and drop your line in the water."

Tony started to protest, but the minister held his finger to his lips as he sat down on the bank and tossed his weighted line into the water. Looking perplexed and somewhat annoyed, Tony did the same. They sat like that in silence for a while. The sun was warm enough to take the chill out of the air and the breeze brought the scent of spring flowers and budding trees. The only sounds were whispers as the breeze blew through the trees and the occasional chirp of a bird or the buzz of an insect. Tony felt his muscles relax, as the tension left his neck and shoulders. He could hardly call it fishing, but he felt himself slipping into the rhythm of nature all around him.

"Tony, I've known you a long time. I have always considered you a friend as well as a parishioner. But I have to ask you a very serious question and I want you to give it some thought before you answer me."

“I don’t know, preacher. What’s this all about?” Tony said as he started to tense up again.

“Hush, Tony. Listen and think. Here’s the question. Where’s your heart, Tony?”

“Well, preacher...” Tony started to say.

Pastor Chuck held his finger to his lips again. “Don’t talk, Tony. Just think about the question. Where is your heart?”

They both sat on the bank as Tony pondered the question. The bobbers on the lines left ripples as the breeze pushed them in one direction or another. Tony started thinking about the question. ‘Where is my heart?’ Well, that was easy. He loved to fish. Oh, how he loved to fish. It was his passion. It was what he lived for.

He hadn’t always been that way. There was a time in the not-too-distant past when he felt blessed to be working every day. And he loved being an elder at the church. And he loved Julieanne. Oh, how he loved spending time with the love of his life. But somehow, he had allowed his passion for fishing to replace everything else that was important in his life. His friends. His family. His church. And even his wife.

The preacher’s bobber had come in too close to the shore, so he pulled it and threw it out again with a splash. For some reason, this activity didn’t break Tony’s thoughts. It was as if his brain was shifting gears, stepping down from running top speed, a speed that had made it impossible to react. And now it was

stepping down to a slower speed more conducive for a proper life. What a jerk he had been and how clearly he could see that now, as his world slowed around him. Where was his heart? Certainly not where it should be. He had allowed it to become corrupt, and by doing so he had managed to hurt those who cared about him.

“Hey preacher.”

“Yes, Tony?” replied the pastor.

“Wanna buy a nice fishing rod?”

“Sorry, Tony, I have all that I need right here,” said the preacher with a smile.

Tony thought for a minute and then smiled as well. “I get it, preacher. Can I keep this one?”

“Of course you can, Tony. I bought it just for you.”

‘Pastor Chuck is pretty wise,’ thought Tony. ‘He knew just what I needed to straighten me out.’

“Thanks, preacher. I have truly appreciated our time together.”

“You’re welcome, Tony. We should do this more often,” said pastor Chuck.

“I’d like that, preacher. But right now, I have some fences to mend, if it’s alright with you,” said Tony.

“Good to have you back, Tony. Give Julieanne my love,” said the minister with a smile.”

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

The human heart is a most wonderful thing. Most of us don't realize just how much we rely on it until it fails us physically, emotionally, or spiritually. One of the hardest things humans can accept and deal with is... well... a broken heart. Whether it is because someone has become estranged from our lives, or our heart becomes physically unable to keep up with our body's demands, or if we are struggling with dark moments and think God has abandoned us, leaving us destitute and longing for his presence. In these moments, our heart, which we so often take for granted, suddenly becomes the focal point of our existence. So much so, there are moments when we think we can't go on and slip into despair and anguish, stuck in a mire of dark thoughts.

Have you ever known someone who is obsessed? I mean really obsessed. When something that they like or enjoy suddenly becomes their only focus. They suddenly find their entire world is guided by the need to feed with that obsession. I'm not talking about a hobby. Hobbies can, and often are, our release valve. A way to constructively remove us from stressful situations and help us to find peace in the chaos around us. No, I am talking about something in our lives that may at first seem innocuous, but over time becomes our reason for living. Something that we engage with to the point that everything else in our lives is sacrificed on the altar of obsessiveness. Relationships, finances, survival, and peace of mind take second place to our need to feed our desires.

People can obsess over many things, like Tony and his fishing. But we also see people obsess over things like making money, work, drugs, sex, alcohol,

cars, sports, stamps, coins, television, conspiracy theories, religion, politics, and just about anything that starts innocently enough but in the end devours a person's mind, body, and spirit.

There is an expression that has regained popularity, especially among nutritionists. "Eat to live, not live to eat." It may be difficult to believe this, but that quote is actually from Benjamin Franklin and has been around for centuries. The purpose of the statement is to impress upon people that it is more important to balance our lives rather than dwell on unhealthy habits. There is nothing wrong with savoring the good things in life as long as we don't lose focus on what is most important. We simply can't stay healthy by eating cake all the time. When our focus is on the pleasure of eating rather than on the result of having a healthy body, we destroy any chance we have of staying healthy. We sacrifice our very existence to satisfy our longing, rather than our need. And the most unhealthy lie we tell ourselves occurs when we decide that our longing IS our need, to the detriment of our person and our relationships.

It is easier to see this problem in others than ourselves. We see people who indulge in their longings and we either admire them or pity them. But the truth is, most alcoholics don't believe they are alcoholics. Most drug addicts don't believe they have a problem. Most extremely wealthy people don't see that they suffer from greed. Most people who overly engage in the trappings of life, don't see a problem when their lives don't example the teachings of Jesus.

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

When a detective in a police drama is trying to find the criminals, we hear the common phrase, “Follow the money.” Why follow the money? When they follow the money, it usually points to where the criminals are located. The same is true of our treasure. Whatever we consider our treasure leaves a trail right to our heart. If we are constantly seeking earthly treasure, the trail we leave will lead others right to our selfishness. If we are sports enthusiasts, the trail we leave will lead others right to the sports team we are enamored with. I’m not saying that following sports is wrong. But when it starts becoming our complete focus and begins hurting our relationships, we need to step back and question our obsessiveness. We might have a favorite jersey that we wear to watch the game on Sunday. We might have a baseball signed by our favorite player. But when we are so engrossed in buying paraphernalia and attending games that we start to have trouble putting food on the table or getting up to go to work on Monday after the big game, we just might have a problem. If we are no longer charitable with the blessings God gives us because we are hoarding them up to spend on our own enjoyment, we may have lost our focus. If we feel that we don’t really need to give of our time and resources to our church because the church doesn’t understand us or our obsessions, we need to accept that we have lost our way.

Let me ask this question. When someone sees our treasure and follows it back to our hearts, what do they find? What do we want them to find? Is what they find a true reflection of what we want them to see? Are they going to find a mound of shiny earthly treasure or will they find that our stony hearts have been replaced with hearts of flesh that remind them of Jesus?

An even more important question is, if Jesus follows the path to our heart, what will he find? Will he discover that we are firmly planted in the world, or that we are storing up treasure in heaven? Have we allowed Jesus to turn our hearts of stone to hearts of flesh? Or have we told Jesus that we like our stony hearts just the way they are?

Tony lost his way. He didn't even realize what he was doing. He couldn't see that his whole world was about to collapse around him. He couldn't see that the price he was paying for his obsession was turning his heart back into stone and that it was about to cost him everything he had been taking for granted, including his wife, Julieanne.

Obsessions blind us to reality and make our ears deaf to the voices of those that love us. And there is really only one solution. We have to shut out the noise and chaos that prevents us from seeing and hearing the truth long enough for the truth to become our new reality. It is akin to waking up from a bad dream. Pastor Chuck knew the only way he was going to reach Tony and get him to see and hear the truth, was to boil his environment down to the basics by dropping an empty line with a cane pole, effectively turning off the noise. The pastor needed for Tony to experience how empty and fruitless his endeavors had come by ensuring that there was no tangible reward for dropping that line other than a quiet mind. It forced Tony to realize how empty his obsession was. Facing oneself in such a moment can be shocking and terrifying as we realize what we have done to ourselves and the ones we love. But it gives us a chance to let God speak into us, turn us around, and turn our hearts back into flesh.

I challenge us this week to reflect on our hearts and see what is making them tick. When we look close, are we seeing hearts of stone, anchored to treasures of the world, or do we see hearts of flesh inhabited by the spirit of God encouraging us to draw closer to our creator?

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

God bless you all!

AMEN

Copyright © 2025 Rev. Walt Wellborn

Scripture references provided under copyright by:

THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION©, NIV© Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. © Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.