

February 13, 2022

Texts: Jeremiah 17: 5-10; Luke 6: 17-26

Title: “The Heart of Jesus”

Tomorrow is Valentine’s Day, just in case that might be a call to action for a few of you men here. This reminds me of an article that came out last year about candy hearts. You know those candy hearts that are bright pink and orange and yellow, and they have sappy sayings stamped onto them—“Kiss Me,” “Hot Stuff,” “Be Mine,” etc.

The original candy hearts with sayings—their official name is “conversation hearts”—were from the Necco Co in the 1860s. By 2019, about 8 billion Sweethearts candy hearts were sold each year, with most of those sold in the six weeks leading up to Valentine’s Day. But no, I don’t think it’s adequate to just give your sweetheart some candy hearts. I don’t think they taste too good either and they might break off one of your teeth if you’re not careful.

Regardless of how you feel about Valentine’s Day, it’s a shame that we don’t celebrate love every day of the year. It’s too easy to take our loved ones for granted. The greater message is that we would do good to notice and appreciate the people who love us. Let them know you care.

Speaking of love, we would do good to remember to view our lives through the heart of Jesus. **That’s the goal of the Christian life, isn’t it?** Someone said, “the Christian life is a life in which Christ is the one living and doing everything in us, with us, and through us.” That means without a doubt we end up focused on sharing God’s love with others and doing the good works God made us to do. In

doing so we represent Jesus' character. The character of the one who dwells within us. We are "ambassadors for Christ" if you will.

And that's why today's Bible passage is appropriate for Valentine's Day. Because Jesus' teachings come from a foundation of grace, of God's unmerited love for this world. His words might seem challenging, even harsh, in this passage. But it's important to view them through Jesus' heart?

Jesus had been teaching out in the countryside and healing people. A great crowd of people had come from all over Judea, and even from the Gentile towns of Tyre and Sidon. Jesus was popular! And in the midst of all this excitement, Jesus comes up with this message that we often call the "the blessings and the woes" directed to his followers. What did he want them—and us—to know? For one thing, he's saying **not to judge your life by your current circumstances**. In other words, don't set your heart on the things of this world. That's not what we were made for. If things are going well for you right now, don't base your happiness, self-worth, or security on these things. Or, perhaps, things aren't going so well for you right now. Don't base your attitude or your self-worth on these things. Our circumstances don't define us. Whether they drive us closer to God or further from God, that's what matters.

Remember, this is a time when Jesus' popularity is rising. Crowds of people follow him wherever he goes. They hang on his every word. They go home and tell their friends and family about him. But Jesus didn't let his go to his head. And he didn't want his disciples to think that following him was a great way to get

rich, for instance. In fact, the opposite was true. It's so easy to let the good things in life become the center of who we are instead of God.

In April of last year, the chairman of a New York-based hedge fund with billions of dollars in assets under his management, committed suicide. Charles de Vault founded the hedge fund International Value Advisers in 2007. He was the chief investment officer for the fund. At its peak, IVA had more than \$20 billion in assets under management. But in 2020, they lost a lot of money.

The board for the investment fund voted to close the fund and liquidate its assets and it was at this time that Charles de Vault, a married father of two, jumped to his death from a building in Manhattan.

That is tragic! Tragic in that he defined his self-worth by how much money he was returning for his investors. Don't set your heart on the things of this world because circumstances change. But God's character and promises are the same yesterday, today and forever.

**And also, Jesus was telling them to find their fulfillment in living for him.** There are a lot of ways that people seek fulfillment. But there is only one place you can truly find it and that is in living for Him!

The disciples didn't know it yet, but Jesus was calling them to make the ultimate sacrifice, to eventually die for the sake of following him. And he is calling us to do the same. Even if we never lay down our lives for Jesus, we are called to sacrifice our own priorities and values and replace them with the priorities and values of God.

Sophie Scholl was born in Germany in 1921. Her parents were Christians who raised their six children to follow Jesus. But when Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany, Sophie and her brother, Hans, joined youth organizations that supported Hitler. Their father was horrified and tried to change their minds.

As Hitler's brutality came to light, Sophie and Hans left this organization and along with four friends, created a resistance movement known as the White Rose. Members of the White Rose passed out leaflets detailing Hitler's atrocities and encouraging Germans to resist. One of the leaflets read, "We won't be silenced, we are your . . . conscience, the White Rose won't leave you in peace." They were risking their lives by resisting the Nazis. But you see, their faith wouldn't let them live comfortably, safely in a society that had abandoned the values of God.

Long story short, in February 1943, Hans and Sophie were arrested by the Gestapo. Six days after their arrest, they were executed by the Nazis. As Sophie walked to the guillotine on the morning of her execution, she said, "Such a fine, sunny day, and I have to die but what does my death matter, if through us, thousands of people are awakened and stirred to action?"

Hans' last words before he died were, "Long live freedom!" He was 24 years old; Sophie was 21. We can find happiness in chasing success, health, wealth, status, comfort, security. But we'll never find our ultimate God-given purpose for living without Him. Jesus was very clear that living for Him isn't easy so friends, keep working for it! Let's set our hearts on knowing God and living in God's will, and we'll discover true power for life, both abundant and eternal in its

blessings.