

Dead Religion

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[0 : 00] This morning we'll be looking at a story where Jesus confronts a group of people that went through great lengths on the outside to look good, to do all the right things, to say all the right things, and to convince people that they were close to God.

But inwardly, they missed God, that their hearts were far from God. Will you join with me? Follow the screen in a responsive prayer.

Father God, the lie of empty, dead religion is that we can be good enough or better than other people, then you will love us, but you are not impressed with our pitiful attempts to appear righteous.

We can do nothing to earn your grace, and we are no better than anyone else. It's only through your Son, His life, death, and resurrection that we can be made right with you.

Save me from dead religion and all its self-righteousness. Forgive me for a cheapened view of grace. You see into the depths of our hearts and know the reality of who we are.

[1 : 12] Our deepest thoughts and darkest sins are not hidden from you. Change my heart. Give me the desire to live a life surrendered to you.

You don't desire a life filled with empty routines or deeds that look good on the outside. But Jesus died and rose to bring us into a living relationship with you that you would transform us from the inside out.

Help me to know you. Help me to love you. Help me to serve you with every part of my life. May your compassion and grace transform our lives and the lives of the 95% of Hong Kong who don't yet know you.

Amen. The scripture reading comes from the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 11. Please follow along your bulletin. Now when he had spoken, a Pharisee asked him to have lunch with him.

And he went in and reclined at the table. When the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that he had not first ceremonially washed before the meal. But the Lord said to him, Now you Pharisees, clean the outside of the cup and of the platter.

[2 : 26] But inside of you you are full of robbery and wickedness. You foolish ones, did not he who made the outside make the inside also? But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you.

But woe to you Pharisees, for you paid tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God. But these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.

Woe to you Pharisees, for you love the chief seats in the synagogues and the respectful greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you, for you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it.

One of the lawyers said to him in replying, Teachers, when you say this, you insult us too. But he said, Woe to you lawyers as well, for you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers.

Woe to you, for you built the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them. So you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers, because it was they who killed them, and you built their tombs.

[3 : 32] For this reason also the wisdom of God said, I will send to them prophets and apostles. Some of them they will kill. And some they will persecute. So that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation.

From the blood of Abel. To the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God. Yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation. Woe to you lawyers, for you have

taken away the key of knowledge.

You yourselves did not enter, and you have hindered those who were entering. When he left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile, and to question him closely on many subjects, plotting against him to catch him in something he might say.

This is God's word. How are you guys doing? So I've got to ask, you know, if you're a lawyer in here, will you raise your hand? I'm teasing you.

I know, they found out we were doing this passage today. What a beautiful day, isn't it? I mean, it is amazing what God has given us to enjoy and spend time with him.

[4 : 37] Well, we are continuing in our Gospel of Luke series. And we are at a passage today that I think I would just rather not teach, to be honest.

This is one of those passages, if you could call in a sick day, you would call in a sick day. This passage definitely isn't sexy. It's not excellent.

It's not sex-cellent, if you put those two together. It's intense. And it's just raw. If you go to any church planning seminar, the guys aren't going to suggest that you teach this passage if you want your church to grow.

Because once people hear this passage, they don't want to come back. And it's interesting because Jesus, in his passage, he comes at these guys, these Pharisees, and he talks to them, these holders and keepers of the faith, these people who are very pious and righteous.

And he basically does surgery on them. Now, the Pharisees, they're not, they didn't start off bad. You've got to realize this. You know, in between the Old and New Testament, there's about 400 years of silence.

[5 : 52] And in that time, the people of God were scattered everywhere. The Babylonians had come in. The Assyrians had come in. They were in captivity. And what was happening in captivity was that the people started to lose their faith.

I mean, they stopped being able to speak in Hebrew. They stopped being able to read the Torah. They stopped being able to understand all the cultural things. And they were quickly becoming like the people that had assimilated them.

And a group of men came and said, we've got to stop this. And so about this time, about the third century B.C., these groups of Pharisees who were middle class workers and Sadducees who were the movers and shakers and the scribes and the Essenes, they all came together and they started to help God's people hold on to truth so that it wouldn't be lost.

So they wouldn't forget what it meant to be God's person. But by the time Jesus came around and the New Testament began, the Pharisees had a problem.

They had a major problem. They had a sickness. It was May 23, 2003. It was a day and a night that I'll never forget.

[7 : 04] I had not felt very good that day. I felt like I had indigestion. And I went to bed that night and ate a whole bunch of Tums. And about 1.30 I woke up and I had this incredible burning sensation on my chest.

Now I'd worked in a trauma unit and I looked at my nail beds and I have no pain coming down my shoulder. I'm not having a heart attack, at least that I know of. But I feel very uncomfortable.

After about an hour up, I went to Christina and said, I've got to go to the hospital. Something's wrong. So God allowed us to walk outside the door.

And the minute we got there, there was a taxi. And we got in this taxi at 2 o'clock in the morning on a Sunday morning. And we drove to the hospital and we went to the ER. And the guy did all the tests. And he goes, as far as I could tell, your EKG and everything's going well.

We had this blood test. We're going to take it and see what happens. But I think that you're just having really bad indigestion. You just go home and gut it out. And I'm like, okay.

[8 : 08] And it will go away. And I go, well, how long will it go away? Like one hour or five hours or eight hours? And he goes, no, like within an hour or two. It will be okay. I said, well, I can handle that. So we got in a taxi and we drove back home.

And on the way home, incredible amount of pain hit me in the chest. And my arm started to become really sore.

And I walked in the house and I'm kind of pacing around like an animal. And Christina's like, but you're not having a heart attack, so you're okay. And I go, yeah, I just don't feel very good. And I'm walking around and I'm walking around. And finally I get to the point where the pain is so much that

I'm kind of hitting against the wall.

And as I hit against the wall, I feel relief from the pain in my arm and in my chest. And finally I go to Christina and say, hey, we have to go back.

Something's happened. And we go back to the hospital and we call them up and they say, come in right away. We come there and immediately they start doing a test and they say, you're having a heart attack.

[9 : 07] And it was an incredible amount of pain. The guy kept pushing morphine in me, pushing morphine in me. And you see in the movies, the guy gets the arm blown off and takes some morphine and you go, oh, I feel so happy.

But it doesn't happen like that when you have a heart attack. And finally the doctor comes in and says, you're having a heart attack. Your right coronary artery is blocked. I'm almost positive. The only thing that's going to relieve the pain is taking you into surgery right now.

And I was willing to die. I mean, if you said, hey, the only thing that's going to relieve you is kill Lincoln, I would have killed Lincoln. Because the pain was so intense.

And I feel like I have a very high threshold of pain. And so I went in and the doctor came in and he prepped me for surgery. And they pushed me through and Christina was there.

And at that time I took my ring off. I gave it to her. I said, I'll see you in heaven. I think at that time she realized, okay, something serious is going on.

[10 : 09] Because that's when she got out of her phone and started calling everybody to pray. But I didn't think I was going to make it. Because it was so intense. Something was wrong with my heart.

I was having heart problems. Well, God allowed me to survive that heart attack and come out of it very much different and very changed in marriage and perspectives and things like that.

One of the things that we started as a mantra was live life with no regrets. So we say that often on our date nights. We have date nights on Thursday nights. Do we have any regrets?

Do we have regrets with our kids? Do we have regrets with each other? If I were to die right now, would you have regrets in our relationship? No regrets. Life's too short.

Another thing that's changed is I became acutely aware of my heart and heart issues. I studied heart disease and I looked about this thing.

[11 : 09] And as I went on this journey continuing in life, I realized as I looked around that heart disease is everywhere. That whether you know it or not right now, you have problems with your heart.

I started to think about what would that look like and what are the symptoms? And as I started to read scripture, I realized that heart disease isn't just in me, but it's widespread among all Christians. The Bible talks about it all the time. We use words like I'm overzealous or I'm uptight or I'm a type A person or I'm a type D person or I want to be very holy.

But the Bible and Jesus use different words. They use Pharisee. They use religious. They use legalism.

You all know what a Pharisee means, don't you? I mean, it's one of these phrases. I think it's coined from this passage that we're going to look at today. To be a Pharisee. What does that mean? If someone were to say you were acting as a Pharisee, how would you take that?

[12 : 30] Would you be offended? Again, as I said, this passage is tough. And Jesus is going to look at our hearts and he's going to look at the hearts of these men and he's going to say that they have this problem.

And this problem is legalism. This problem is Phariseeism. This problem is... A problem we all have. Now, for the sake of this sermon, I'm going to say that being a Pharisee means that we attempt to gain favor with God. And we attempt to gain favor with the people around us while ignoring what's going on in our heart.

And we gain that favor by either doing things that everybody thinks that we should do, like go to Bible study and come to church and read our Bible and tithe. And we gain that favor by not doing things that we think everyone says you shouldn't do, like cuss and smoke and drink and whatever their culture says.

But we all try to do and not do these things because we want to earn favor with the people around us and we want to earn favor with God. But as we do it, we forget what's going on in our heart and what's happening.

[13 : 39] And today's passage, man, it is intense. The only way I can preach this passage is by sharing that this passage is one part of Christ's journey. And this journey is ending at the cross.

Because if you preach this passage just by itself and you don't talk about grace, you don't talk about redemption. You walk away just depressed because it's so intense.

So what I want to do is really quickly through this next couple moments, look at some warning signs that maybe you and I have some heart issues. I think there's about ten of them in here, but I'm only going to look at four of them.

Verse 37, now when he had spoken, a Pharisee asked him to have lunch. And he went with him and he went in and reclined at the table. Now everybody knows what's going to happen here. I mean, Jesus knows he can read the guy's mind.

He knows why it's there. It's an ambush. He's going to, they're going to try to go after Jesus because Jesus is this young radical guy who is the liberal coming on the scenes and trying to change things.

[14 : 42] And so Jesus goes in there and he does something very unusual. He doesn't wash his hands. When the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that he had not first ceremony washed before the meal.

So what you would do is you would come into this house and you would go to a special side and there would be a special basin and a special pitcher of water. And you would take the water and you would have your hands like this and you would pour and you would pour from the tip of your fingers to your wrist.

And you'd stop. Because if anyone poured back onto your arm, you'd be unclean. And then you'd do that with both hands. You'd pull from the tip of your finger to your wrist and you would stop. And then you'd take your palm and you'd kind of rub it, your fist, and you'd rub it into your palm. And you'd take your other fist and rub it into your palm. And then you'd put your hands out like this again.

And then this time you'd pour the water from your wrist to your fingertip. And when you did that, you were clean. And you would do that after every dish in the meal.

[15 : 47] So you'd eat your first course and you'd get up and you'd go off and you'd pour. And you'd come back and you'd eat your second course. There'd be a lot of water wasted at a Chinese banquet, wouldn't there be?

How many courses is this going to be? Like 14? Okay, I have my hands. I'm going to need some chapstick or some kind of lotion afterwards because they're going to be really worn out here. But this is what would happen there. And the guy looks at Jesus and says, why didn't you do this? And Jesus walks into him and he says, what the Lord said to him, now you Pharisees, you clean the outside of the cup and the platter. But inside you are full of robbery and wickedness.

Now can you imagine this conversation? Because it's not just with the Pharisees. Everybody is there watching this confrontation. You foolish ones, did not he who make the outside make the inside also?

But give that which is within. Give your heart. Give it out. Surrender your heart. And if you surrender your heart to God, all things are clean for you.

[16 : 50] Jesus looks at these Pharisees and he realizes right away they have a heart problem. And their heart problem is that they're focusing on these small outward things.

But they're forgetting about the inward heart. They've done all these ceremonies and rituals to clean themselves outwardly and they don't think about their heart. And Jesus looks at them and says, no. No. No. No. Your heart is what God wants. I mean, you can look really great on the outside, but you can have a very, very bad heart.

There's an amazing passage in 1 Samuel 16, I think 8, and it's when they come to find David as a king because Saul has failed for the people. And Samuel walks in and he sees David as a king. And he sees David as a brother walk in who's handsome and tall and strapping. And he goes, surely that's the next king. And God speaks to him. He says, no. No.

[17 : 54] Because I see not as men see. I see the heart. Whereas men look on the outside. And so Jesus goes after these Pharisees and he goes after us and he says, be careful when you take this standard of holiness and you lower it.

Be careful when you take God's command and you say, I don't know if I can do that, but I can do this. And if I do that, I'm clean. Because when you do that, whenever you take this standard of

holiness and you try to change it, you always make it less.

You always turn it into something that you can do. Maybe others can't do it. But it's always less than what God wants because God wants our heart.

I was talking to a Muslim friend in China. We spent a lot of time. He was a Uyghur. And he was kind of culturally Muslim, but he was studying the Koran with a guy. And we were talking about everything that he did in his life every day to make the outward clean.

And I finally asked him this question. I don't know what made me ask it, but I think God just gave it to me. And I said, but does all that make your heart clean? How do you make your heart clean?

[19 : 12] And the guy looked at me and he said, I don't know. They haven't taught me that yet. And here Jesus is going after these Pharisees and he's saying, guys, you're paying attention to all the things on the outward, but you're not looking at the heart.

And the question we have to ask ourselves is when someone walks into our church or into our house, do we ever make judgments on them? By what we see outwardly?

I mean, do we ever look at how they dress or what they do and say, okay, something's going on there? Do we ever make these standards of holiness and perfection really small, little, inconsequential things?

It's amazing to me. I always watch women. And I got cued into this after I got married because as a single guy I was clueless. But guys, I think, can care less what each other looks like. But when girls come together, you can see there's like this two seconds eyes go up, eyes go down, and there's this immediate, okay, they're wearing this.

They didn't have time to fix their clothes. They got last year's Pradas on. They're just frumpy. And they make an assessment of what's going on right away. And guys, you know, maybe we look at the guy's watch and say, oh, he has a cool watch.

[20 : 28] But that's about it, right? But what Jesus says here is he says, be careful when you look at someone outwardly and you judge them. Because all the things that you do outwardly don't clean your heart.

He goes on and he talks about another symptom of being and having heart problem in this verse 42. But woe to you Pharisees, for you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and you disregard justice and love of God.

But these are the things that you should have done without neglecting the others. I mean, he looks at these legalists and he says, guys, you have a heart problem. You're focusing on the minor things. You're focusing on these little things.

And you're making these minor things major things. And you're not focusing on the major things.

And it's interesting because Pharisees were well known for tithing. I mean, they had their act together.

I mean, they tithed everything. A tithe at that time was about one-tenth. Now, we talk about it here. We don't pass the plates because we want it to be a response to your worshiping of God. I was talking to Mormon friends this week.

[21 : 35] We had them in our house. And I said, so what do you guys do about tithing? He goes, well, we take our bank statement to the head bishop. And he knows exactly how much we tithe, how much we make.

And then we have to tithe exactly 10% of everything that we make. I thought, wow. So next week, I'm teasing.

And I said, well, what happens if you don't tithe 10% of whatever you make? He says, you get kicked out of the church. You don't get to go to heaven.

Or you don't get to go to the highest heaven. And these Pharisees, they had tithing down to an art. They would pour out their tea leaves. And they would count 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

1, 2, 3. Can you imagine doing that? They counted all their tea leaves. And at the end of the day, they took their tithe and they gave it to the priest. Here's my tea leaves. Now, don't be bringing your tea leaves next week laughing, okay?

[22 : 39] But that's what they did. And Jesus looks at them and he goes, guys, you have heart problem. You're dealing with these really simple, easy things to do. And as you do them, you neglect what God wants you to do.

Love the people around you. Have mercy on the people around you. Love God. I mean, there was a story, and actually it was a well-known practice among the Pharisees.

It was this word called corbin. And what they would do is they would basically say, okay, I know that Joe needs money. He's going to come see me. And by rights of hospitality, I need to help him. But I don't really want to help him because I want to keep my stuff, my stuff. And so what I'm going to do is I'm going to take my money, and I'm going to take it to the temple, and I'm going to corbin it for two weeks. And it's basically like putting it into a bank.

So when my friend comes and he asks for help, which I would normally be obligated to do, I can say, well, I'm sorry, but I corbin my money. I mean, it looks really holy.

[23 : 44] I put it aside for God. I can't help you this time. And the Pharisees were experts at that, and I started thinking through my life, how many things in our life do we corbin?

We're walking out the door, and I'm looking at myself, and I see someone who's really hurting, and I know that I need to go talk to them and spend time with them and pray with them, but I really don't have the time. I need to corbin that time and put it aside because I have something else I need to do.

And maybe in two weeks I'll have that time, and I'll uncorbin it and give it to a person. Listen. Jesus looks at them and goes, you guys are Pharisees.

Because you're focusing on these little, simple things to do, and you're not focusing on your heart.

What are some things we focus on in the church? I mean, we're a young church.

We're one year old. Sometimes we focus on our dress code. Sometimes we focus on what Bible translation we read.

[24 : 54] You ever got any big discussion with somebody over a Bible translation? Just walk away, okay? It's not worth it. Sometimes we focus in on how much we tithe. Sometimes we focus in on how much we baptize.

But in doing these really simple, easy things that we can do, we forget about other things that God calls us not to do. We forget about gossip. We forget about greed.

We forget about pride. I think sometimes we're so worried about these small little things that we forget about loving each other. When Christine and I first came and we interviewed at our sister church, Ireland, I preached.

And then that next hour, I was in a room with about 100 people who just grilled me and asked me questions, theologically and other things. And all of a sudden, this one lady stood up, and she said, and her husband was right beside her, and he was kind of sheepishly there.

And she goes, what do you say to your husband who smokes cigarettes? Isn't he a sinner? And I'm like, okay. Danger, Will Robinson, you know, all these little flags going off in my head.

[26 : 08] And everybody kind of snickered and laughed, and I guess there was something that had been going on there. And I said to her, I said, you know, there are a lot of famous people in the church who smoke cigarettes.

Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, Martin Luther. And if that is the worst issue that your husband has, and his heart is fully for God, that's pretty good, isn't it?

I looked at her, and what I wanted to say is, I'm sure he has greater problems, hint, hint, than smoking cigarettes. But sometimes we become so caught up in these little small things, and I'm not saying go start smoking, okay?

We had a staff meeting, and we realized that almost everyone on our staff team and volunteers had smoked at least one time in their life. And so I thought that was very interesting, okay? But I'm not saying smoking is good, do that.

If you're a little kid here and you hear me say that, I'm not saying that. But what I'm saying is, God wants our heart. God wants our heart.

[27 : 24] And let me tell you one thing else, and this is just for me personally because I struggle with this. If I focus on really small things in my life, and if you find me obsessed with small things like, it used to really freak me out when guys come walking into church with hats on.

Because there's something about growing up in the South, and you take your hat off, and yes ma'am and no ma'am, and you walk into somebody's house, you don't wear a hat. And people walk in, and they were wearing their hats. And I was like, oh man, I'm just, oh, that guy's wearing a hat in church.

It's okay for girls to do that, but guys, no. And I realized, just like these Pharisees, that when I focus on small things like that, it's probably a really good indicator that there's something bigger in my heart that I'm trying to hide.

That sometimes it's easier to focus on the small things and to forget about the big things and the massive holes in our life.

And Jesus looked at their hearts, he looks at our hearts, and he says, hey, don't neglect loving people. Don't neglect caring for each other. Don't neglect compassion and mercy.

[28 : 31] Make sure that those things are important in your life. And he goes on, and he gives us another symptom, verse 42 and 43. He said, but woe to you Pharisees, verse 43 and 44. Woe to you Pharisees, for you love the chief seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces.

Woe to you, for you are like concealed tombs. And woe is a bad word. It's like horror. It's like terrible. It's like you're going down this track, and you're gonna fall off into this river full of sharks and piranhas and everything else.

You need to turn around. And so when he said it, and when we read it in our nice Aussie accents up here, woe. I mean, it was bad.

And so he says to them, woe, because you're heading down this road, and you're doing these things, you want to be seen by people. You love the greetings. You love the recognition. You love the reputation. You love the being thought more well by people than by God.

Jesus looks at them, and he looks at us, and says, be careful. Watch your heart. Because if your motives are driven by outward appearance, if your motives are driven by what people think of you, if your motives are driven by how I respond and how I perform so that everybody sees this, that's bad.

[29 : 51] The Pharisees were all about image, how they dressed, how they acted. The greetings. Remember when Jesus sent his disciples in to get food? He said, hey, don't greet anybody. Because sometimes the greetings lasted 30 minutes, and sometimes they lasted two hours.

Because they loved this, oh, pastor so-and-so of the first prefect, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And it was a huge thing. And he said, be careful if that's your motive.

Be careful if that's what you want to see. Be careful of being concerned about your outward appearance. Because if you're concerned about what people think of you, you have to spend a lot of work to get that going.

You ever notice, like, movie stars? I mean, they have to be in every magazine all the time. It's not just to be in one magazine. Because if you're in one magazine that's two years old, it's like, well, that was two years ago.

But if appearance and outward performance is important, you have to be doing that all the time. And Jesus is looking at the Pharisees and saying, guys, no.

[30 : 53] No. Don't be worried about the other people around you. Don't be worried about their appearance. We all need grace. We all need Christ.

We all need the cross. We all are under massive condemnation. We all are sinners. And when God looks at each one of us, he sees the same heart and the same need.

It doesn't matter how you dress or what you do or how you act. In front of God, our hearts are the same. And Jesus is giving us a warning. He's saying, be careful.

Don't separate yourself from other people. Because if you separate yourself, you become a hypocrite. Be careful. Don't think of yourself more than other people.

Because in God's eyes, we're all the same. We all have this need. We all, we're all sinners. We're all saved by grace. And the minute we forget that, we start acting like a Pharisee. And we say, well, I did this.

[31 : 50] And I did that. And I'm here. And how come they don't respect me? And how come they don't say hi to me? And how come they don't do these things? And that's what the Pharisee's world was all about. My girls come home from school.

And I say, well, how was your day today? And they said, that was terrible. I said, why? He goes, well, they X'd me out. They X'd you out? What does that mean? Well, they stopped paying attention to me. So they X'd me out.

Now, boys, again, we never talk about being X'd out. But for girls, that was really important for them. And I'm warning a lot. As I said over and over, I'm highly teachable right now as a parent. Especially with my daughters. But Jesus looks at these people who are so concerned about their appearance. And he says, be careful. Because if you head down that road, not only will you corrupt yourselves, but you're going to be this tomb.

And when all the people walk by you or get near you, you're going to corrupt them. It was very important for a Pharisee not to touch on a dead body. Because if they touched a dead body for seven days, they couldn't go to church.

[32 : 57] And so they had this big campaign in Jesus' day. And before all the festivals, they would send people out. And the people would whitewash all the tombs everywhere just to make sure that no one, as they walked around, stepped on a tomb and got undefiled.

And not knowing it. And Jesus looks at these guys that were concerned by their outside and by their appearance and who they are and what they do and how they're seen. And he says, be careful. Because if you don't deal with your heart, you're going to corrupt your family. Be careful. If you don't deal with this issue there, you're going to be a tomb. And people are going to walk beside you or beside you or along you. And you're going to corrupt them. And they're going to become just like you.

And woe to you who love the chief seats in the synagogues and have respectful greetings in the marketplace. The chief seat was this bench in the front.

And it faced outward. And everybody important wanted to sit there so that when everybody walked in the back, they could be seen. And they could see everybody.

[34 : 03] And Jesus says, be careful of your heart. Because if you do this, it's going to destroy you. How's your heart doing?

One last thing he looks at here, and I think it's all 45 through 54. If you're the lawyers, you hate this passage. The lawyer said to him in reply, teacher, when you say this, you're insulting all of us. Because you're not just picking my Pharisee brethren, but you're insulting all of us. He said, woe to you lawyers as well, for you weigh men down with burdens that are hard to bear.

These large loads like a boat put on their shoulder, while you yourselves don't even touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe to you, for you build a tomb to the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them.

So in building these things, what you're basically saying is, my fathers did the right thing. There was a saying in Israel that the only good prophet was a dead prophet.

[35 : 05] And the Pharisees and the scribes and the lawyers agreed with that. For this reason, the wisdom of God, which I will send to them, the prophets and apostles. So he puts the Old Testament prophets and apostles, New Testament together.

So you have a blending of the old and new in this one verse. Some of them will kill, and some of them they will persecute. But all of their blood, all of their blood that's shed from all these foundations were going to be charged against your generation because you know the truth. From the blood of Abel, the first person who was innocent, killed in Genesis, to the blood of Zechariah, the last prophet in 2 Chronicles, who was killed between the altar, the house of God. Yes, I tell you, it should be charged against you this generation.

Woe to you, lawyers, for you've taken away the key of knowledge. And you yourselves did not enter, and you've hindered those who were entering into them. And what Jesus says is the last heart check is, is your life so unattractive that when people look at you, they can't see Jesus? Is your life so concealed and so hidden? The lawyers wore this key, actually a symbol of a key around their neck, and it was a symbol of the truth, that they held the truth and they could unlock the truth. And what he's saying to them is, be careful if this is you because your life is going to be not filled with love, not filled with compassion.

[36 : 32] And you're going to look at different ways to get to God, and you're going to try rules and ceremonies and all these things. You're going to try to work harder. You're going to try to tithe more. You're going to try to eat better.

You're going to not sleep. And all these rituals and all these rules the lawyers brought on, there were 6,000 of them that they put together and they said, okay, you have to follow these 6,000 rules. And if you follow these 6,000 rules, then you're good, you're holy, and you're in.

And Jesus looks at them and says, guys, you're living a life that's so difficult to live. No one's going to want to be that part.

What does that look like today? It might look like a different thing for each one of us, right? I grew up in a culture where you went to church Sunday, you went to Sunday school Sunday, you went to church Sunday night, you went to Bible study Wednesday, you went to a men's group on Friday, and you might have done something on Saturday.

Now, if we ran the church like that in Hong Kong and said, this is what you're expected to do, you have to do these things, would that be attractive to people here? Maybe for some of us who grew up that way, but for a lot of us, it would run us away, and we say, man, I don't want to have anything to do with that.

[37 : 56] I don't want to have anything to do with your religion, I don't want to have anything to do with your traditions, I don't want to have anything to do with your legalism. Because in the midst of all these things that you're centered in your life around, Jesus looks at their heart, and he says, you don't know God.

The problem is that you're not doing enough things, the problem is you're doing all these things, but you don't know God. God hasn't seen your heart, you haven't given your heart to God.

Be careful if you head down this road maybe a question I've thought about a lot these last two weeks as I've read and thought and read and thought about that is what do people see when they look at you?

When you walk into your home, what do people see? When you walk into your workplace, what do people see?

When you walk into church, what do people see? Do they see a heart that loves?

[39 : 14] A heart that cares? A heart that serves? A heart that knows God intimately? A heart that wants to share Him with everybody? Or do they see a church and a people that want rules and rituals and things that only make it harder for us to get to God?

Maybe a question to ask would be, what does it look like to have a clean inside and a clean outside also? Finally, as I said before, this passage to me, I was looking at this and I was like, man, this is a hard passage.

This is really difficult and I have no hope in this passage by itself. But this passage isn't by itself. Because as we've said over and over again that Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem, He's going to be crucified for us. After my heart attack, I started doing a couple things.

I read and I did all these things and I put a heart monitor on when I worked out. And the heart monitor goes to my watch and I measure my heart and intake and how it's doing and watching it and regulations.

[40 : 40] And I learned that medically there are a lot of different ways to deal with heart disease. There's at least three common ways that people try and do things. There's the old traditional way, there's a new way, and there's kind of a progressive way.

And each one of them have different ideas of what it means to fix your heart and change your heart. And the Pharisees did too. They said you fix your heart by being smarter, by going to Bible study, by being better, by tithing more, by being seen, all of these things.

And God's word says there's only one way to fix our heart. Medically, there's a lot of ways. This is very interesting because even nine years ago after my first heart attack, the common wisdom of what it means to fix your heart then and now is pretty different.

There are certain drugs you do take now and you don't take then. There are certain stints that are coated and you don't coat and you want to use an uncoated stint now because it causes a certain coagulation. And within nine years, all of that terminology and thought and wisdom changed. But in Scripture, it's never changed. How you fix a human heart has always been the same for 2,000 years.

[42 : 04] The Bible says that we fix our hearts by coming to it and realizing that we've all rebelled against God. The Bible says that we've all decided to worship ourselves instead of God.

We've worshipped idols and we've clung to things to give our lives ultimate meaning instead of temporary meaning. That we've all come under God's judgment and we've all are guilty because of our sin.

That we've all tried to cover ourselves up with masks or clothes or rituals or things that we've learned how to do from our parents.

Or sometimes we just pretend that it isn't there. That I'm really not that bad. The Bible says that we all deserve condemnation.

We all try to fix ourselves. But then we see that we can't do that. That there's only one hope and that hope is God. And God has given the good news and the good news is his son, Jesus Christ.

[43 : 08] And we come to Christ by faith and trust in his sacrifice in the life that he lives. that's the only way to fix our hearts. We see that we can't be God.

That there is a God. And he's given us the gospel message of his son, Jesus Christ. And as we come to him and we put our faith and our trust in Christ and the sacrifice that he's done for us, we are able to then allow God's spirit to enter into our life and it changes us.

We would have 10 billion people in this church if we came up with a pill that would make you go take it and you go to church but go to heaven. But the scripture says that there's only one thing that fixes our hearts.

The only one thing that brings us back to God and that's a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Now are there things that we can do in that relationship? Yeah. The scripture's very clear that we're to be in community.

The Bible's really clear that we're to read the Bible. The Bible's really clear that we're to pray. The Bible's really clear that we're to surrender our lives and to confess our lives and to continually examine our lives to see do we have heart problems.

[44 : 29] And as we do, we come before the Lord and we confess those to him and we surrender those things to him and we allow him to change us. How's your heart?

Jesus looked at some men who on the outside had their acts all together. They were the leaders, they were the powerful, they were the beautiful, they were who everybody wanted them to be. And he saw that their heart was not good. And he shares for us in scripture these symptoms that we need to be aware of. And I would say that we all have this problem.

And I hope that you're not hearing me say, I don't have this problem because I'll say over and over that I have this problem more than anybody else in this room. I shared that one time at a church I was preaching to who, and the elder came up to me afterwards and he said, you can't say that. I said, what? He said, you can't say that you struggle with sin and you have these problems and you're broken and you're needy because we expect our pastor to be perfect. We expect our pastor to have his act together because if our pastor doesn't have his act together, then what hope is there of us having our act together?

[45 : 56] I was like, dude, heavy burden, right? I said, you don't need a perfect pastor.

You need a perfect savior. If you had a perfect pastor, you wouldn't need Jesus. You need Christ. Because he's the only thing that's going to change your heart.

Father, we just thank you for this day. We thank you for your word. We thank you that it is living and active. We thank you that even in the hard, very difficult passages of woes and terrible and you're in trouble, we see the cross and you point us to, you point us to Golgotha and we see your son hanging there and we see his blood spilled so that you would fix our hearts.

And so we come before you as a church and as individuals and we just ask you to look at us and to change us and to show us and bring people into our lives to encourage us and to point us to your son.

Father, help us to realize that we're on a journey and none of us are going to be perfect, not even the pastor, until we get to heaven. But in the meantime, Lord, help us just to trust you and to surrender and spend time with you.

[47 : 27] Father, we thank you for this heart check and we pray for our heart check. We pray that our hearts would be hearts of love and compassion and caring as they reflect your son who's given us a new heart and a new hope.

We love you. We pray all these things for your son Jesus' holy name. Amen.