

Radical Diagnosis, Radical Cure. Mark 7:1-23

An attack on Jesus, but it's not about hygiene. Vv. 1-5

Jesus is often criticized through His followers. It's not as direct, but just as real. For example, people today find fault with Jesus by finding fault with His followers' views on sexuality, that sex is to be reserved for marriage between a man and a woman, or with their views about the sanctity of every human life.

And what is at stake is not just whether this or that act is right or not, but fundamentally different views of the good life, of what allows people to live the best and most fulfilling life they can. For many modern people that life is found in maximising personal human freedom and autonomy, allowing them to live free from any authority external to themselves, including God, to express who they really are by being true to themselves. And Jesus' followers, by saying that the good life, the life we were created to live, is found by living, not true to your own inclinations but true to Jesus' instruction for He is God's appointed ruler over all and the one who can give eternal life, is at odds with and can even frustrate that secular version of the good life, by not accepting or affirming people's choices – and so, for many modern people, Christians and Jesus as the source of what they believe should be criticised as the enemies of humans living the best life they can.

Mark 7: The Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him. ² They observed that some of his disciples were eating bread with unclean—that is, unwashed—hands. ³ (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, keeping the tradition of the elders. ⁴ When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they have washed. And there are many other customs they have received and keep, like the washing of cups, pitchers, kettles, and dining couches.) ⁵ So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders, instead of eating bread with ceremonially unclean hands?"

But criticism of Jesus through His followers is not new. That is what is happening in our passage when the Pharisees come to Jesus and say ⁵ *So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders, instead of eating bread with ceremonially unclean hands?"*

They are saying 'What's wrong with you Jesus that you can let this happen. Why aren't you insisting on living by the traditions of the elders.'

And for the Pharisees the issue in their criticism is not hygiene. They are not coming to Jesus and saying 'Don't you know there's a covid pandemic. Get these blokes washing their hands.'

The issue for the Pharisees is the same as it is for Jesus' modern critics – what makes for the good life, life as we were meant to live it, the life of blessing. Life lived in covenant relationship with their God was the good life, for that was what would guarantee their present and their future, spare them now from the disastrous judgments the nation had experienced in the past and give them, they hoped, a share in the resurrection.

And the guide to that life was 'the tradition of the elders', a body of oral interpretation and application of the law of God, that some even claimed went back to Moses and had been handed down by a succession of teachers of the law. That tradition showed you how to be God's holy covenant people by keeping God's law in every area of life, and so retain God's favour, keep living the good life.

Although the law did not command handwashing, The Pharisee's concern for handwashing was a concern to maintain the ritual purity, the holiness, the law said God demanded, that was needed for God to be present amongst His people. You must be holy, God had said, as I am holy. Lev. 11:45.

Leviticus 11:⁴⁵ For I am the LORD, who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God, so you must be holy because I am holy.

And in the law, Leviticus chapters 11-14, the Jews were taught that contact with some objects – like corpses, or carcasses of some unclean animals, or people who had certain kinds of discharges, [Leviticus 11-14] – could defile you, make you unclean and so exclude you from God's holy people unless dealt with.

So knowing you could have accidental contact with someone or something unclean, contact you may not even know you have had – just brushing against someone in the market place, but which would make you unclean,

and knowing that the law said those who had been touched by someone unclean should wash themselves [Lev. 15:11] to cleanse themselves, and that the law also prescribed washing by the priests before they performed their duties [Ex. 30:18-21], the tradition of the elders taught you could maintain your cleanliness, your purity, by practicing washing your hands before you ate, and performing other washings as Mark points out in v. 4.

So in the tradition of the elders, washing hands, is not a small issue.

If purity, holiness, defines who are the people of God, and being pure, undefiled, is the way for the nation to enjoy God's blessing and not His judgement, then not living according to the tradition – the disciples not washing their hands – threatens the identity and well-being of the whole people by having the unclean living amongst them,

and Jesus' failure to teach and endorse the tradition of the elders, potentially saying that there is another way to be the people of God than obedience to the law, challenges their whole understanding of how you find and live the good life, and also their influence as guardians of that tradition.

So in their question *Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders, instead of eating bread with ceremonially unclean hands?*" they are saying to Jesus – why don't your followers endorse and support what we know to be the path of blessing, the way to live the genuine human life, the life of being at peace with God. Are you an enemy of people living a blessed and fulfilled life, an enemy of people's happiness and security.

How does Jesus respond?

It is a two fold response.

Firstly vv. 6-13 Jesus says you are relying on the wrong authority, human teaching, to instruct you about what makes for the good life, the life pleasing to God, a reliance that shows your heart is far from God

Secondly vv. 14-23, Jesus says defilement is an issue for God is holy, but you have a wrong focus when thinking about what defiles, what makes you unfit for God's presence, and you are not radical enough in thinking about the source of that defilement.

Those same two points are also at issue in modern criticism of Jesus through His followers

What is someone's source of authority for saying what makes for the good life? God the Creator, or human opinion?

And secondly, does what is taught really grapple with the radical root of the human problem, with what will always defeat achieving the good life.

Jesus' response (1). His critics are wrong because they are relying on the wrong authority vv. 6-13

Mark 7:⁶ He answered them, "Isaiah prophesied correctly about you hypocrites, as it is written:

***This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me.***

***⁷They worship me in vain,
teaching as doctrines human commands.***

⁸*Abandoning the command of God, you hold on to human tradition."*

Wrong because of a wrong heart vv. 6-8. Isaiah 29:13

Jesus calls His critics Hypocrites! – play actors, people whose actions give the lie to their words, who are pretending devotion to God while living self interested and self reliant lives that disobey God.

You are, says Jesus, the same kind of leaders of God's people Isaiah spoke of when speaking in Isaiah 29 of God's judgement on Jerusalem and its leaders in his day [29:1-4, 11-14]. They were people who did not comprehend what God was doing even though they had a show, an appearance, of worshipping God.

Their worship was all lip service for Their hearts, that is their wills and thinking were far from God. The love of God which is at the heart of the covenant relationship was not in their hearts. And the evidence of that was that they taught as doctrines human commands. That is, in place of obedience to God they put obedience to what humans taught, while claiming this was obedience to God. They made human teachings equal with the living God's Word, and so displaced God's word from ruling their relationship with God. This meant that their trust was in people, not God; that they were living to please people, creatures, and not God their Creator.

And it also meant that their worship of God was vain – empty, was not reckoned by God as worship at all.

And says Jesus to the Pharisees, with your insistence on the traditions of the elders, this is exactly what you do: *Abandoning the command of God, you hold on to human tradition.*

Your tradition, rather than help you obtain the good life, the life of peace with God, makes your zeal for God's law empty, not reckoned by God as obedience at all.

This would have been a bit hard to take for the Pharisees thought they were the champions of the law..

So Jesus gives them an example of their practice to show them that their commitment to tradition actually undermined genuine obedience to God

*Mark 7:⁹ He also said to them, "You have a fine way of invalidating God's command in order to set up your tradition!"¹⁰ For Moses said: **Honor your father and your mother; and Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must be put to death.***

God's will is pretty clear in relation to parents, says Jesus. You see it there in Exodus 20:12 – the fifth of the ten commandments, spoken by God Himself, that speaks of the positive duty to honour parents; and from Exodus 21:17 which speaks of the community's duty to uphold that honouring of parents by putting to death those who refuse to, who dishonour their parents by their words.

But, says Jesus, the effect of your tradition is to lead people to disobey this clear will of God, revealed in His Word.

¹¹ But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or mother: Whatever benefit you might have received from me is corban'" (that is, an offering devoted to God),¹² "you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. ¹³ You nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many other similar things."

Jesus speaks of the practice of 'corban', the practice of making a vow to devote something to God, in effect to the temple. You could do that just declaring it corban, given to God. While still available for use by the person who declared it to be dedicated to God, anything dedicated to God in this way was off limits to others, something which they could not use or benefit from.

In this case someone might dedicate something to God – a field or house for example, declare it corban, and this would prevent his parents receiving any benefit from it, deny them any claim to it or its produce or revenue, while the one who declared it Corban continued to enjoy its produce.

This was open to cynical manipulation where people fell out with their parents – they could spite them by depriving them of support under the guise of religious devotion. What is more the scribes ruled that even if a person changed their mind about something they might have done in anger, they could not change the dedication, they could not return it to being used to benefit their parents. That is, they could not do what God clearly commanded – Honour their father and mother

The outcome of their commitment to their tradition - *You nullify the word of God – the command to honour parents, by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many other similar things."*

The Pharisees, says Jesus, are doing exactly the opposite of what they were claiming to want to do, by relying on their tradition

it was there, they said, to help live a life pleasing to God, to help in keeping God's law.

But in reality it sets aside God's word, and made it of no effect in their lives

More –Rather than keeping them in covenant relationship with God where they could enjoy His peace and blessing, their reliance on tradition brought behaviours that provoked His judgement

How did this happen?

How is that their zeal for the law could be corrupted into disobedience to the law, that their attempts to please God, to live the good life, actually become causes of their condemnation by God, threaten the good life they sought?

Jesus answers that important question in the second part of His response when he speaks of the heart as the source of defilement, but I want to pause to say that outcome – disobedience to God that provokes His judgment and means you won't attain the good life, is inevitable where you make any human teaching equal to God's word, where loyalty and faith in human words displaces loyalty to and faith in God's word

The Word of God and the word of man – are not really comparable

God knows all things – we don't

God can do all He says – we can't

God is loving, true and faithful – He is committed to doing all He says – but we are self interested, and often unreliable

God's word can be trusted to accomplish its purpose – ours cannot be

*Is. 55: ¹⁰ For just as rain and snow fall from heaven
and do not return there
without saturating the earth
and making it germinate and sprout,
and providing seed to sow
and food to eat,
¹¹ so my word that comes from my mouth
will not return to me empty,
but it will accomplish what I please
and will prosper in what I send it to do."*

And Only God's Word is a guide to what is pleasing to God for only God knows Himself

God is not a dumb idol, a mere object. How could we ever know better than the living God what pleases Him or how we are to relate to Him?

To put the human word alongside or in place of God's word – is really idolatry, putting the trust in the creature rather than the Creator

But more, as the word of the Creator it is also the best guide to the life of human flourishing for God knows us and our world best, completely, and He rules over all things and His judgements will prevail. So to substitute the human word for God's word as the guide to the good life – even if it seems to be the emancipation of people from God – is in the end to mislead and to fail to love people

It is good to ask yourself - What is informing my understanding of a life pleasing to God?

What is informing my understanding of the good life?

Is it God's word, or human words?

If we are followers of Jesus our Father wants us to grow up, to mature, in our thinking

And we do that by having our thinking about Himself, ourselves, and how we live informed by His word

Romans 12:² Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

1 Corinthians 14:²⁰ Brothers and sisters, don't be childish in your thinking, but be infants in regard to evil and adult in your thinking.

So, for example, if you have a Roman Catholic background, have you thought through whether what you believe is grounded in God's word, or in tradition?

Do you think, for example, that church buildings are holy places and you ought to genuflect when you enter? That thinking is based on the presence of the reserved sacrament in the church, not on Scripture, on the lie that the reserved sacrament is the body, the presence, of Jesus.

Do you think of ministers as sacrificing priests?

That has no basis in God's word, but tradition, and it dishonours the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

On what are your beliefs grounded – the word of God, or tradition?

For others of us are we critiquing what the world says is the good life in the light of God's word.

The world's vision of the good life all around us. Here is an example

Struck by how blatant a lie it is

Anywhere you are – is not paradise

But it gets into our heads

Good life – experiences, away from people, free from responsibility, where we are all beautiful and toned, and there are no poor

And it is something money can buy

All lies

We have to learn to apply God's word to the message we receive all the time from people about the good life.

TO do that – must know the Word, and must take time to think about it

You can never live at peace with God, find the life of human flourishing we were created to live, where you make human words equal to or a substitute for the word of God

But How is that apparent zeal for the law could be corrupted into disobedience to the law, that the Pharisees attempts to please God, to live the good life, actually become causes of their condemnation by God, threaten the good life they sought?

Why will all attempts at the good life without God fail? Jesus tells us in vv. 14-23

Jesus' response (2). His critics are wrong because they aren't dealing with the source of defilement which is a matter of the heart vv. 14-23

Having demonstrated the truth of what He said, that despite their appearance of wanting to please God by their tradition their use of that tradition showed how far their hearts were from God,

Jesus goes on to say the problem in the Pharisees pursuit of purity, of their pursuit of the good life, was that they weren't even addressing the real source of defilement, what really makes us unclean, unfit for God's presence

Mark 7: ¹⁴Summoning the crowd again, he told them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵Nothing that goes into a person from outside can defile him but the things that come out of a person are what defile him."

A puzzling saying vv. 14-15 – but defilement still an issue

This saying is a little enigmatic. Those who heard might relate the first part to the controversy they have just witnessed, Jesus' rejection of the need for handwashing.

But the second is a little puzzling – for there are a whole range of things that come out of people – all sorts of excretions and secretions and discharges and bodily fluids

Could Jesus be talking about these, another source of physical defilement?

So the disciples ask Him about what He means, and Jesus explains

Matthew 7: ¹⁷When he went into the house away from the crowd, his disciples asked him about the parable. ¹⁸He said to them, "Are you also as lacking in understanding? Don't you realize that nothing going into a person from the outside can defile him? ¹⁹For it doesn't go into his heart but into the stomach and is eliminated" (thus he declared all foods clean).

A puzzling saying explained vv. 17-23

Not into the heart vv. 17-19

Jesus focuses on the heart – for first century people the thinking, willing, feeling centre of a person, the source of their actions and attitudes

And He makes the point that what we eat, what goes into our mouths however unwashed our hands, can't defile a person – for physical things don't go into the heart – but get flushed down the loo

They stay separate from our inner being, from our will and thinking

True

What you touch or eat or breathe – these don't defile.

And Mark adds as an aside – thus He declared all foods clean.

That is a really important consequence, one that took years to be worked out in the early church, one that laid the foundation for Jews and Gentiles to eat together [c. Acts 10, Acts 15, Galatians 1-2, Romans 14, 1 Timothy 4:4-5]. What you eat as a believer is now a matter of necessity and taste, not a matter of religious obligation and purity.

But I am not going to talk more about that now, because I want to focus on what Jesus says does defile a person, makes them unclean, unfit for God's presence

What would exclude them from God's people.

²⁰And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹For from within, out of people's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immoralities, thefts, murders, ²²adulteries, greed, evil actions, deceit, self-indulgence, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. ²³All these evil things come from within and defile a person."

Out of the heart vv. 20-23

It is not physical things that defile, but moral actions and attitudes that are inconsistent with God's righteousness and goodness, with His holiness.

Jesus lists six activities in the plural, and six attitudes,

Some are self explanatory – like theft, murder, adultery, others may need some thinking about

Let me run through them quickly so you can see how common they are

Sexual immoralities – notice that is bigger than adultery, the fourth in the list. This is any sexual activity outside a marriage between a man and a woman

Acts of Greed – or covetousness or avarice – that can include possessing and using just for the sake of having it for yourself, always wanting and getting more than you need.

Evil actions – that has the sense of deliberate malice, so that would include bullying, racial abuse

And then there are Attitudes or patterns of behaving

Deceit – habitual untruthfulness, but also cunning, treachery. Never being open and honest

Self indulgence – a lack of self-restraint that transgresses the boundaries of what is acceptable – whether that is in dress, or conversation, or spending money

Envy or it can also mean stinginess, a lack of generosity to others that can resent their success and happiness if it cannot be your own

Slander or blasphemy – the word can be applied to people or to God, and is more commonly applied to God. It can mean disrespect of God, a denigration of God – when someone says ‘God, if He is there’, or assaults God’s reputation with wild charges of injustice – that is blasphemy

Pride, arrogance, a conviction of one’s own self importance and the expectation that others treat you in line with your sense of your own importance, your privilege

Foolishness – lack of sense, ‘a moral and spiritual insensitivity’ that just doesn’t want to think – about God, or the consequences of his or her actions on others. Taking drugs, or getting drunk – that would rate as foolishness

This list is about 2,000 years old – and so modern.

We can see all these actions and attitudes around us every day – can even see them in ourselves.

Jesus says these are the things that defile, that exclude us from the presence of the holy God, will make the good life with God impossible

And what is the source of this terminal defilement.

Here is what is shocking – it is not something out there, external to us. It is our hearts, our wills, our own evil thoughts,

²¹ *For from within, out of people’s hearts, come evil thoughts*

²³ *All these evil things come from within and defile a person.”*

We carry the source of our defilement with us, and while our hearts are as they are – far from God, committed to our own will, to loving ourselves and not our Creator, to trusting ourselves and not our Creator – we will always be defiled, unfit for God’s presence, for they will always produce the fruit of evil thoughts

And nothing we can do from the outside can change that

Going to a new town or country – might change your environment, your external circumstances and that can be helpful if they are the cause of your trouble – you are being bullied at work, or crushed by a home loan you can’t afford

But it doesn’t change your heart – you take that with you

Turning over a new leaf, making and keeping new year's resolutions – might help where you replace a bad habit with a good habit – you quit smoking and take up cycling – but it won't change your heart, and it won't bring you closer to God

Making gifts to a good cause, even a church or mission – won't change your heart

Fasting – that won't change your heart

No amount of washings, ritual or otherwise, will change your heart

Do you see how radical Jesus' view of the origin of defilement is, of the problem we have in coming into God's presence, of being at peace with God is?

If you were a Pharisee – you are hearing Jesus say your project will fail

You can never obtain the good life, the life of peace with God, of knowing blessing and not judgement, by keeping your traditions, by living by your rules

You cannot cleanse yourselves from these sins

And you cannot remove yourself from their source

In fact, it is because your heart is the way it is that your zeal for God, your seeking to bring every part of life in conformity to God's law, has become a vehicle for setting aside God's law, for furthering your rebellion against God

And it will always be the case

Unless your heart changes

But Jesus' statement goes beyond a criticism of the Pharisees and the futility of their reliance on the tradition of the elders to be right with God

It is everyone's heart He is talking about, not just the hearts of religious people, or even people who believe in God

And if you are someone who wants to have an optimistic view of human nature, to think that society is perfectible

Think that if we could get the social conditions right, or educate everyone properly, then people would always make good, constructive choices

Jesus' words spell the failure of your project.

Our environment gives us the context in which we express our hearts, may make it easier or harder for some expressions of the heart to come to the surface – like the malice of racism, or self indulgent greed – but they don't create the human heart – which we have from Adam

And they don't change the human heart

That heart will always find expression

And if you are someone whose path to the good life is to turn people in to themselves, to find meaning and direction within by being true to themselves, Jesus' words foretell the bitter end of that path.

What you will find there, in your heart, is that restless love of self and the disordered desires it produces, and it will continue to produce bitter fruit, not happiness and contentment

Actions and attitudes that destroy relationships, undermine trust, co-erce others into approving and supporting their choices

Jesus' teaching here sets up an inevitable clash with all those who want to place their confidence in finding, attaining, the good life in themselves, in people.

Take the Pharisees

They claim We can say what pleases God – Jesus says no. Your very attempt shows how far you are from God

WE can do what deals with our uncleanness with God – Jesus says no, what you do on the outside can't change the inside

We have it in our power to live a life that pleases God, that will allow us to enjoy His favour, not His judgement – no, says Jesus. What you are doing defiles you, and you cannot separate yourself from the source of those actions and attitudes

Or take modern secularist who rejects God, whose vision of the good life excludes God

They claim We can know for ourselves the best way to live. Jesus says no, the human word can never compare with God's word, God's instruction on the best way to live

We can overcome by ourselves that tragic tendency of humans to destroy themselves and each other. No says Jesus, you cannot get away from your heart, and its evil thoughts will always produce that evil, relationship destroying, misery bringing, fruit.

We can secure our vision of the good life by bringing everyone into line with our thinking.

Jesus says no. You will never be able to do that – never stop the evil thoughts, or the envy, or the malice, or the pride – your own and that of others, and the attempts to do it, by manipulating the environment of people's lives, or lying persuasion or violent co-ercion, will destroy what you are trying to create

Jesus' view of the human problem is radical and at odds with what our society want to believe about people, about us.

Radical but true, amply illustrated throughout history in every failed utopian scheme, amply illustrated in our own experience – the constant pursuit, and failure to obtain, lasting happiness and contentment

Have you accepted Jesus radical diagnosis of the human condition?

Have you accepted that He is speaking of your heart, and the heart of those around you?

Have you accepted Jesus' radical diagnosis?

Again, the challenge is to your thinking.

But certain things will flow from accepting Jesus' diagnosis of the source of human defilement – all pretty big

You won't think you can save yourself, and so you will be freed from human rules, regulations and rituals that claim to be able to make you right with God, free you from uncleanness

You won't be sucked in by those who claim to be able to transform your life if you listen to their teaching, or let them change your environment. You will be freed from their often costly deceit

You won't entrust anyone with absolute power, for you know they have a human heart. You will support transparency and accountability for those in power

You won't think that teaching that turns you in to yourself, that says look within for guidance, put your trust in yourself, will give you that life of human flourishing. You will be freed to look out to God and relationships with others

You won't be blaming others for the state of your heart, be able to accept that even though you might be sinned against, you also are capable of sinning. You will be freed from self pity to live a life where you are responsible for yourself

And more

You will be humbled, humbled enough to say – I can't fix myself, I can't find the life of peace with God I was made for by myself

And you will cry out to God for help – for Jesus' teaching tells you cannot save yourself, you cannot of your own initiative escape from your heart

That you need a new heart – which only God can give you

You can't do a heart transplant on yourself

What originates in your heart, your will, will always have the character of your heart

But you heard God promise to give a new heart in Ezekiel 36

Ezekiel 36: ²⁵I will also sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and all your idols. ²⁶I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances.

And this is what the Lord Jesus says He gives in John 3 – and if you accept His diagnosis, you will long for His cure

What Jesus offers – the radical cure [John 3:1-16]

John 3: ³Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

⁴"How can anyone be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked him. "Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?"

⁵Jesus answered, "Truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again. ⁸The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

⁹"How can these things be?" asked Nicodemus.

¹⁴"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

When Jesus said to Nicodemus 'you must be born again' He was telling Nicodemus that he needs what God promises to give in Ezekiel 36 – for a heart of stone is a dead heart, and so what we need is new life, a new birth with a new and living heart.

It is the promises of Ezekiel 36 Jesus is referring to in v. 5 when He speaks of being born of water and the Spirit

We need our sins forgiven, to be cleanse of the defilement of our sinful actions and attitudes

And we need the Spirit to give us that new heart.

And this is a sovereign work of God, not man. It doesn't, and can't originate in us.

V 8. ⁸ *The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.*"

Nicodemus cannot see how this can come about, but Jesus knows, and tells Him in John 3:14-15

¹⁴ *"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.*

It will come about through His death

His death will be the source of that cleansing

His death and resurrection will be the means by which the Spirit is given, will come to all who believe in Him

Who abandon reliance on their own works, who give up making human words equal to God's words, who abandon trust in themselves,

To rely wholly on Jesus

Repenting and believing is not just turning over a new leaf, resolving to do better

It is being given a whole new life, from a new source – by the Lord Jesus who gives the Spirit of God

A life that goes on to eternal life

The life of human flourishing

In the end there really are only two ways

The way of the Pharisees – the way of trust in self, in your own words, your own truth; of trust in what you can do to ensure for yourself the good life; trust in your own rule of your life

Or The way of Jesus – acknowledging that what is impossible for you is possible for God, and that His word alone gives life, and that He can forgive and give the new heart we need, the living heart that trusts and obeys our Creator.

The pharisees were sure they were right, and saw Jesus' threat – and in the end killed Him – as an enemy of the people, a danger to their peace and security, to their flourishing

Just like modern people would kill him – with His insistence on His authority and our radical helplessness

But the word of God is not like the word of man.

Jesus said HE would die and rise again and

God raised Him from the dead

Jesus lives and reigns, His judgements the judgement of God, His word the word of the living God that can bring life, eternal life,

Believer – let His teaching inform all your thinking – about yourself, about God, about what the genuine human life, the best life, looks like

And don't confuse that word with teaching that has its origin with humans

Not yet a believer – hear His diagnosis on your heart, and turn to Him for the cure, the heart surgery only He can perform, that new life He gives.