



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 14 12-21

Mark

"The Last Passover and the 2 Ways"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Mark, and good morning. Our passage is Mark chapter 14 verses 12 through 21. And if you have your Bibles, follow along with me as I read it. Mark 14 beginning with verse 12:

On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?" And He sent two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying [break in audio] say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is My guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?'" And he himself will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; prepare for us there." [Break in audio] and they prepared the Passover.

When it was evening He came with the twelve. As they were reclining at the table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me – one who is eating with Me." They began to be grieved and to say to Him one by one, "Surely not I?" And He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who dips with Me in the bowl. For the Son of Man is to go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and bless our time of study in it together. Shall we pray?

[Prayer] Our gracious heavenly Father, we thank You that we have this great privilege to come together and to study Your word. What a privilege we have to possess it, to be able to read it, and to read it with understanding because Your people have been given the Spirit of God. Or as John calls Him, the anointing who teaches us all things. And so, we pray that as we study together and as we seek to understand these great truths that are present in this passage, that the Spirit of God would open our eyes and guide us and direct us in our thinking. Not simply to understand what the text says, but that we might be convicted of our need to be obedient and to follow and to live a life of dependence upon You. That is a life of great reward. That is the life that we have been called to. And yet, we are so prone to wander away, Father, to go after the things of the world, the things that are so attractive, to adopt for ourselves the standards of the world. And we confess we do that. We fight that every day. We pray, Lord, that You would guard our hearts, and that You would fill us with the desire to serve You, and to live in a way that's pleasing to You, and help us to see the proper warning from the passage that we studied this morning, and make us alert to the dangers of this life and very much aware of the blessings that are ours in Christ.

Well, bless us to that end, Father, and we pray that You'd bless our assembly in many ways. In ways of a physical nature, we pray that You'd make provision for Your people, that You would bless where there is blessing that's needed. We pray for those who are in need of employment, and we pray that You would make provision for them and give them encouragement. Give encouragement to those who are sick, those who are recovering. We think of all of those names on the prayer request list, and ask that You would give special grace to them for healing, and for spiritual growth through great trials.

We do thank You Lord, that You never abandon us. And even when trials come, they serve Your purpose. Help us to see that and to respond properly. We pray for those who teach. We remember those who will be teaching in footsteps when it begins in the next few weeks. We think of our Sunday school teachers and all those who put so much time into training up our Young people, and teaching us as well. We pray Your blessing upon their ministries. Bless them spiritually as they walk with You.

We pray You'd bless this church, that all of us would have a heart for Christ and a desire to walk with Him, and a desire to be a good witness in this community.

Use our time now to prepare us for the week in which we might serve You well and be a good testimony, that we as Your people would be light and salt in the midst of this world.

Bless the churches throughout this land, at that end, and bless this land. We ask for special care to be given to our leaders, that You'd give them wisdom. And we pray that if it please You, You might bring many souls to faith, that You might sweep through this land a revival that would quicken the hearts of men and women, and that we might see a great turning to You.

We commit the time now to You, Father. We pray that as we sing our final hymn. It might be used of You to prepare our hearts for our study together, and pray that as we do that, that You would bless us and build us up in the faith. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

[Message] There's a proverb that each of us should know, and one that I think young people should probably put to memory. It's a proverb I think that's rather familiar to most of you. Proverbs 14:12. "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." We see that in a variety of ways in the lives of different people, different men who seek pleasure as the way to happiness, or people who seek drugs as that way, or perhaps another woman.

The list of examples can go on and on, but those words were never more true of any man than Judas Iscariot, a man of great privilege who was one of the twelve, as Mark has reminded us, but who left that company, departed from the Lord in order to betray Him to His enemies.

Why the company of the priests was more Judas than the company of our Lord is hard to say. Matthew records that he went to the priests and asked: "What are you willing to give me to deliver Him up to you?" And so, it may be as simple as greed, that that is what motivated Judas in his action. Luke states that Satan entered into him, and it may be that the devil played on Judas' love of money to influence him in his betrayal. The Puritans used to say that the devil comes over the hedge where it is lowest, and Judas' hedge was lowest. His weakness was greatest in the area of money. So that may have been it. But whatever the reason, it seemed to Judas to be the right reason, and the way of betrayal seemed to him to be the right way.

But as the Lord explains to him and explains to all of His disciples, "Woe to him. It would have been good for him if he had not been born." The end of that way, the way that Judas had chosen is the way of death. And we shouldn't think that Judas is an anomaly, that Judas is something unique, that Judas is one of a kind, because he's not.

There are many men and many women like Judas, and many of them in the church. In fact, it's been said that the story of Judas is not a story for the world; it's for the church. He's a picture of a man or a woman who sits in a pew Sunday after Sunday, who receives the light of God's word, who partakes of the Lord's supper, who identifies himself with Christ, identifies himself with God's people. And then after a year or two years or three years or ten years, after some period of time, his heart grows cold to those things, and he departs from them and departs from the light.

That's what Judas did. He was one of the twelve. He was a minister. He was a man of the church, if we could put it in those terms. He's the kind of man that would've been right up here preaching this sermon. A man of great knowledge, a man of great privilege, a disciple of the Lord who does just what our Lord says: departs from the truth, betrays Him, and goes the way of death.

But there's another way. The narrow way. The way of Christ that leads to life. The way that is life. And I think we have something of a picture of that way at the beginning of this passage when the Lord sends His disciples out to make preparations for the Passover. It was on a Thursday morning before the evening of Passover when the disciples asked Jesus where He wanted them to prepare the Passover meal. The number of arrangements had to be made. There were a number of features of this meal that had to be taken care of. A lamb had to be purchased and then had to be killed at the temple before sunset. In addition to the lamb, they would have to purchase unleavened bread, wine, bitter herbs, and that special sauce that they dip these things in. And of course, they would have to find a room within the walls of Jerusalem that would be of sufficient size to accommodate the disciples and our Lord, which was a fairly large group.

And so, in verse 13, the Lord gives two disciples instructions to go into the city, where they would see a man carrying a pitcher of water. They were to follow him. And He says in verses 14 and 15, "And wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is My guest room in which I may eat the

Passover with My disciples?" And he himself will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; prepare for us there."

Now, Luke tells us that these two disciples were Peter and John. And you'll notice that the instruction the Lord gives to them is really somewhat indefinite, a little bit vague. He doesn't say what we might've expected Him to say. "Go to Jerusalem and go to number 7 Ben Yehuda Street, and that's where we'll have the room." Or, "Go look up Mr. Goldstein. He's the owner, and he'll be the one that will show us the room." He doesn't do any of that. Tradition has it that the owner was Mark's father. That may be so, but the Lord doesn't say. He just gives enough detail to allow the disciples to find the place without any difficulty.

And the reason for that, the reason for these rather oblique instructions is probably to be found in the fact that the Lord knew of Judas' plot with the authorities and was keeping the location secret until the Passover feast was over. The time was not yet right. And as the Lord will say, the time has been set, and the time has been ordained. This is all of God. But the time was not quite right for that to happen. The Lord still needed to celebrate the Passover and obedience to the law, and He was obedient in every aspect of the law.

He had to say His farewell to the disciples, and He had to give them some very instruction. It was during the Passover, as you know, that the Lord instituted the Lord's supper. It was during that time that He gave the Upper Room Discourse, or the Farewell Discourse that's recorded in John chapter 13 through 17.

And so, much remained to be done before the arrest and the crucifixion. And to prevent Judas from divulging the whereabouts of the Passover and where the authorities could apprehend him before that, he kept the location of the room a secret.

Well, these are the instructions that He gives to Peter and John, and they set off from Bethany for Jerusalem to look for a man carrying a pitcher of water. That in itself was something of a very definite detail. It was a very distinctive sign for them because in that day, customarily, men did not carry pitchers of water. That was women's work. You may remember from John chapter 4 and the scene of the woman at the well. She goes out to draw water which was customarily the task of a woman. So, to see a man carrying water and drawing water would have been something that was very obvious and a very apparent thing to these men.

I think it was William Barclay in his commentary that likened it to a man using a lady's umbrella on a wet day. Something that would stand out to these men, particularly. And verse 16 states that they went off to the city, " and found it just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover."

Commentators discuss whether this signal of the man carrying the pitcher of water was a prearranged signal that the Lord had made with this man to help the disciples, or if perhaps this wasn't an example of the Lord's supernatural knowledge, that He had simply seen what would take place and told them.

Now, the Lord could've made a prearranged signal such as that. He certainly made careful plans and He lived a wise life that would fit within the character of our Lord. But, there's nothing in the text to indicate that that's what happened, that there is any prearrangement here.

The gospels, on the other hand, do give a number of examples of the Lord exercising supernatural knowledge. As, for example, in John chapter 1, you remember the Lord is gathering His disciples and calling them to Himself, and Philip goes and gets Nathaniel and tells him about the Lord, and Philip is skeptical. He asks, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip says, "Well come and see."

He does, and immediately, the Lord shows him that yes, something good can come out of Nazareth when He says, before they'd ever met, I saw you when you were under the fig tree. Well, Philip knew that there was no way He could've seen him under the fig tree or known about that other than some supernatural knowledge in recognizing that that was miraculous knowledge. Philip then confessed Jesus to be the Son of God.

This, I think, is probably an example of that kind of knowledge, of foreknowledge, of seeing ahead of time, what would take place. But either way, however we understand the Lord's instruction, whether simply an act of wise planning or an example of supernatural knowledge, the fact that stands out is that the Lord prepared the way for them.

Everything was arranged in advance. All they had to do and all that was expected of them was to follow the Lord's instructions, and they would end up at the right place. I think that's an important point to underscore in our thinking. Because that is the way of Christ. That is the way of life. He has not left us to find our own way. He's not left us to produce the results and the outcome and the success of the

Christian life. It's His work. He's worked it all out for us. He doesn't depend upon us. He depends on Him, and we're simply to look to Him. He sets us on the way. He provides for us along the way. He simply calls us to be obedient to His instructions which, if we follow, will lead us to the right end.

We sang a hymn this morning based on Psalm 23, and turn over to that psalm for a moment. I'd like to read it because I think it illustrates very well that point about our Lord's leading. It's a familiar psalm to you, I know. If there's one passage in Scripture that's very familiar, it's Psalm 23. It's the psalm of the shepherd. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me. Thou hast prepared a table before me in the presence of my enemies; Thou hast anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

What a beautiful picture of the shepherd, of the Lord, and the way He takes care of us. The shepherd doesn't say to the sheep, "Find your own path. Make your own food. Fight your own fights. You're on your own." Doesn't say that at all. As we look at that psalm and we consider the way shepherds care for sheep, we know that the shepherd leads, the shepherd provides, the shepherd defends. And all that the sheep is to do is to stay with the shepherd and be obedient to the shepherd. Where the shepherd goes, the sheep is to go. And he will find his food, and he will find his protection, and he will find his guidance. And we too, as we follow the Lord, will have the same experience. As we look to Him, as we trust in Him, we're taken care of.

I think of that passage in Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 10 where the author describes Christ as the leader or the captain of our salvation. And you have this picture of Christ going ahead of a great company of His people, leading them through this world to the heavenly city. And as we go in that company, and as we follow Him, He provides and protects along the way. That's what He does. He provides and He guides through His word. He guides through providence. He protects us providentially.

John Calvin, commenting on the dangers that surround us every day in a chapter of the "Institutes of the Christian Religion" wrote, "Go through the city streets. You are subject to as many dangers as there are tiles on the roofs." If you're familiar with Europe, you know that all of the houses and the buildings there have roofs that are covered with red tiles. Numbers of tiles. What Calvin is saying is you go through the city, go through a place you might even consider safe, a place you're very familiar with. And there are innumerable dangers there.

And as the point that he makes in that chapter is that we are in a world that is filled with dangers that we're not even aware of. And the reason they don't touch us as they might is because God has, in effect, built a hedge around us. And providentially, He cares for us. Providentially, He protects us at all times.

He guides us providentially. Just as He did the disciples, when they just happened to meet a man carrying a pitcher of water, who led them to their destination, to the place that they were seeking. The Lord often helps us along with providential encounters. In fact, I would say that He helps us along every moment of our life, providentially, with helpful, unexpected meetings that may seem to us to be meetings of chance or coincidence. But they're not. They're from the hand of God, and they are divinely appointed encounters, providential encounters that are given to us to give direction and to open doors. He does it providentially. He leads us with His truth.

A truth that God gives us is a guide to us, a lamp to our feet. And the truth that we have as we look at God in His sovereign arrangement of events for us and His sovereign guidance of us at every moment, according to His authority, according to His will, according to His wisdom, according to His power, all of that together should give confidence to the people of God to trust Him and to follow Him, to be obedient to Him, to commit ourselves to His way.

The true Christian life is a journey toward heaven in a walk of faith. These disciples illustrate that. They trusted the Lord's instructions, which was rather vague and maybe as they thought about it, a little bit odd, looking for a man carrying a pitcher of water. But they trusted Him. And as a result, Mark writes, found it just as He had told them.

And as we live our lives in obedience to Him, and follow His leading through the Spirit of God as He guides us according to the Scriptures, we too will find everything to be just as He has told us.

Well, they find the room and they prepare everything as the Lord had instructed. And then, when it became evening, Mark writes in verse 17, Jesus and the 12 came to Jerusalem and began the Passover meal. Now, according to our reckoning, that would be Thursday evening. But, by Jewish reckoning, the day begins at sunset. And so for them, they assembled in the upper room at the beginning of Friday, or Friday evening. The lambs had all been slain at the temple. Their blood had drenched the altar, a reminder of the cost of deliverance. The night that the angel of death passed through Egypt, slaying the firstborn of every family and every household that did not have the blood of the lamb on the doorpost.

And this was a perennial reminder to them, of the fundamental truth that without shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. Every year, that would be a solemn statement made to them through that festival that they celebrated. And yet, as evening came and the families throughout Jerusalem gathered around the Passover meal to drink the wine or to eat the unleavened bread, and to sing the psalms, and remember with joy their national deliverance from Egypt, few of them realized that this would be the last Passover.

Now, Passovers have been celebrated year in year out throughout the centuries that have followed, but this was the last Passover in the sense that the Lord would fulfill the Passover in His suffering and His death. Few realized that that would be the last Passover, and few realized that the one whom they had hailed a few days earlier as their king was the true Passover Lamb who would be sacrificed in a few short hours for the forgiveness and the salvation of all who believe in Him.

Well, few understood that I say, but the Lord did. He knew, of course, and He interrupted the meal in verse 18 with the startling announcement that He would be betrayed, betrayed by one of them. "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me." Those words, "one of you," stunned the disciples. AT Robertson writes that they came as a bolt from the blue.

The treachery of it, the shock of it was heightened by the fact that it was one, He says, who is eating with me. Understand that, you have to appreciate the customs in the Middle East because to betray a friend after eating a meal with him was, and still is regarded as the worst kind of treachery in the East. Worst kind of treachery to accept hospitality and then respond with treachery. And yet, that would happen from one of the twelve.

The announcement of this by the Lord is given in words that echo words that David wrote a thousand years earlier when he spoke of his trusted advisor, Ahitophel, who betrayed him to David's son Absalom when Absalom led a revolt against him. David wrote in Psalm 41, "Even my close friend whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me."

In fact, John records our Lord quoting that verse at this time when He announces the betrayal. But He does so with some modification. He does not say, "My close friend whom I trusted," but simply, "He who eats My bread has lifted up his heel against Me." There's a good reason for why the Lord would leave out that aspect of trust. David trusted Ahitophel because David didn't know the heart of Ahitophel. He could only see the outside of a man and trust the words of that man. He didn't know his heart.

The Lord didn't trust Judas because He knew Judas' heart. He knew his character. He knew it from the beginning. You go back to John chapter 6 and verse 7, Jesus says, "Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet, one of you is a devil." John adds, now, he meant Judas, the son of Iscariot. So Jesus knew Judas from the beginning, knew what he would do, knew his character, knew that he was not a true disciple. He was a devil.

And by making this announcement, He showed that He was in complete control of the events, complete control of the situation. Nothing was taking Him by surprise. Judas had not deceived Him. In fact, He'd unmasked Judas at that very moment. The disciples didn't know that. They trusted Judas greatly. Evidently, Judas was a man who showed some character, who showed great spiritual interest, who seemed to be a man very devoted to the Lord because the disciples made him the treasurer. John says that he was the one entrusted with the money box. They trusted him with their money, with their possessions, and they must've looked very favorably upon him. He's sitting right next to the Lord at this meal.

And so, they didn't know that He was referring to Judas, and they were startled. They were grieved. They were filled with self-doubt about themselves, filled with mistrust. And they began to say to the Lord, "Surely not I?" Matthew records that even Judas joins in that, still trying to carry out his charade, still trying to fool the Lord. But, there's a significant difference. The disciples all say, "Surely not I, Lord?" While Judas says, "Surely not I, rabbi?" And evidently, he could not say

that word, "Lord." He could not confess Him as Lord. And it was a subtle tipping of his hand, so to speak, that none of the disciples caught.

But the Lord knew. And He then gives another sign, a sign that would indicate the identity of the traitor in verse 20 when He says, "It is the one who dips with me in the bowl," a reference to that dish that contained the sauce into which the bitter herbs and the unleavened bread were dipped.

Now, you might wonder, how is it that having said that and then dipping the sop into the sauce and handing it to Judas, they wouldn't have all then gathered around Judas and prevented him from going out the door? I think the reason for that is they didn't know. They didn't hear. You read John's account of this, and evidently, the Lord said it to John, said it very quietly so that only John and Judas could hear. They were, as I said, reclining right next to the Lord.

Having said that, John then tells us that after He gave the morsel that had been dipped to Judas, Judas received it. And in receiving it, he was receiving a warning from the Lord. The Lord was saying, in effect, "Judas, I found you out. I know what you are, Judas. I know your plot. I know your plan." And while it was on the one hand an unmasking of Judas, it was also a gesture of kindness on our Lord's part, in which the Lord was giving Judas an opportunity to repent and to turn from that way that inevitably leads to death.

Well, it was an opportunity given to Judas, but as we know, Judas rejected it, which strikes us as amazing. It does me as I think about it, the great privilege that Judas had, he followed the Lord, he knew Him personally. He knew His kindness, knew His character. And yet, he's willing to betray Him knowing that the Lord knows who he is, knowing that the Lord knows what he is going to do.

It's amazing, I say, and yet at the same time, is it not an excellent illustration of the hardness of the human heart, apart from grace? Let's not fool ourselves. The heart of Judas is the heart of every one of us, apart from the grace of God. And the only way and the only reason that heart is open to receive the truth is the Spirit of God comes upon us to do that, to quicken us, and to give us understanding, and to give us a new disposition and a new desire.

One way to look at the life of Judas and the response that we have here of Judas is to see it in light of grace because it magnifies the grace of God. And it says that you and I are no different than him, and we'd be right where he is, except but the

grace of God. Yet, his heart was not opened. It wasn't changed. Is that because the grace of God was not great enough to penetrate that heart?

Not at all. No. No, His grace is sovereign and His grace cannot fail. Paul says to the Ephesians in Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 11 that He "works all things after the counsel of His will." All things. Everything. And, He's under no obligation to change the sinner's heart. We have no claim upon His goodness and His kindness. We're guilty. We're separated. We deserve the judgment of God. We have no claim upon Him. The fact that He opens up one heart is an act of grace beyond our comprehension.

No, He's sovereign. He's in control. in fact, He is able to use sinful hearts to His own glory, to turn the wrath of man to praise Him. That's what He did with Judas as the Lord makes very plain in verse 21. Behind all of this, there was a divine purpose, even in the actions of Judas. They were part of God's plan. " For the Son of Man is to go just as it is written of Him." In other words, all of this has been prophesied. It may be that He's referring to Isaiah 53, in which the prophet describes the suffering servant and what he would go through as the substitute for sinners. And there, we have our Lord's work described in such statements as "He was pierced through for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities. He would bear the sin of many."

Well, that's the path that He would go, the way of suffering and death, the way that leads to glory, the way that leads to salvation for all who put their faith in Him and all who trust in Him and follow after Him as the captain of their salvation. All of this, He says, was written of Him. What that means is: it was all prophesied.

Now, what is a prophecy? A prophecy is not some insightful speculation on what might happen and often times it's correct. A prophecy is nothing more than the revelation of God's eternal decree. What is going to happen, what must happen, what cannot but happen, and that's what He unfolds here. And that being so, what He's saying here is this death that He is going to was decreed. And all that's involved in that is decreed. And since the way that He would go would be my means of betrayal, even Judas' treachery, even His betrayal was part of God's plan. He works all things after the counsel of His will.

The Lord tells His disciples all of this for a very practical reason. He wanted them to know that this was the will of God, that this was all working out according to

His plan, so that they would not come to the conclusion that the Lord's enemies had triumphed. Now, this would be no triumph of the Lord's enemies at all, but merely the realization of God's gracious and sovereign plan of salvation. It's all working out according to His plan. All working out according to His divine decree.

And yet, none of this cancels out human responsibility. As the Lord says, the Son of Man is going just as it is written, just as it has been decreed. "But woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed." That's a note of sorrow and pity as well as a word of judgment. Judgment would come. Woe to that man, He says.

But the Lord took no joy in that. He wasn't happy to say "woe to him." As He says in Ezekiel, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live."

And so, in all of this is that mysterious but biblical combination of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. As Professor Cranfield, the British scholar and commentator notes, "The fact that God turns the wrath of man to His praise does not excuse the wrath of man." And yet, we must confess that we find this combination of human responsibility and divine sovereignty hard to grasp. I think we all do. If we're honest, we should, because it's very difficult to fully understand. And yet, unfortunately, the difficulty has caused some to reject one or the other, to reject the sovereignty of God and place all of the emphasis upon man and his choosing.

It's a problem that we all have and a problem that has been addressed very well and very articulately by Charles Haddon Spurgeon. I think he has some good comments on this. He points out that while it's often argued that these two, divine sovereignty and human responsibility, are seen to be contradictory of one another, they're really not. Both are taught in Scripture, and so two truths cannot contradict each other.

The fault then is not with the doctrines. It's not with the Scriptures. The fault is with our finite minds and our inability to fully grasp the truth of God. He writes, "If then I find taught in one part of the Bible that everything is foreordained, that is true. And if I find in another Scripture that man is responsible for all his actions, that is true. And it is only my folly that leads me to imagine that these two truths can ever contradict each other. I do not believe they can ever be welded into one upon any earthly anvil. But they certainly shall be one in eternity. They are two lines that are so nearly parallel that the human mind which pursues them farthest will never

discover that they converge. But they do converge, and they will meet somewhere in eternity close to the throne of God whence all truth doth spring."

It's a good way of putting it. You look at these two doctrines and they seem to be like parallel lines. They don't meet. They just run parallel. And yet, they really don't. They will dovetail. They will come together. And while we may not see it in this life, we will see it in the next. God will explain it all to us, and we'll see how it meets in His perfect wisdom and plan.

So, what do we do? We take one and reject the other? No. We accept both as truths of Scripture. We recognize our inability to comprehend it fully, but we take it as true. And really, I think that is the main issue. Will you believe what the Bible says or not? The question is not: do we understand it? The question is: do we believe it? And it's as we believe God's word, it's as we do that that He instructs us and that He expands our understanding of things. We must approach the Scriptures as the Word of God, as trustworthy, as believable, as without error, and believe what's said, and ask Him to give us a fuller understanding of it.

God is sovereign, and Judas was responsible, and the terrible end of his life is stated in the remainder of the verse. "Woe to that man. It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." Now, what could that mean? Good for him if he had not been born? Well, it can mean only one thing, and that is that Judas was doomed to endless punishment.

The eternal punishment of the wicked and the unbelieving is a terrifying doctrine. And yet, it is one that the church has taught from the beginning. There are only a few examples of men among the early church fathers, and then in the time of the Reformation, that denied eternal punishment. But in the 19th century, that really changed. There has been a widespread defection from the doctrine of eternal punishment, and that defection continues to this very day. Many people deny that there is such a thing as eternal punishment, that there is a thing called perdition.

The rejection of eternal punishment usually takes one of two forms, either universalism or annihilationism. The universalism believes that hell is inconsistent with a loving and powerful God, and it teaches that men will ultimately be saved, everyone. The early church father Origen entertained this view, and he taught that even the devil and his demons will someday be ultimately saved. Annihilationists, on

the other hand, believe that the wicked are simply annihilated, that at death, the become non-existent.

But none of those views fit with what our Lord says. How could the Lord say that it is better not to be born if after 10,000 years of suffering, Judas was restored to God and blessing for eternity? 10,000 years? 10,000,000 years? However long you want to extend the time is brief when compared to eternity, which is endless. And if that was his ultimate end, if his ultimate destiny was eternal blessing, then it could not be said "better that he not be born." It's better to suffer 10,000, 10,000,000 million years in the hottest corner of hell and inherit all of the blessings for eternity, than to not be born at all.

So, that doesn't fit. Neither does annihilationism, 'cause really, He's not saying anything, better to not be born than having been born to not exist. Better to not exist than to not exist. That doesn't fit. Even if one should say, well, better not to have been born than go through a miserable life. And yet, that's not true of Judas. Judas lived a wonderful life. Judas had some of the greatest privilege that any man on earth had ever had. His life was far from miserable. His life was a great blessing.

Now, another form of annihilationism which has become increasingly popular in our day is that known as conditional immortality. It's a view that we have spoken on before. But, very briefly, it teaches that man is created mortal. Not only is his body mortal, but his soul is mortal. And immortality is a gift of grace, and god gives that to those who believe. And those who don't believe, the wicked, he does not give it, so that when they die, they are extinguished. Some teach that there's a period of punishment, but eventually that comes to nothing.

And yet, as we have discussed in the past, that view cannot be sustained in light of such passages as Matthew 18 verses 8 and 9, Mark chapter 9 verse 43 where the Lord warns of hell and He describes it in terms of eternal fire, an unquenchable fire. Revelation 20 and verse 10 describes the lake of fire as a place where torment will be day and night forever and ever.

That's the force of our Lord's words. Better never to have been born than suffer the torments of hell for eternity. Endless punishment. It's a terrifying prospect. And I think that's one reason that so many people deny it. People don't want to face that. But the Bible teaches it. And denying it doesn't change that fact.

Walter Hooper was CS Lewis' personal secretary. And he tells of coming across an inscription on a gravestone which read, "Here lies an atheist, all dressed up with no place to go." He laughed at that. He thought that was humorous. But he said, "Lewis didn't think it was funny and responded soberly. I'm sure he wishes now that that were true." Well, hell is a reality. Denying it doesn't change the fact it's a reality and it was certainly a reality for Judas. It was his destiny.

He was warned of that. This man who had such great light. All the way to the end, He has light. And yet, he rejects it. He receives it without faith. And John tells us that following this, following the reception of that sop that had been given to him, Judas left the room to betray the Lord. He writes these very interesting, ominous words. He says, "He went out and it was night." It was nighttime. But more importantly, it was night in Judas' soul, and that's why he left. He chose a way that he thought was right. It was a way of disobedience, a way of unbelief. And the end of that way is the way of death.

And all for 30 pieces of silver. Not much of a bargain. Would it have been a better bargain if he'd gotten 30 pieces of gold, or if he'd gotten 1,000 pieces of silver, or if he'd gotten all of the gold in Rome? Would that have been maybe a little better deal?

Well, we might think so, but that's no better deal at all. Our Lord addresses that very point earlier in Mark's gospel when He writes in chapter 8 and verse 36, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world?" All of the gold in Rome, and Persia, and everywhere else, can add 50 years to his life, or 100 years to his life, or 1,000 years to his life; what does it matter if he gains all of that and forfeits his soul? It gains him nothing. In fact, worse than nothing. It's better to have never been born.

There are two ways, two paths. One leading to death, one leading to life. So, the question that we must ask ourselves is: which path are we on? The way of life is the way of Christ, and we enter it by faith alone by simply trusting in Him as our Savior and our Lord. And having done that, we continue along that path by faith, trusting in His words, trusting His instruction, being guided by His Holy Spirit in according to His word and knowing that He is in control, and He's providentially leading us, and His hand is always upon us.

And like the two disciples who went to the city in obedience to the Lord's instruction and found it just as He had told them. We too will find the same

experience to be true. Maybe not immediately. Maybe we'll go through difficulties and wonder: is it true? Life's not as easy as I thought. No, it's not. It never will be. But God says He will never depart from us, and we can trust Him and know that He's guiding us. And we will find that it is just as He said it will be.

Now, is that too simple? Is that a bit too risky? Well, I think it would be to the world, and they would probably answer yes. And yet, it's not too risky at all because the Lord promises to be with us always, to provide for us along the way, and to bring us safely to the end into His glorious presence for all eternity.

Christian life is a walk that we make by faith. And Judas turned from it to follow another path. One promising money, promising safety, promising something that appealed to him. And which he accepted not realizing that it was truly a dangerous path, a risky path.

Johnathan Edwards develops the peril of that way in his most famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." And he uses very descriptive expressions and terms to make his point about how dangerous it is for the unconverted. And he describes the unconverted in such ways as "walking over the pit of hell on a rotten covering," so that any moment, their foot could go through and they could plunge into that pit. And he describes how God holds them over the pit like one holds a spider over the fire. And the only thing that keeps the sinner, at any moment, out of hell, is the mere pleasure of God. The pleasure of a God who's angry at sin, and one who could change at any moment.

Well, it's a sermon that everybody's familiar with, at least the name of it. And probably familiar with it in negative terms because it's been villainized by critics as a manipulative attempt to scare people into believing. But it's no stronger than our Lord's words to Judas. "Woe to that man. Better that he had never been born." And as you read through the gospels, you find our Lord on many occasions warning against hell and the dangers of it.

Judas rejected His warning. He went out and it was night. But to go to Edwards and to that sermon that he preached, many responded to it. The church at Enfield experienced a great revival when he preached that sermon, which is interesting, is it not? He preached that sermon to a church. He preached it to religious people. He didn't go to the bar. He didn't go to the tavern. He didn't look for a brothel to preach that sermon. He went to religious people, people who were

religious, but who were without faith. In fact, that congregation in Enfield has been described as secure, vain, and indifferent to spiritual things. So Edwards entered the pulpit, and he preached to them the eternal danger of being indifferent to spiritual things, to being religious without having faith.

That's why the lesson of Judas is for the church. It's for you and it's for me. He was a religious man, a man of the church, a man who had great knowledge, a man who walked with the Lord; and yet, a man who did not have faith.

So, if you're here this morning in church, maybe you've been here hundreds of times, and yet you are without faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior, then you are on a perilous path that leads to destruction. It doesn't matter if you've been baptized or catechized, or you've attended church all your life. If you've never believed in Christ as your Savior, then you are lost, and you are headed for destruction. And the warning is for you as well. Turn from that way. And there is a way of escape, and that way of escape is Jesus Christ, who died in the place of sinners, who became a man, sent by His Father in order to fall into the hands of His Father in judgment, and bear the wrath of God in the place of sinners so that all who believe in Him would escape that wrath and enter into life eternal.

If you've never believed in Christ, I urge you: believe in Him. If you believed in Christ, then walk by faith, not by sight. Trust in our Lord at every moment. May God help us all to do that. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Our gracious heavenly Father, we do thank You for the great truth that we are reminded of here. There are two ways. There is a way , the end of which is death. And there is a way, the end of which is life. That way is Christ, and we pray that You would bless us in that way. If there are some in attendance who don't know Christ as Savior, I pray that You'd convict them of their sin and bring them to a saving knowledge of Him. For those of us who have put our faith in Him, help us to be more relying upon You in all that we do, to trust You at every moment, to trust Your word and to live in obedience to it, with the conviction that just as those disciples found it just as He told them, we too will find things to be true just as He has said, as we are faithful and obedient. Help us to be that, Father, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.