

Pastor Spencer Martin
Jesus & Judas

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Series: Unexpected
Mark 14:1-25

**BIG IDEA - IN JUDAS'S CHOICES, WE SEE A COUNTER-VISION
FOR OUR LIVES**

My name is Spencer. I'm one of the pastors here. What you heard in that video is that every Christian has a responsibility to own the lostness in their community and also around the world. One of the things we say here is that a disciple is someone who's following Jesus and helping others find and follow Jesus. So, every Christian should be asked this question at some point...*What are you doing to help others find and follow Jesus?*

There is so much need here in our city. There's so much need globally. We need to be asking ourselves the question, "What can I do personally to own the lostness around me?" Then, like they also said, the church at large is also responsible. So, as a church, what we also are asking is "What can we do, as a church, to push back lostness, to own the lostness around us?"

Well, if you are new or if you haven't been coming around very long, you need to understand that at this church we are dead serious about doing whatever we can do to own the lostness we see around us locally but also nationally and globally. The way we do that is through our Hold the Rope offering.

Pretty much every year, we have a Hold the Rope offering. What we do is we ask every person who calls Two Cities home to give a one-time gift above and beyond their normal tithes and offerings to Hold the Rope. We end up giving 100 percent of this offering away to different ministries that have great need.

If you were here last week, you saw a video of Pastor Thomas West, who is pastoring a church called Redeemer Queen's Park in London. A couple of weeks ago, Pastor

Caleb and I went to visit Pastor Thomas and his team in London. Here in this picture you'll see Pastor Thomas, his wife Elizabeth, their two super cute kids, and then Pastor Caleb with his very British-looking hat. He loves that hat. I had a hard time getting him to take it off once we got back.

When we were there, we were so encouraged. Church planting here in the United States is hard, but it's especially hard in London. It's hard on the lead pastor. It's very hard on the wife and kids. I mean, think about it. You're in a new culture. You're trying to figure out how to fit in. Grandparents are on the other side of an ocean.

To make things worse, there's no Chick-fil-A. No Chick-fil-A in London. It sounds like a nightmare for many of you. But we came back, and we were so encouraged to see all that the Lord is doing there. We are excited, as a church, to next year not only be sending them mission trip teams but also to give to them through part of what we get from Hold the Rope.

So, if you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those and flip to Mark, chapter 14. That's where we're going to be today. Mark, chapter 14, is the longest chapter of the book. We're not going to get through all of it today. If you're new, what we've been doing is we've been walking through the book of Mark and looking at the teaching, preaching, and healing ministry of Jesus.

As we start chapter 14, what we're going to see is that it starts out with a very somber and serious tone. As I was preparing this message, I just kept thinking to myself, "Man! This is such a serious text." It's so heavy. It's so somber. I think this might be challenging for many of us, because as Americans, we are not a very serious people.

What kind of conversations are you most comfortable having? Probably the conversations that are shallow and superficial. It's why most people aren't very comfortable talking about death, talking about dying, talking about spiritual things, because it's just so serious.

This passage is somber and serious, and I think it's going to be a very timely passage for us because we are now officially in the Christmas season. I say "officially" because I'm personally a traditionalist, so I wait until after Thanksgiving to start celebrating. I know some of you like to get a little bit ahead of yourselves. November 1, you're starting to celebrate Christmas, but it is now officially Christmas season.

Well, what are we celebrating here at Christmas? The culture uses Christmas as a time to see family, and that's great. They get presents for each other. That's fine. You sort of do a reset before the new year. All that stuff is great. What we are celebrating,

as Christians, is that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We are celebrating that Jesus Christ was born.

Why was he born? He was born so he could eventually step into the betrayal we're going to see, starting here in Mark 14. Now, if you've been in church for any amount of time, you know a big player in the betrayal of Jesus is Judas. This chapter is going to be the first time Judas is mentioned except for Mark, chapter 3, and he was just briefly mentioned.

As we look at Judas, what I want you to think is not "How could Judas have done such a thing? I would never do something like Judas did in that he betrayed Jesus." What I want you to think is "How can I see some parts of Judas inside of me?" because we're going to see that Judas struggles with a lot of the same things you and I struggle with.

What's funny is we like to find things in common with Peter, Paul, James, and those guys, but not Judas. When was the last time you heard someone named after Judas? Probably never. We love to name people after Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and all of those guys, but not Judas.

In Mark 14, we are going to see a picture of devotion and a picture of deception. In Mark 14, we are going to see legitimate Christianity, true Christianity, and then we're also going to see a picture of counterfeit Christianity. As we're going to see here, counterfeit Christianity can sometimes be hard to spot. So let's look together. Mark, chapter 14, verse 1:

"It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him [Jesus] by stealth and kill him, for they said, 'Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people.'"

We are now in the last week of Jesus' life, and we are told it's two days before Passover. What that means is it is busy in Jerusalem. We know there were probably around two million people in the city at this time. If you're trying to picture this, just think of the North Carolina State Fair, if you've been there...lots of people, lots of games, lots of food, lots of activities, lots of kids, lots of smells. Very busy.

So, it's two days before Passover, and we're also told the chief priests and scribes are trying to figure out how to kill Jesus quietly. You might ask, "Why quietly?" Well, by this point of Jesus' ministry, he had become very popular, so the last thing these guys wanted to do was kill Jesus with all of these people in town and start a big riot. So, they're trying to kill Jesus quietly. Let's keep going. Verse 3:

"And while he [Jesus] was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. There were some who said to themselves indignantly, 'Why was the ointment wasted like that? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.' And they scolded her."

There's so much here to talk about, but I'm just going to point out three things. First, we see that Jesus is in the house of Simon the leper. Now, during that time period, as many of you know, if someone had leprosy, you couldn't eat in the house with them, but what most commentators think is that, by this time, Jesus had actually healed Simon the leper. So a more appropriate way to describe him would have been "Simon the ex-leper" or maybe "Simon the healed," but aren't we too quick ourselves to judge people or to label people by who they used to be? It's not helpful.

So, we see Jesus is in the house of Simon the leper. The second thing we see is that a woman comes and pours perfume on Jesus' head. Now, we know from other gospel accounts that the woman who does this is Mary, who's the sister of Martha, the sister of Lazarus who, not long before this, Jesus had raised from the dead.

So, this is Mary, and it says she poured very expensive perfume on Jesus' head. Mark goes out of his way to communicate that this is very expensive stuff. He says this perfume is worth at least 300 denarii, which would have been a year's wages. Today, picture someone having a bottle of perfume worth \$50,000 and then breaking it and pouring it on someone's head. That's what's going on here. It's a lot of money.

What Mary does here... It makes you wonder. Why do we not do extravagant things for Jesus like this? Why do we not do things for Jesus? Why do we not make sacrifices for Jesus that are hard for people to understand? There are probably a lot of reasons, but one reason is it's costly. Doing extravagant things for Jesus tends to be expensive. It's expensive financially. It's expensive relationally. It's expensive with time.

It also might be that we're afraid we are going to get the same response Mary gets here, which is the third thing we see. Some were indignant or angry, and they scolded Mary. They said, "Why did you do this? Why could we not have just sold this perfume and given the money to the poor?"

What's so interesting here is that, in the gospel of John, we are actually told which one of the disciples spoke up to scold Mary. Guess which one it was: Judas. John is also very specific when talking about Judas. The question is...*Why is Judas upset?* John actually tells us the reason Judas was upset was not because he cared about the poor. The reason Judas was upset was because he was a thief.

We know Judas was in control of the disciples' money bag. What that meant was, since he was a thief, he was figuring out ways to slowly, creatively, over time steal money. In view of this text, I feel the need to ask: Is this you? Are you a thief? How do people steal today? Most people today don't steal by creating big Ponzi schemes or stealing people's iPhones or going to rob banks. We tend to be much more careful and discreet today with stealing.

What about using your company credit card when you shouldn't? What about not scanning every item at the self-checkout in the grocery store? What about stealing time, billing more hours than you're actually working? Or maybe you're intentionally working fewer hours than you're being paid for.

Last night, after the 5:00 p.m. service, I had an older man walk up to me, and he said, "Sometimes at work I'll feel tempted to take some small things, and I feel like I have a little voice in my head that's telling me, 'It's okay. It's not a big deal,' but I know this is a specific temptation for me."

A buddy of mine who I went to college with... He doesn't go to this church. He lives in eastern North Carolina. He has two young kids, and he told me last week, "At my church, we were doing a diaper drive for a pregnancy care center," and he said, "I was tempted to steal some of the diapers, but I didn't."

I thought, "This is exactly the kind of thing we are tempted to do." Nothing drastic. We're not creating big Ponzi schemes, but little compromises where we are tempted to steal. We are tempted to be thieves. Judas was a thief. So, what we see is that Mary pours expensive perfume on Jesus' hair. Judas scolds her. Now let's see how Jesus responds. Let's look together at verse 6.

"But Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.'"

What Mary had done here seemed to be totally wasteful. Think about it. It would have been pointless for Mary, because at this point she didn't really need anything from Jesus. He had just raised her brother from the dead, and now she was out of a big expensive bottle of perfume. Then it was also pretty pointless for Jesus. I mean, this perfume would have lasted a day or two anyway, and who was Jesus trying to impress?

But Jesus says, "What Mary has done for me is beautiful. She has done a beautiful thing for me." She has given us a picture of how worthy and valuable Jesus is. Mary is giving us a picture of gratitude and worship. Worship is just responding rightly to who God is. That's all worship is. So, when we gather together and sing, we are responding rightly to who God is. Whenever you give generously, you are responding rightly to who God is.

What Judas is doing here is the exact opposite. Judas does not respond rightly. What we are seeing is a really clear contrast between Judas and Mary. Mary over here is willing to forfeit her wealth for Jesus. Judas is willing to forfeit Jesus for wealth. Mary is a giver. Judas is a taker. Mary loves Jesus. Judas loves money. Mary is generous. Judas is critical and hypocritical. He's critical of Mary. He's hypocritical before God.

What we see here is that Jesus is not having Judas' critical spirit. Jesus looks at Judas and says, "Leave her alone." What Judas is trying to do here is he's trying to rain on Mary's parade. Mary is trying her best to show others how valuable and worthy Jesus is, and Judas is trying to dampen it.

One of the things we say here is we, as a church, want to be a church full of people who have critical minds but not critical hearts. Yes, we want to think critically about things. We want to analyze things well, but we don't want to do things with a critical spirit, like we see here in the life of Judas.

We also see, in verse 9, that Jesus says Mary's legacy forever is going to be a love for him. When you think about what kind of legacy you want to leave, is that not it? I mean, what sounds better to you? "Yeah, he really loved Jesus and loved his family" or "Yeah, he really loved money, and he was willing to sacrifice a lot of things for it." Obviously, we would much rather be known as someone who loves Jesus.

So, Mary and Judas give us a vision and a counter-vision here. Now let's see what Judas does next, picking up in verse 10. ***"Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him."***

Two things here. The first thing we see is that Judas is going out of his way to betray Jesus. It says he sought an opportunity to betray him. Now, it's one thing to sin. It's one thing to mess up, but it's an entirely different thing for sin to be totally premeditated, for sin to be totally planned. This is the guy who is planning on his wife leaving in a couple of hours so he can get on some websites that he shouldn't.

This is the girl who is planning to dress in a way that's provocative in order to attract a guy's attention. This is the guy who's making all sorts of plans on Friday night and

rearranging his entire weekend because he plans on drinking too much on Friday night. There's something uniquely evil about seeking opportunities to sin.

So, that's the first big idea. The second thing we see is Judas was willing to sell Jesus out for a price. Now, when we read this text, Judas betraying Jesus is honestly pretty terrifying, for multiple reasons. One of the reasons it's terrifying is Judas was thought of as being a trustworthy guy.

How do we know that? Well, like I said earlier, we see in other parts of the Scripture that Judas was elected to carry the money bag for the disciples. If he were thought of as being some sketchy guy, they probably wouldn't have voted him money bag holder. I mean, would you pick the sketchy guy to do your taxes? I hope not.

But for some reason, when we think of Judas, we like to think of Judas as being this clearly sketchy guy who's doing all of these things that are just a little bit dark. We picture Judas telling inappropriate jokes when Jesus is not around. We picture Judas going to skip class to vape with his friends. We picture Judas cheating at card games, but that is not how Judas was thought of. He was clearly thought of as being trustworthy.

The second thing that's terrifying about Judas is that he had been in the inner circle with Jesus for three years. For three years, he had been with Jesus the entire time. Here's what that means: Jesus was Judas' Community Group leader. Jesus discipled Judas. Whenever Judas had a question about theology, he didn't have to Google it. He didn't have to go ask anybody else. He could just ask Jesus.

When Jesus gave his Sermon on the Mount, Judas was right there listening to it in person. When Jesus fed the 5,000 and used the disciples to do it, the miracle was happening in the hands of Judas. Judas was taking the bread and the fish to people. So, when you see Judas betray Jesus, it just makes you ask the question, "How on earth could this have happened? How is it possible that he could have spent three years with Jesus and betrayed him like this?"

Well, there are two reasons I could think of. The first (we're going to talk about this later) is that Judas was never actually a Christian. That brings up another big question. How is it possible to spend three years with Jesus Christ and not become a Christian? The answer to that is we don't know. It's a mystery. It's something we are not able to understand.

Here's what I do know. In a room this size, there are many of you who have wayward children, children who are not walking with the Lord. Maybe you have a sibling who's not a Christian or a best friend who's not a Christian, and you just beat yourself up over it. It just breaks your heart.

You think, "Well, maybe we should have sent them to a different school. Maybe we should have paid a little bit more money to send them to a Christian school. Maybe we should have sent them to a different church so they could have had more Christian friends. We should have done more of *this*. We should have done less of *this*. We should have had more devotional time as a family."

In view of what we see with Judas in this text, I think you need to hear this. First, could you have done some things differently? Sure. But you did the best you could with where you were. Even Jesus lost one. I mean, think about it. Did Judas have good Christian friends? Oh yeah. Did Judas have a good Christian teacher? Yeah. His teacher was Jesus. It doesn't get any better.

So, if you are here and you are heartbroken over a child who is not walking with the Lord, you need to understand Jesus knows exactly how you feel, because one of the Twelve wasn't a Christian. So, that's one reason Judas betrayed Jesus: he wasn't a Christian.

The second reason we're going to see is that Judas had a price. A reason he betrayed Jesus is he had a price. Do *you* have a price? I was thinking about this a lot this week, and I asked a friend of mine who just got a brand-new puppy... I said, "Let's say, for some reason... Just bear with me here. Let's say someone offered you \$25 million to very gently and compassionately have that puppy put to sleep. Would you do it?"

He thought about it for a second, and he took a deep breath. He said, "I would do it. I would do it. I'd feel bad about it, but I'd do it." He heard me say this earlier. He wanted me to share with you all... He was like, "Remind them I said I would buy a new puppy." Okay. Communicated.

After he said that, I was like, "Okay. Fair enough. Twenty-five million dollars is a lot of money. What about \$25? Would you do it for \$25?" He said, "No, of course not." Okay. What we had established in that moment was he had a price for which he would do something terrible. It's just a matter of what that price was.

So, my question to you is...*What is your price?* Now, again, I'm not saying some of you are willing to actually sell Jesus out and recant your faith or renounce your faith for a price. That's not what I'm asking. What I *am* saying is: Do you have areas of your life where your commitment to Jesus stops?

For some of you, you are committed to Jesus until it's not convenient anymore. Over the last 10 years, I have seen far too many college students be very plugged into the church, be very plugged into a college ministry. They're coming to all of the events because it's very convenient. Then they move to a different city, and it's not as convenient anymore, and they just fall away.

Some of you might be very committed to Jesus until somebody gets sick or until *you* get sick. Some of you are committed to Jesus until you want to live with your boyfriend or girlfriend or fiancé before you get married, but that's where your commitment stops. Like, "I'm not committed enough to actually walk away from this."

Some of you are committed to Jesus until you feel convicted about giving 10 percent of your income to the kingdom of God. In view of what we see with Judas here, in view of how he sells Jesus out, we need to ask ourselves, "At what point does my commitment to Jesus stop and I sell him out?"

This is why we need accountability. This is why we need community. We need people to help us with this. This is why we need to be praying and asking God to help us. In Psalm 19, David says, "Lord, would you keep your servant back from presumptuous sins? Let them not have dominion over me." We need help from God, and we need help from each other. Let's go to verse 12.

"And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, 'Where will you have us 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 carrying a jar of water will meet you.

Follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us.' And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover."

We're not going to spend very long here, but what we see... When Jesus tells them to go find a guy in the city who's carrying a jar of water, it's very similar to what we see in chapter 11 when he tells the disciples to go into the city and find a colt that's tied up and bring it to him.

The big idea we need to understand here is that Jesus is in total control as he is about to be betrayed. As you see Jesus betrayed, you need to think this: Jesus is sovereign; he is not surprised. When you think about your life right now and whatever it is you're going through, you need to understand Jesus is sovereign; he is not surprised.

People love to spin in circles all day asking this question. "Is God in control or is man responsible?" Well, good news. Two things can be true at once. God is in control. God is sovereign and man is responsible. God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are compatible in ways that are hard for us to understand.

What that means is Jesus being betrayed by Judas was part of God's redemptive plan. God planned it. At the same time, Judas is going to act on his own free will, and as we're going to see here, he is going to be held accountable for his actions. If you have any questions about the sovereignty of God versus man's responsibility, Pastor Dave afterward would love to talk with you. He'll be just out front. Verse 17. Jesus and the disciples are at the Passover meal together, and it says this:

"And when it was evening, he came with the twelve. And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, 'Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.' They began to be sorrowful and to say to him one after another, 'Is it I?' He said to them, 'It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me. For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.'"

A very harsh last sentence there from Jesus. ***"It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."*** There are a few things to notice here. First, we notice Jesus doesn't tell the disciples exactly who's going to betray him. The reason he does this is he wants his disciples to examine their own hearts and ask themselves, "Is it me? Am I capable of doing this?"

When Jesus asked this, you would think either one of two things would happen. Either they would say, "It's Judas; I've had my suspicions," or you would think they would look at Peter and be like, "It has got to be Peter. He has a way of messing up everything." But neither of those two things happen.

Then Jesus gives the disciples some heavy news. He says, "It would be better for the person who is going to betray me if they had never been born at all." This one sentence lets us know a few things. It lets us know Judas was not a Christian, it lets us know Judas is in hell, and it lets us know hell is permanent.

In Matthew, chapter 26, we're actually given another clue or another glimpse into this scene that helps us make a little bit more sense. In Matthew 26, we're told Jesus tells his disciples, "One of you is going to betray me." It says they go around, and they all say, "Is it I, Lord? Is it I, Lord?" "No." "Is it I, Lord?" "No."

Then it says we get to Judas, and Judas looks at Jesus and says, "Is it I, Rabbi?" Hmm. Interesting. You see, the reason Judas was not a Christian was he never acknowledged Jesus Christ as Lord. He only viewed him as a teacher. In a room this size, I have to wonder. Are any of *you* in that boat?

You might be in here. You grew up in a Christian home. You like coming to church. You enjoy singing the songs. You can say the right things. You sometimes lift your

hands when we worship. All that stuff is great. You love that your kids are here, your grandkids are here, because they're getting a good sense of morality, and that's great, but at the end of the day, Jesus is not really Lord of your life. He's not really in control. He's just a teacher.

I heard a pastor talking about this idea of Judas and viewing someone as Lord instead of teacher. He said one of the things we learn in the life of Judas is you can't lose your salvation, but you can fake it. We know, as we look at the Scriptures, that you cannot lose your salvation. Salvation is when God sovereignly speaks life into someone who was dead. So, you can't lose your salvation, but you can certainly lose your assurance of salvation.

I'm sure there are many of you in here who have friends or family members about whom you would say, "I was sure at one point in my life that they were a Christian, but now they're not walking with the Lord. What about them? How do I make sense of this? I just knew this person was a Christian. We used to go to all of these things together. It just doesn't make sense to me."

This is actually a very personal topic to me. About a month ago, I was talking to an old roommate of mine from UNC Chapel Hill. I love this guy. We don't talk very often now, but we have a great relationship. We lived together for two years. We used to go to church together. I was sitting beside him when he decided to get baptized. I watched him get baptized. We went to church together. We had a lot of spiritual conversations together.

Recently, I heard he was doing some things I found a little bit worrisome, so I reached out to him, and I was like, "Hey, man, how are things going? I just wanted to check in. Help me understand this." He said to me, "Hey, man. I think it would be helpful for me to tell you I don't identify as a Christian anymore. I identify as agnostic." I hear this, and I'm just like, "Man. How do I process this?"

As I was thinking about it, there are really only one of two options for my friend. First, he either actually is a Christian and has just lost his assurance of salvation because of the lifestyle he has been living or the second possibility is that he was never a Christian in the first place; he was just faking it.

Counterfeit Christianity, as we see in the life of Judas, can be hard to spot, especially here in the Bible Belt. Now let's pick back up in verse 22. We know at this point, as we jump into verse 22, that Judas had actually just left the dinner to betray Jesus, and it says this:

"And as they were eating, he [Jesus] took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body.' And he took a cup, and when he

had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'"

What's happening here is called the *institution of the Lord's Supper*. What we're going to see is that the Lord's Supper, or Communion, is a tradition that is connected back to the Passover meal. The Passover meal is a tradition that is connected back to the Passover that we see in Exodus, chapter 12.

Now, the problem with traditions is we often forget their meaning. I mean, think about it. What is Halloween for most of us? It's a tradition without a meaning. What about Saint Patrick's Day? They have a lot of traditions. Well, for most of us, it's a tradition without a meaning. We would have to Google it to know the meaning.

What if someone had come up to you before the service and said, "Could you explain to me very simply in one to two minutes what the meaning of Communion is? What is the meaning of the Lord's Supper?" It's an important question because we need to understand the meaning. To understand it we have to go all the way back to Exodus.

Many of you know that in the book of Exodus, what is happening is the people of Israel are slaves in Egypt. Moses goes to Pharaoh on behalf of God and says, "Let my people go." Pharaoh says, "No." Pharaoh's heart is hardened. What God does is he sends nine plagues throughout Egypt, and Pharaoh still has a hard heart. What God does next is he says, "All right. I'm going to send a tenth plague called the *Passover*."

God tells Moses, "What's going to happen is the firstborn son in every household is going to die overnight unless that family takes a spotless lamb and kills it and spreads the blood on the doorposts. For the families that have faith in the God of the Bible and a substitute, a lamb, God's wrath is going to pass over their house, and the firstborn is going to be spared."

What's also really interesting about Exodus, chapter 12, is you can look, and you will see that God gives a lot of description about what the Passover meal should look like. He explains to them what the Passover meal needs to look like before the Passover even happens. The reason he does this is the meal itself is going to be important, and he does not want the people to forget how he rescued them from slavery in Egypt.

What's happening in Mark 14 is Jesus is at the Passover meal with his disciples, and he takes the bread and gives it to his disciples. He says, "This is my body." He takes the wine. He gives it to them. He says, "This is my blood." What he is doing here is making a 1,500-year-old tradition about himself.

This would have been shocking to the disciples, because Jesus is basically saying, "In the same way the Passover meal is meant to remind you of how God saved you from slavery, the Lord's Supper from here on out is going to be how you remember me." Then we are given the Lord's Supper or Communion.

Now, in a room this size, I'm sure you are all over the map when it comes to your experience in the past with the Lord's Supper. Some of you grew up in a church where you did not do Communion very often. You might have done it once a month. You might have done it once a quarter. Last night, after the 5:00 p.m. service, I had a lady come up to me and say, "In the church I grew up in, we did Communion once a never." Okay. Some of you may have done Communion once a never growing up.

This tends to be Baptist churches. It tends to be Methodist churches sometimes. It tends to be charismatic churches. This was my experience. I grew up in a small Southern Baptist church of fewer than 100 people, and I can remember about once a quarter they would pass around the silver trays, and we would have the little cups with juice in them, and they would give us a little cracker that was stale and seemed older than I was, and we would just take it. It wasn't a huge deal, but that's what we did.

That was some of your experiences, but some of you grew up Lutheran or Anglican or Presbyterian, and you may have taken Communion every week. Some of you grew up Catholic, and you received the Eucharist every week from a priest. It was a big deal for you. The Catholic Church holds to a position called *transubstantiation*, which is a big word. Transubstantiation is basically the belief that during Communion, the bread and the wine become the literal and actual body and blood of Christ.

Here at this church, we believe all of Scripture is meant to be taken literally, but there are two kinds of literal. There is actual literal and figurative literal. For example, let's say I were to go over to the kids' building, grab my 1-year-old daughter Emma, bring her over here, and say, "Emma, you are so cute. I could just eat you up."

Now, if you heard me say that, would any of you call Child Protective Services and be like, "This pastor at Two Cities is threatening to eat his child"? No, of course not. I'm speaking figuratively. What about examples from Jesus? Jesus also says, "I am the vine; you are the branches," but Jesus doesn't have leaves. Jesus says, "I am the door," but Jesus doesn't have hinges.

We see in the book of Romans that Paul says we are baptized with him unto death, but if you have been baptized here as a believer, in case you didn't know this, you did not actually literally die. What we believe here is that when Jesus says, "This is my body and this is my blood," he is speaking figuratively. Even though Jesus is not

actually present in the bread and the juice, the Holy Spirit is present in his people during Communion.

We believe here that Communion is a very sacred time where we are called to remember the cross and to remember what God has done for us on our behalf. So, what Jesus is doing is he is saying, "The Passover is ultimately about me." He's saying, "The Lord's Supper is going to be how you remember me."

There's one final detail I noticed as I was studying this passage that I thought was really interesting and wanted to share with you as we wrap things up here. At every Passover meal, there would normally be four things. There may have been more than this, but certainly not less than this. Every Passover meal, there would be bread, there would be wine, there would be herbs, and there would be lamb.

In Mark 14, if you'll notice, there is no mention of a lamb at all. There's no mention of meat, which is sort of strange, because it's a big part of the meal. It's the meat. You might think, "Maybe it's mentioned in one of the other accounts." Nope. You can look in Matthew. You can look in John. You can look in Luke. There's no mention of a lamb. You might say, "Well, maybe the disciples are vegetarians." I don't think so. Probably not the case.

The reason this is the case is Jesus Christ is himself the Lamb. He is saying, "I am the Lamb of God. I am here." You see, in the Old Testament, what would happen was the wrath of God would pass over the house of anyone who had sacrificed a lamb that was a spotless, innocent substitute. Does that sound familiar at all?

Here, today, any person who has faith in the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who was a spotless, innocent substitute, will be spared from the wrath of God. You see, the heart of the gospel is put on display here at the Last Supper, here with Communion. The heart of the gospel can be summarized with this one word: *substitution*.

A couple of weeks ago when I was in London, Pastor Caleb and I were on a Christian Heritage tour. One of my best friends, JT, and his wife Caroline were on this tour as well. It was really cold this morning. It was like 40 degrees. We were in the shade. We were listening to the tour guide. JT was standing right beside me. His wife Caroline was standing on the edge of the group.

As I was listening to the tour guide, I noticed the wind started to blow out of nowhere really hard from one direction. As I was listening to the tour guide, I noticed JT had slipped off from beside me and had walked back around his wife Caroline, and he stood behind her so the wind would hit him and then pass over her and she wouldn't be cold. I saw this happen, and I just thought, "This is a small picture of the gospel."

In the same way that JT shielded Caroline from the cold wind, what Jesus Christ has done for us is he has shielded us from the wrath of God by becoming our representative substitute. He has done this by receiving the wages of our sin in our place. So, if you're in this room and you're a Christian, you need to understand that Jesus Christ did not just die *for* you; Jesus Christ died *instead* of you. What we do during Communion is we remember what Christ has done for us on our behalf.

If you're here and you're not a Christian, you need to view this passage as a warning and an invitation. It's a very serious warning. Jesus gives us the verdict on what happens to someone who does not acknowledge him as Lord. It says he would have been better to have never been born. It's a harsh verdict, but at the same time, it's a very generous invitation, because Jesus Christ holds up the bread and says, "Take."

If you're not a Christian, he is offering to you right now his gift of salvation for free. He just says you have to receive it. Forgiveness, acceptance, being adopted by God is something that is given to those who have faith and who repent. May we be a church that is full of people who are quick to remember our great substitute, the Lamb of God who stood in our place. Let's pray together.

Father, I thank you for the cross. I thank you that you became our substitute. You paid the price we couldn't pay with your life. Father, help us to remember. We are a forgetful people. We are so quick to forget what you have done for us, what you have done on behalf of us. I pray that you would help us to remember how you have pursued us, how you love us, how you forgive us.

Father, I pray for those in this room who have never received you, that they would see your forgiveness that you offer to them right now in a new way. Father, help us to endure. Help us to finish well. Help us to stay faithful to you until the end. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.