

Dangers to avoid and safety to seek

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[0 : 00] Good morning, a warm welcome to the service this morning. It's good to see some visitors with us this morning. You're especially welcome. It's good to see some who've been away for a wee while and who are back and some new faces as well.

So you're all very welcome. It's good to see everyone and we come together to worship God in this hour. The intimations you have on the screens and on the sheet, if I can highlight just one or two of these, the service at 6 till 7 tonight, is followed by the Youth Fellowship at half past 7.

And I think at the YF tonight, Fiona McLeod, Donnie Martin's daughter, Kyle's wife, has given her testimony. Is that right? So the young folks, you can take note of that and be encouraged to go to that.

In the course of the week, you can see various things which are normal and I'm not going to highlight them all. But if I could highlight that on Tuesday, there's the monthly community pop-in lunch from 12 till 2.

And you can note that. Also, if I can highlight that the services next Sunday will be at 11 and 6. The morning service I will hopefully conduct myself.

[1 : 11] The evening service is actually next Sunday, a Gaelic service. And that is conducted, I think, by Dan Marig. Is that right? So that's next Sunday. Morning service at 6. And the evening service is Gaelic.

And Dan Marig will be preaching at that and the fellowship will be afterwards. The congregational meal is this coming Saturday, the 25th. Hospitality team 2 are on duty and there's a sign-up sheet at the door, I believe, for helping out with the food.

The Kirk session meet on Monday, 27th. That's a week on Monday. They can note that. And the final thing, it's just not on the notices either, but just to log in your minds, the second week in February, we hope to start running.

And, well, it's the new version of Christianity Explored. It's called Life Explored here in the church. So you can maybe give some thought to that yourselves and you can maybe give some thought to people that you might want to invite to that.

So that's the second week in February that will begin so we can be praying in advance of that and thinking about that. The rest of the intimations, there's quite a few you can read at your own convenience.

[2 : 25] If you could turn with me now, please, to Mark 14, passage that we read. And again, let's pray.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We read and hear the haunting words of Psalm 41, written so many hundreds of years before the sufferings of Christ, and yet we see so clearly all that was prophesied and all that came true.

And we thank you even as we look at history that we have so many assurances of the fact that the Bible can be trusted. We thank you for these prophecies that we see here and the prophecies that we have seen in the evenings through Zechariah that so clearly demonstrate the fact that you are the God who is sovereign and you are the God who works out your purposes.

Sometimes we cannot see and understand that, but we thank you that that is true. And we ask now, Lord, that as we turn to this passage that we would know your help, the help of the Holy Spirit.

We pray that we would know your presence with us. And we pray that you would open our hearts. We ask, Lord, that the little children, that as they hear the gospel message next door, Lord, that you would be speaking to them and that they would remember and trust their Creator in the days of their youth.

[4 : 07] And we pray that we too, Lord, not in the days of our youth, but as time passes before it's too late, enable each one of us to trust you. So help us, Lord, we pray.

And what we pray for ourselves, we pray for the churches around us here in this community too, that wherever the gospel is preached, and we know that in each church that's preached, we ask, Lord, that you would add your blessing, that you would speak through your servants.

Help us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. When R.J. McLeod's came to town, sounds like the beginning of a country music song or something.

When R.J. McLeod's came to town, we knew they were here, and we knew they were here partly because we saw cabins coming and being put into place, partly because we saw machinery, heavy machinery, being transported over and put into position, partly because we started to meet people who were employees of the firm.

But the main reason that we knew R.J. McLeod's were in town was because of the signs, warning signs, warning signs, outside the school, at the surgery, halfway along, at the bottom of the call, on the main street, further around.

[5 : 43] There's warning signs, all kinds of warning signs that have been put up so that their people would be kept safe on the job and so that their people, whilst they were on the job, would make sure that other people in this community would be kept safe.

So we see a whole host of signs, warning signs. Now in the section that we read, we see various people, we see various things happening, and in many ways, they serve, in the first instance to us, as warning signs.

God is guiding us here on the dangers that we can encounter and the absolute necessity for us to seek safety and security in him.

And that kind of gives us the tone of the passage this morning. There's two sections that we'll look at. There's two points this morning. There's dangers to avoid.

That's point number one. And secondly, there's safety to seek. So first of all, we're going to look at various dangers to avoid that we see in this passage.

[7 : 02] And the first danger to avoid is the danger of secret sins. And we see that in Judas. I think if we were honest, all of us would acknowledge the fact that we have particular areas of weakness.

Judas, we know, had a particular area of weakness. He sinned catastrophically. But we can look at Judas and just focus on Judas, but we must also look at ourselves because the Bible is a mirror.

And I think if we're honest, we would all acknowledge the fact that we have particular areas of weakness. We all have blind spots.

When you were learning to drive, you can perhaps remember that the instructor would tell us, before we move out, there's various things that have to be done.

You have to check the mirrors. Don't just pull out into the middle of the street. You must check your mirrors and then start to signal that you're going to move out.

[8 : 15] But just before you move out, even though you've checked your mirrors and even though you've signaled, I remember the instructor always saying, look over your shoulder. Take a final look because there's a blind spot.

The mirror won't show you everything. There's a blind spot. And if you don't check that blind spot, you can be in grave danger. Now, Judas, he had a blind spot. He had a particular area of weakness.

He had a secret sin. It was a love of money. And likely he always had it, but it was well hidden. And it was so well hidden that no one actually objected to Judas looking after the money bag.

If anybody knew about Judas' secret sin, he would have been the last man who was going to be entrusted with the cash. But nobody seems to have seen this.

It was a secret sin. But over time, it started to manifest itself.

[9 : 24] We're told that before long, Judas' hand was in the money bag. He was helping himself to a penny here and a penny there.

And then at the beginning of this chapter, Mark 14, we see this scene, this beautiful scene where a woman in an act of worship, she takes this expensive perfume, this expensive nard, it was worth a year's wages, and she breaks it and she anoints Jesus with this.

And Jesus, he appreciates this act of worship that she does. He uses it to point to his death and his burial.

He says, whatever the gospel is preached, this woman will be remembered. But there were some people who witnessed that scene that Jesus saw as beautiful.

and they objected to it. Mark 14, and at verse 4, it says that some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, why this waste of perfume?

[10 : 40] It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor. And they rebuked her harshly. John tells us the person who said that, or amongst the people who said that, was Judas.

And John tells us in that same passage that by this point, Judas' hand was deep in the money bag. He was helping himself.

And I suppose if you think about it from Judas' point of view, if a year's wages had been put into the money bag, that's a lot of coins. Where there are a lot of coins, a few more going missing, aren't really noticed.

But the money didn't go in the money bag. It was used in this act of worship of Christ. And that really irked him.

And it says, immediately after that scene, Judas Iscariot, this is verse 10 of Mark 14, one of the twelve went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them.

[11 : 58] They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him what? Money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

And we fast forward just a few verses from the beginning of this chapter and here is Judas and he has opportunity. And here is Judas and he comes to greet Jesus as was traditional.

The pupil greets the master, the rabbi, with a kiss. But Judas says, this will be the sign. This will be how you know who to arrest. I will greet him with a kiss.

And so there's the act of betrayal and the 30 pieces of silver are given to Judas. He might have put them in his money bag but he would never spend them because that currency could not be used to trade with in hell which is where he ended up we're told that.

He gained a lot in terms of cash as he pursued his secret sin but he lost his soul. He lost his soul. And I think and I know this is speculation I think if Judas was to have been asked months before would you ever betray Jesus?

[13 : 21] You know, for cash even. I think Judas would have sincerely said never. But then bit by bit, week by week, sin by sin, our hearts get calloused.

You know, the builder's hands. They can stick pins in them. They can pick up red hot trays that we can't go near. Their hearts, their hands are calloused because of the bricks and our hearts can get like that.

The more we sin, the more we handle sin, the more our hearts get calloused. And Judas' heart had become calloused to the point that he was willing to betray his Lord.

Although the reality was he wasn't sincerely his Lord. I think the point for us to note here is if we don't seek help repenting of and killing sin in our lives, sin will kill us.

I think that's the point for us to grasp. You may have secret sins. I may have secret sins. We are called to repent of them day by day, hour by hour and trust Christ.

[14 : 40] And if we don't repent of them, if we handle them, if we accommodate them, if we play with the fire of them, they will kill us. St.

Leif Ferguson said, this tragedy has often been repeated. Judas stands as a warning to us when we fall into sin.

Openly confess it to Christ and be cleansed. Or darkness in your heart may one day engulf your whole soul. It's a sobering warning.

The danger of secret sins. That's the first danger that we are given here to avoid. The second danger is the danger of over-familiarity.

I'm not sure I put that quite right, but we'll kind of explore it anyway. And again, we're looking at Judas here. And we need to remember again as we think this through, who Judas was.

[15 : 42] Judas was an apostle. He wasn't someone on the periphery. He wasn't somebody who came to church twice a year. He wasn't a nominal person who was somewhere on the fringes.

Judas was an apostle. Judas was a disciple of Jesus. He was one of the twelve. He had spent three years living with Jesus.

He had seen the miracles performed by Jesus that we have recorded in the Gospels. Judas himself would have been enabled to perform some miracles of his own in the name of Jesus.

Judas was somebody who heard the out-of-this-world preaching of the Son of God. Judas was somebody who preached powerful sermons of his own. He was part of this close-knit band of Christian brothers.

Judas was familiar with Jesus. He was familiar with the teachings of Jesus.

[16 : 47] He was familiar with the people of Jesus, but Judas was lost. He had never repented of his sin.

It looked like he had. But he never had. He had never truly believed in Jesus. And this is a huge flashing warning sign to us.

Me first. I think this is designed to terrify us. I think this is designed to cause us to search our hearts.

to make sure that we're not looking in the mirror at ourselves here. It is possible to know about Jesus.

It is possible to fit in comfortably with the people of God. God. It is possible to be a full communicant member in a church, to have been baptized, to have sat in these chairs and other pews week by week by week by week throughout our whole lives.

[18 : 16] It is possible to be in full-time ministry as Judas was and yet be lost. And I must hear that as must you.

We don't get saved by what we know in our heads. We don't get saved by being able to demonstrate a huge biblical knowledge and being able to recite the catechisms that we learned in primary school.

We don't get saved by the good works that we do in this community or in this church. We don't get saved by sitting in these chairs and being in Christian company.

We don't get saved by being part of a Christian family. We don't get saved by having a Christian boyfriend or a Christian wife or a Christian husband. We don't get saved by being familiar with Jesus.

We get saved by knowing Jesus personally. We are saved by day by day repentance of sin and morning by morning coming to him for grace.

[19 : 36] You've heard me say it before that the entry point into heaven is not a big wide gate where thousands come in concurrently. It's like a turnstile in a stadium.

The old football stadiums. You pay your money through the window and the style goes over and you go in one by one. We are saved by coming to Christ.

One by one. Repenting of our sin, confessing it and asking for him to be our saviour, receiving his grace.

we don't do this as part of a crowd. This is about you and I personally coming to Jesus.

The danger of over familiarity. I don't know if that quite encapsulates it but you see the point of this in Judas. Third danger, the danger of Christless religion.

[20 : 40] Now the camera shifts from Judas to looking at this whole raft of religious leaders. We have them all present in these verses. We read here about the chief priests and the teachers of the law and the elders and the high priest and the Sanhedrin.

The whole gamut of religious leaders are gathered. They can sense that they're close to catching their prey. for many chapters now these people have hated Jesus.

They have been against Jesus. They've wanted to kill and silence Jesus and now it seems like the net is starting to close in on Christ. That's how they saw it. They're close to catching their prey.

They're close to getting their claws into Jesus and they're determined that they will kill him.

And there's irony dripping off these verses. All these people, all these religious people, they were zealots when it came to procedure and legal correctness.

[21 : 47] For them everything was about the rules. It's all about following the right rules and codes and processes and procedures. It all had to be done that way.

That was where your salvation was. It was in keeping the rules. And yet here, as they get close to putting their hands on Christ, the rule book goes out the window.

We see this joke of a trial. They met at an unlawful time. The commentators reckon it was somewhere between 1 a.m.

and 3 a.m. they met in the middle of the night. That was forbidden. They met during Passover. That was forbidden. They met in the house of the high priest in some upper room and not in the temple.

That too was forbidden. But it didn't stop them because they wanted Jesus dead. guilty. And you know that back then and still now a legal trial is something whereby the authorities investigate whether or not a person is innocent or guilty.

[23 : 02] And yet before this trial was ever set up, they were determined they had decided that Jesus was guilty. And not only had they determined that he was guilty, but they had determined that his sentence, his punishment must be death.

So they had the verdict. They had the punishment, all worked out. All they needed was to charge us. So here are these religious people running around in the middle of the night trying to find witnesses with a story that would stick.

so they could then take these witnesses and these testimonies to the Romans who alone had the power to order the crucifixion. And yet even that, as they got these rogues and rascals to testify, even in this joke of a trial, the testimonies didn't corroborate, they just clash with each other.

The high priest is becoming exasperated, and eventually the high priest takes matters into his own hands, so he can ensure that he pins the guilt on Jesus.

But what we need to see here is that the whole order of things was wrong. Everything about this smacks of conspiracy and corruption, and it's done, note who it's done by.

[24 : 48] All this conspiracy, all this corruption, all this grubby underhand dealings, is done by the most religious people of the day. Okay.

Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. They didn't empty the prisons. They didn't go into the dark alleys to find characters to turn against Christ.

All this was done by the apparently upright moral and religious people of that day. And it's a warning.

any religion, no matter how respectable it is in the eyes of the culture, any religion that does not focus on Jesus and his grace is false.

And it's dangerous. And it does not lead to salvation. It does not take us on the road to heaven but it condemns.

[26 : 06] And it sets people on the road to hell. And I know that in this current climate of multi-faith people will howl in protest.

I know this is the kind of statement that was published in the news this evening would probably set me in some police station somewhere. I know the culture said you can't say that.

You can't set Christianity above other religions. You can't say that what you're saying is true and what they're saying is false. But that's what the Bible teaches. So I will say it.

That's what Jesus said in John 14, 6. I am the way, he says, singular. I am the truth, singular. I am the life, singular. No one comes to the Father except through me, says Jesus.

Any Christless religion sets us down a wrong path. Think about Saul the Pharisee who became Paul the Apostle.

[27 : 14] One of the most religious, zealous men you could ever meet. Nobody could question his sincerity, nobody could question his commitment to the faith that he was following.

That Jesus met him on the Damascus road and Jesus said to Saul, you're wrong. You've got everything wrong. And Jesus told him he had to change direction and go from persecuting Christ to following Christ if he was to be saved.

the danger of Christless religion. And just before we leave this point, let's remember this is not just about other religions.

It's possible for people who are in Christian churches to take the focus off Jesus it's possible for people who are in Christian churches to steer people away from the message of the cross and to teach a kind of good works performance related religion where we save ourselves by the good things that we do and the bad things that we don't do.

You can go to Christian churches this morning all over the land and you will hear that. that's not the Christian message. We're not saved by what we do.

[28 : 56] We are saved by what Christ has already done. We're not saved by our religious efforts. We are saved by Christ's righteousness.

In Christ alone our hope is found. There is no other way, there is no other name. the danger of a Christless religion.

Fourthly, finally under this heading, the danger of self-confidence and we look here at the disciples. I want to just skim past this one really because we've seen this consistently over the last few weeks.

The disciples, they fell, we see them again in this passage and they fall. They desert Jesus. Now, rewind just a few verses and we hear the disciples saying to Jesus, we'll never desert you.

Jesus says to Peter, you're going to disown me, the rest of them are all going to scatter and Peter says, I'll never disown you. I'll never deny you. Even if I have to die, I'll be with you.

[30 : 06] And Jesus says, no Peter, you've got that all wrong. And all the rest of the disciples were told, said the same as Peter, we'll never let you down. We'll be with you to the end.

And yet, we see here, and we see in the next section, which we've looked at already in Peter, that when the heat was on, they scattered.

And Jesus was left alone. Why was that? It's because of their own self-confidence. they didn't listen to what Jesus said. They didn't pray when Jesus said you need to pray.

They thought, we can do this ourselves. We're strong, we're steady, we'll be okay. The danger of self-confidence.

Disciples, they failed. And where they failed, you and I can fail, and we often do. If we put our confidence in ourselves, in our own strength, and we try and do things our way, if we don't listen to Jesus, if we don't spend time on our knees before God, we will fall.

[31 : 20] The danger of self-confidence. It's painted very clearly for us in these verses, so that we will do all that we can to avoid it.

so there's the dangers that we are to avoid. And if we don't heed these dangers, we could find ourselves either lost eternally, like Judas was, like the religious leaders were, or we could find ourselves not lost if we are God's people, but we could find ourselves having badly fallen and let Jesus down as the disciples did if we don't heed this.

These warning signs along the road, they're there for a reason. If some R.G. McLeod van goes screaming through here at 120 mile an hour, he'll be saying to the guy, you don't see the signs.

You're not heeding what is clearly in the best interest of you and everybody in this place. for you and I, we see the signs here, I hope, and pray, but we need to heed them.

We need to heed them. Dangers to avoid and finally, safety to seek. Where will we find safety? We see where there are dangers, but where will we find safety?

[32 : 50] Well, there's two places that we find safety here to finish. First of all in the scriptures and secondly, in the saviour. We must see here that all that was happening was predicted.

As Jesus is let down by his disciples, it's no shock to him. It was predicted. As Jesus is attacked by the religious and the civil authorities, it doesn't shock him.

He knows it's coming. The scriptures said it. As this stinking conspiracy progresses, we need to keep on seeing here that this is not some tragic, unexpected turn of events.

This is not something whereby Jesus has lost control and has suddenly become the victim of an awful travesty. Jesus knows where he is.

He knows the hour to which he has come. He knows that everything must happen as the scriptures foretold. He says as much as that in verse 48 and 49.

[34 : 09] The heavy mob comes along with all their weapons and all their artillery. Jesus says in verse 48, am I leading a rebellion? That you've come out with swords and clubs to capture me?

Every day I was with you teaching in the temple courts and you did not arrest me. But, he says, the scriptures must be fulfilled.

fulfilled. And we see them being fulfilled here. And I could take you to Zechariah 11 and Zechariah 13. We've been already in Psalm 41.

We could go to Psalm 22. We could go verse by verse through Isaiah 53. We could go all over the Old Testament and see how every gritty, cruel, ugly detail that is going on in this passage connects with what was predicted many hundreds of years prior.

And all this was done so that our salvation could be delivered. All that was happening is not something that's distant from you and I.

[35 : 27] It was for us. it's for our safety. It's for our security. Ryle says there was no accident or chance in any part of the close of our Lord's earthly ministry.

The steps in which he walked from Gethsemane to Calvary were all marked out hundreds of years before. The 22nd Psalm, the 53rd chapter of Isaiah were literally fulfilled.

The wrath of his enemies, the rejection by his own people, his being dealt with as a malefactor, his being condemned by the assembly of the wicked, all had been foreknown and all foretold.

All that took place was only the working out of God's great design to provide an atonement for a world's sin. God's is for us.

You know, there is much in life that is not dependable. I sometimes look at that clock, the barracks are gone, it's not dependable.

[36 : 35] We look at weather forecasts, we make plans on the basis of weather forecasts, and even as we've seen this week, they're not always dependable. we meet people sometimes we are the people who say one thing and do another we're not dependable we can think of corporations we can think of institutions we can think of politicians who let us down not dependable so where is their safety where is their security where can you and i find the truth about about who we are and about who god is and about where we came from and about what the world is where can we find the truth about salvation do we have to go on a mountain pilgrimage no we don't do we have to have some kind of mystic experience no we don't do we have to look into the inner workings of our heart don't dare do that because your heart and mine is dark and deceitful we'll be in a state of confusion so where do we find safety where do we find security where do we find the truth where is their dependability in the scriptures that's the answer if we want to avoid the dangers of sin and satan and death and hell if we want to be on a safe course that takes us through time into an eternal home then you have the map in your hands if we want to know where we can have our sins forgiven if we want to know how to receive eternal life then this is where we get the answers our safety our soul safety our eternal safety is found in the scriptures which is why satan is so desperate to take them out of our hands and finally very briefly our safety is found in the savior sometimes on these quiz shows there can be a category where you have to try and identify the celebrity or the sports person and so uh the the picture comes up on the screen there's hardly any pixels in it it's all blurred the teams are are watching that and they're there with their buzzers and then again they become sharper and sharper and eventually the the press the buzzer because you can see uh as it sharpens who it is that's on the screen and as mark's gospel progresses we see more and more clearly the identity of jesus and here as the high priest questions jesus what he shouldn't have done another breaking of the rule in the trial as the high priest questions jesus the question of who jesus is is posed verse 61 the high priest says are you the christ the son of the blessed one and jesus responds with these words that identify him as god he says i am and jesus makes clear in these verses to them and to us that he is the christ he is the promised one he is the the son of man he is the savior and when the high priest heard that what did he do where he tore his clothes and outrage and he condemned jesus for blasphemy that was his judgment the tragedy is

that true judgment is still to happen and on the day that jesus speaks of where he is seen coming on the clouds of heaven the high priest will be answering the questions and jesus will be doing the judging and the charge that the high priest will be found guilty of will be blasphemy not believing that jesus is who he said he was the tables will be turned power will shift and all the religion that the high priest had all the approval and the slaps on the backs that he felt from his religious cohorts will not save him from the punishment that is coming only jesus can save there is safety eternally only in him and i want to ask the question as we finish what do you say about jesus it's not about the chairs we sit in it's not about the religion we practice it's not about the reputation we have it's about what we say about jesus we can sit in these chairs for decades and on the final day be condemned for blasphemy if we have not accepted that christ is who he says he is and come to him in faith and repentance the scriptures point to him and salvation is given to all who come to him will you come to him will you come to him will you come to him will you come to him will you come to him will you come to him will you come to him will you come to him will you come to him