

THOU ART NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD

MARK 12:34 • TV088B

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Mark 12:34

“And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.”

I may get just a little personal in my message today. I’m going to be speaking on the subject: *“THOU ART NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD.”*

Now, I hope it’s not offensive. I hope the Spirit of God will take the Word of God and make it effectual for His glory and your good. Paul asked a group of people one time, he said; *“Am I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?”* Do we become your enemy because we deal honestly with you?

Well, I must deal honestly with you because I must give an account and so shall you give an account. So, on the subject: **“Thou Art Not Far From the Kingdom of God;”** I want to read one verse of Scripture from **Mark chapter 12:34.**

THOU ART NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD

MARK 12:34 • HENRY T. MAHAN

Now, this story's in **Matthew 22 and Mark 12**, but for my text let's read **Mark 12:34**: *“And when Jesus saw that, he answered discretely he said unto him, thou art not far from the kingdom of God.”*

Now, in some respects and in certain respects, all men are the same; everyone is the same. Now, first of all; all men are the same in that they're all fallen sons of Adam. There is no difference: *“All have sinned and come short of God's glory.”* In that respect all men are the same. They are all fallen sons of Adam.

And then all men are the same in that they all need salvation and they all need Christ as Lord and Saviour. They need a Mediator. They need someone to atone for their sins. They need someone to put away their transgressions.

“This is the record, God hath given us eternal life and this life is in his Son. And he that hath the Son of God hath life. And he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”

So, all men need Christ. They need salvation. They need a Redeemer and they need a Mediator. In that sense or respect all men are the same.

And then all men are the same in that they must individually, personally repent and believe the Gospel. *“He that believeth on the Son hath life. He that believeth not the Son shall never see life but the wrath of God abideth on him.”*

Now, that's so; all men are the same in that respect, they must repent and they must believe. *“Except you repent ye shall all likewise perish; ye must be born again.”*

I could go on in a few other areas but in those three, especially, all men are the same, rich or poor, old or young, educated or uneducated, white, black, whatever; all men are the same in that all have sinned, all need Christ, and all must repent and believe the Gospel.

But, at the same time all human beings are different; they are not all the same. And we greatly err if we dealt with all of them in the same way. Now, Nicodemus is different from the woman at the well. Consequently, our Lord dealt differently with Nicodemus than he did with the woman at the well.

And then Zacchaeus is different from Mary Magdalene. And the Pharisee is different from the Publican. And the Saviour in His infinite wisdom; (now we need to learn something here) we need to slow down a little bit and be seated and listen to God a little while.

THOU ART NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD

MARK 12:34 • HENRY T. MAHAN

We keep our mouths open all the time and our ears are not listening to God's voice. We are doing a lot of religious talk and witnessing and soul-winning and we are missing the message. And consequently we are making proselytes unto our religion and Christ said, "*After you've made them they are two-fold more the child of hell than you are.*"

But our Lord in His infinite wisdom; He knew how to meet men where they were. He talked one way to Nicodemus and another way to the woman at the well. You just don't go down this thing, down the line, giving every sinner the same pill because they are different.

I know that there are some respects in which they are the same; they have the same need but they are different individually. For example, to the Pharisees; our Lord used strong rebuke; He said: "*You generation of vipers; who hath warned you to flee the wrath to come?*"

Well, He didn't talk that way to the woman at the well. He didn't talk that way to the harlot in Simon's house. He didn't talk that way to Zacchaeus. But to the woman at the well He lovingly and affectionately invited her to take of the water of life that she would never thirst again.

Nicodemus was shut up to regeneration. Christ said: "*You must be born again.*" Christ didn't talk to the rich young ruler about the new birth; he talked to him about selling his possessions because he was a greedy person and a covetous person, selling his possessions and taking up his cross and following the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well now, Nicodemus didn't have any possessions. He was a religious leader and he thought he was bearing a cross. He thought he was following the Lord and our Lord dealt with him and his need of regeneration.

And the rich young man needed humiliation. And Saul of Tarsus needed revelation; he didn't know Christ. He didn't know the living God. He had a God that he had whittled out with his own little pen knife.

So you see; there are in some respects, in certain respects; all men have the same need, that all men are not the same. And therefore, we must learn to deal with sinners in the way that our Lord dealt with them.

Oh, for some of His wisdom. I know our Lord knew men's thoughts and hearts. In His infinite wisdom and His everlasting wisdom of all men lead Him to deal with them right where they were. I need a little bit of that wisdom.

THOU ART NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD

MARK 12:34 • HENRY T. MAHAN

Now here in the text you see our Lord actually telling a man. Now here, He is actually telling a man. I don't know that He dealt with anybody else this way. He actually told a man; He said, "*Now you're not far from the kingdom of God.*" "You're not far from salvation. You're not saved but you're not far from it. You're not a child of the living God but you're not far from it. You're closer than most others. You're almost, but not quite there."

Now, let's see why He said this to this man?

First of all: The Pharisees came to Him and they had a reason for what they were doing; it says; "*They wanted to trap him.*" They wanted to confuse Him in His words and in His teachings so they came to him there in **verses 13 and 14** and they said: "*Master, is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?*" In other words, shall the Jewish people, the people of God; shall they give tribute to Caesar? They were trying to trap the Lord.

And our Lord said, "Do one of you have a penny?" And they said: "Here's one" and He took it and He said: "Whose picture is this on here?" And they said, "Well, Caesar's." He said, "*Well, you render to Caesar the things that are Caesars and to God the things that are God's.*"

And these men went off and they got angry and He shut their mouths. And they went off in the corner you know, somewhere sulking, and didn't say another word.

The Sadducees came up about that time and you will find this in **verses 18-23**. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection and Christ our Lord preached the resurrection. He said: "*You destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up; He spake of his body.*"

And so these Sadducees came to Him and they said: "Now Lord; here a woman was married to a man and they didn't have any children and the man died and she married his brother and they didn't have any children and he died and she married seven brothers without having any children and all the brothers died."

"*Now; whose wife will she be in the resurrection?*" And our Lord; he rebuked them strongly, he said, "*You do err, (in other words, you are on the wrong road and you're mistaken) not knowing the word of God nor the power of God. You don't know the Scriptures. In the resurrection they are like the angels; they neither marry nor given in marriage.*" Well these fellows; they clammed up and they walked off and went away and sulking, you know.

And then a young man, a scribe came to our Lord Jesus Christ after the others had been successfully rebuked and put to silence. This young man came to our Lord. Now his attitude is different and his spirit is different and his conversation is different.

THOU ART NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD

MARK 12:34 • HENRY T. MAHAN

And so the Master used a different tone, a different approach, a different manner with this man. When they got through talking Christ looked at him and said: *“You’re not far from the kingdom of God.”* He didn’t say that to the Pharisees, he didn’t say that to the Sadducees but He said that to this young man.

So, I want us to look at **four things** now and see if we can apply it to ourselves:

First of all: Let’s look at this young man.

Secondly: Let’s look at his knowledge.

Thirdly: Let’s look at his attitude.

Fourthly: And let’s find out wherein he failed.

Maybe this is where we are missing the mark. Would you like to do that? Alright; let’s look at the man first.

First of all: What was he? We know very little about him but we do know he was a scribe and one of the scribes which were with them, with these religious leaders, came to him and started talking.

What is a scribe? Well my friends; a scribe, the duties of the scribes were very important. The duties of the scribes were the preservation, transcription, and interpretation of the Bible, the Old Testament, and the Word of God.

The New Testament at this time was not completed but the Old Testament, Genesis through Malachi was. And these scribes were men who painstakingly and deliberately transcribed the Bible. They wrote; they didn’t have printing presses then; they were written by hand. And these men transcribed the Scriptures; they preserved them, the old manuscripts, and they interpreted them.

So, in other words, this man was a student of the Bible to whom our Lord said; *“You’re not far from the kingdom of God.”* This man was well educated. He had to be to do what he did. He was a man of authority. He was well read and I’m sure he could quote from memory much of the Bible, yet our Lord declared: *“You’re not far from the kingdom of God.”*

THOU ART NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD

MARK 12:34 • HENRY T. MAHAN

Now, let me say this, salvation is revealed in the Bible. *“I’m not ashamed of the gospel; it’s the power of God unto salvation.”* A man’s not going to be saved apart from the Word of God: *“Of his own will begat he us through the word of truth:*

“We are begotten not through the corruptible seed but the incorruptible seed, the Word of God; faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” Salvation is revealed in the Bible, but a head knowledge of Bible history, doctrine, ceremony, ordinances and law, does not assure us of salvation.

Our Lord said to these religious leaders; He said in **John 5:39**, *“You search the scriptures.”* *“You do search the Scriptures. That is your work and that’s your pastime searching the Scriptures.”* They looked at every *“jot and tittle.”* They memorized and they taught.

He said, *“In them you think you have life, but they are they which testify of me.”* A man can have a head knowledge of God’s Word and not know God, just like he can read a blueprint and not know the architect.

That’s right; he can have a head knowledge of the Bible and I’ve heard people say, *“Well boy; he really knows the Bible.”* Well maybe he does. This scribe knew the Bible better than anybody listening to my voice today; I guarantee you that. This scribe knew the Bible.

But it was to this man who knew the Bible and who transcribed the Bible and who interpreted the Bible and who preserved the Bible. Christ said to him, *“You’re not in the kingdom of God.”* Now it’s serious isn’t it?

All right; let’s notice another thing; we are not through:

Secondly: Let’s look at his knowledge.

He was a man of knowledge. And the scribe said, *“Master; you told the truth, you told the truth. There is but one God and there’s none other but he.”* That’s in **verse 32**.

When they said, *“Which is the greatest commandment?”* Our Lord said the greatest commandment is, *“thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind, soul, and strength, and thy neighbor as thyself. On these two hang all the law and the prophets.”*

And that’s when the man said, *“Master you’ve spoken the truth. There is but one God and there’s none other than he.”*

THOU ART NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD

MARK 12:34 • HENRY T. MAHAN

So let's look at this man's knowledge: First of all he knew and he acknowledged there's one God. And he's talking about the God of creation because he was a transcriber of Scripture. He was talking about the God of whom it is said: *"In the beginning God who created the heavens and the earth."*

He's talking about the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the one of whom Joseph feared. He's talking about the God of deliverance from Egypt. He's talking about the God of Isaac. He's talking about the God of Sinai's Law.

But we can believe in one God and not be in the kingdom of God. Now listen; let me lay it down with a verse of Scripture, **James 2:19**: *"You believe in one God; you do well. The devil believes in one God and trembles."*

So this man; Christ said: *"You are not far from the kingdom of God."* This man despised any thought of idols; he says: *"There's none other God but he."* This man certainly did not believe in idols. He had a strong feeling against idolatry and yet he was not in the kingdom of God.

He wouldn't take God's name in vain. He believed in one God. He resisted idolatry. He hated idolatry. And then watch this, he also; (now here; here's a powerful point here) he also knew that the condition of the heart before God was of more importance than to fulfill all the outward forms and ceremonies.

Listen to him in **verse 33** and he says: "Master, you've spoken the truth; there is but one God. I believe in one God." And he says: "I don't believe there's any God but he (no idols)."

And the scribe said: *"To love that God with all the heart; and with all the understanding, and with all the soul and with all the strength and to love one's neighbor as himself is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."*

Now let me tell you something, that was an unusual statement for that man to make in his day because his day was the day of ceremony, law, and works, the Feast Days, the Fast days, the Holy Days, the Ceremonial Days, and all the other days.

And very few people in his day would acknowledge that the condition of a man or woman's heart before God was more important than all the whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices put together.

Paul spoke of that day; he said: *"They have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge. They are going about to establish their own righteousness."*

THOU ART NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD

MARK 12:34 • HENRY T. MAHAN

So, look at this man, he was a well-educated, well-read, student of the Scriptures. Look at this man, he believed in one God, hating idols, and knowing that the proper relationship with God is a heart relationship and not just a hand relationship.

Thirdly: Let's look at his attitude!

Christ said to him: *"You're far from the kingdom of God."* Do you see why I said this would be a personal and maybe an offensive message? This man was close but not in the kingdom of God.

Now, most religious denominations would have already had this man in the kingdom of God and given him a high office because he had all the credentials of a religious servant. Let me show you his attitude.

Look at his attitude. Evidentially, this man had a better attitude than all the others; he recognized the wisdom of Christ. He said in **verse 28**: "And when he perceived that Christ had answered them well he admired the wisdom of Christ."

He said: *"Master; you've spoken the truth."* This man spoke highly of Jesus Christ. He admired the wisdom of Christ. He saw that Christ had put to silence, wisely, these Pharisee's and Sadducee's and that Christ had spoken the truth.

I'll tell you something else about him, he was teachable. He had an open mind. After the Lord answered the questions of these other men they left; they walked off. They didn't want any more to do with Him, but not this young man.

He stayed right there and he had some more things to say. He wanted to keep that conversation going. He pursued the matter further. He didn't want to close that conversation. He had a teachable mind, an open mind.

And then he had some degree of spiritual revelation. I don't know how much, but some, because he spoke of loving the true and living God. He spoke of loving one's neighbor. He spoke of inward godliness and yet our Lord solemnly declared unto him after all of this, and I imagine Christ paused for a few moments and looked at him directly and he said, *"Young man, you're not far from the kingdom of God."* He was a teacher, a translator, a transcriber, a preserver of Scriptures, a man with great knowledge, believing in one God, hating idolatry, knowing that the condition of the heart is more important than outward claims of righteousness or outward obedience to ceremonies.

THOU ART NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD

MARK 12:34 • HENRY T. MAHAN

And then knowing that one must love God with all his heart, mind, soul, understanding and strength in his neighbor as himself, and a man who respected Christ and who spoke highly of Christ. But to this man our Lord said there pointedly: *“You’re not far from the kingdom of God.”*

Fourthly: Wherein did he fail, wherein did he come short?

Well now, this is difficult but I want you to bear with me. Let me try to show you from the Word of God where this young man failed:

First of all: I find him speaking well of Christ and I find him speaking well of the law of God!

But I do not find on his part any acknowledgement of his sins, not any. I do not find on his part any confession that he had not loved God with all his heart and he had not loved his neighbor as himself. I don’t find that.

Now let me tell you this, *“If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* There can be no entrance into the kingdom of God except by humiliation and confession and contrition and repentance.

Listen to David in **Psalm 51:** *“I acknowledge my sin. My sins are ever before me. O God against thee and thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight that thou mightiest be justified when thou speakest and clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity. In sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou dost desire truth in the inward part and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. O God cast me not away from thy presence. Take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Blot out my transgressions. Wash me from mine iniquities. Purge me with hyssop. Sprinkle me with the blood and thou shalt be clean and thou shalt be whiter than snow.”*

Do you hear any of that coming out of this young man? You’ve got to be lost to be found. Grace is for the guilty. The Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to save, not scribes, not believers in one God, not moral young men, not folks who agree with what He said; *“He came to save sinners of whom I am the chief. Christ died for the ungodly.”*

And I don’t hear any of that out of this young man. I don’t hear any contrition or confession, or humility. I don’t hear any acknowledgement of sin. Christ died for sinners. He said: *“I’m not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”*

THOU ART NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD

MARK 12:34 • HENRY T. MAHAN

Have you ever been brought to that place? Have you ever been lost? Somebody said one time: “If you’ve never been lost you’ve never been found.” Have you ever been a sinner? Have you ever been estranged from God?

Have you ever wept over your sins? Have you ever acknowledged your transgressions? “*God delights to show mercy. He’s plenteous in mercy.*”

All right; let me show you the second thing; now this is obvious.

Secondly: There’s no cry for mercy!

There’s no acknowledgment of sin on the part of this scribe and there’s no plea for mercy. All the way through the Bible you will find those who are saved are those who pleaded for mercy. David said: “*Have mercy upon me O God, (not according to my merit) but according to thy loving kindness, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies have mercy upon me.*”

The Publican said: “*O God be merciful to me a sinner.*” Be reconciled unto God through the blood of Jesus Christ. “*If any man shall call on the name of the Lord he shall be saved.*” That’s a promise. That’s what God said.

But this young man; there’s no plea for mercy. He does not sue for mercy. He does not seek mercy. Listen to the thief on the cross: “*O Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.*” Here’s a plea for mercy.

Every invitation of our Lord presupposes need. He says, “*Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden.*” He says, “*Ho everyone that thirsteth; come to the water.*” He says, “*Come let us reason together. Though your sins be as scarlet; I’ll make them white as snow.*” This young man offers no plea whatsoever for mercy.

Thirdly: I find no acknowledgement of sin, no confession of sin!

“*If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us.*” But if we cover our sins; “*he that covereth his sins shall not prosper.*” He that hides his sins shall not find mercy.

That doesn’t mean to tell them to the whole world but to tell them to God. The world can’t do anything about them but God can and He already knows them anyway. He just wants to hear it from you.

Fourthly: And then I find no plea for mercy and I hear no recognition of Christ as a Messiah

THOU ART NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD

MARK 12:34 • HENRY T. MAHAN

I hear him calling him “*good master*” and I hear him bragging on his theology and all but I don’t hear him calling Christ “*Lord, Lord.*” I don’t hear him recognizing Christ as the Messiah.

And then I find when all of this was over, he didn’t leave with Christ (read **Matthew 22**). After all of these many questions by these Pharisee’s, Sadducee’s, and scribes, this young man came with that crowd and he left with that crowd. He didn’t leave with Christ.

Now I know this; when a person really knows Christ and is in the kingdom of Christ he’s going to follow Christ: “*My sheep hear my voice and they follow me.*” They don’t run around with Pharisee’s and Sadducee’s and scribes for our Lord said down there later on in that same chapter **Mark 12**; he said: “*You beware of the scribes. They seek the uppermost seats. You beware of them; they are full of hypocrisy.*”

But this young man didn’t acknowledge Christ’s Lordship. He didn’t acknowledge Christ as a Messiah. After all of this was over Christ looked at him and He said: “I’ve got a question for you; you’ve asked your question, now here’s my question.” “*What think ye of Christ; whose Son is He,*” (the Messiah; that’s what he is saying). Who is the Messiah? Who is He? And they said: “*Well he’s the Son of David.*” And Christ said, “*Why did David call him Lord then if he is David’s Son?*”

David said, “*The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.*” He called Him Lord. This young man never recognized Christ. There is where you find mercy, confession of sin, acknowledgment of sin, repentance of sin, seeking mercy through Christ the Lord, the Redeemer, the Messiah who came, “*that we might have life and have it more abundantly.*”

Are you not far from the kingdom of God or through Christ are you in the kingdom of God?