

RELIGIOUS BUT LOST

MARK 12:34 • TV106A

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“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 want to speak to you today from the passage of Scripture found in the book of **Mark**. If you will, take your Bible and turn with me to the book of **Mark chapter 12:34**.

My subject will be: **“RELIGIOUS BUT LOST.”** That’s right; I want us to think together on this subject: **“RELIGIOUS BUT LOST.”**

Now, let me read the text, **Mark chapter 12:34**: *“And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, (that is intelligently), he said unto him: Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.”*

Here is a man who’s interested in the kingdom of God but who is not in the kingdom of God. Here’s a man who is a student of the Scriptures, a man educated in the Bible, and yet, he does not know the living God; *“he’s not far from the kingdom of God.”*

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Here's a man who is devoutly religious but who's never been regenerated. And here's a man who is concerned about the law and morality, for his questions to Christ Jesus were about the law and morality.

Here was a man who's interested in the law and interested in morality but who has no righteousness and no holiness in the sight of God almighty. He is most religious, but lost.

Now, I don't know how to stress the importance of this message this morning. I don't know how to get across to you just how important I feel this message is to me and to you and to every person who hears this program.

But my friend; notice the speaker here is not a denominational fanatic. The speaker here is not some religious radical. The speaker here is not a promoter of personal priorities; the speaker here is the Lord of heaven and earth. This is the Master Himself talking and Jesus said to him: "*Thou art not far from the kingdom of heaven.*" This is Christ Himself speaking. This is not some religious fanatic or radical or denominational promoter deciding because a man doesn't believe like he does that he's not in the kingdom of God.

This is not a man saying, "because you don't see things like I see them, you're not saved;" this is Christ the Son of God. And the Lord certainly knows them that are His. And the Lord is saying to this man: "*You're not far from the kingdom of heaven.*"

Now, I need to listen to Christ: "*He that hath ears to hear let him hear.*" And I need to listen to the Master here as He deals with this religious man because I have an interest in the kingdom of God.

I have an interest in the law of God. I have a concern about the Scriptures and a concern about understanding the things that are written, don't you? And yet, our Lord said to a man similar to you and to me: "*You are not far from the kingdom of heaven.*"

I need to examine myself whether I am in the faith. "*I need to give diligence to make my calling and election sure,*" and my friend, you do too! Don't take for granted this most important thing in all of the world. Don't take for granted your relationship with God, the salvation of your soul.

Now, I have four divisions for this message and this will make it easy for you to understand and to follow and to remember, I hope:

First of all: We are going to look at the man himself, the man to whom Christ said: "*You are not far from the kingdom of God*"

Secondly: Then we are going to look at this man's knowledge, what did he know? Did he know as much as you know or as much as I know or did he know more?

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Thirdly: Then we are going to look at this man's attitude; what was his attitude? Did he have a good attitude or a poor attitude?

Fourthly: Then we are going to last of all in closing the message find out where he failed, where did he fail?

First of all: Look at the man; who was the man?

Christ said to this man: *"Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."* Who was this man? This may surprise you; **verse 28** says, *"This man, was one of the scribes."* We don't know a great deal about him but we do know that he was a scribe and we do know something about the scribes.

What were the duties of the scribes? Do you know what their duties were, to preserve, to translate, to transcribe, and to interpret the Scriptures. That was the job of the scribes. They were the men who sat down with pen and ink and translated the Scriptures from other languages.

They were the men who preserved the Scriptures. They were men who transcribed the Scriptures. They were the men who interpreted the Scriptures, in other words; this man was an authority on the Bible, the Old Testament Scriptures. That's exactly what he was, he was a scribe.

We have the Pharisees who came to Christ and the Sadducees and then one of the scribes. He was a man who was an authority on the Bible. He knew by memory much of the Word of God. He could quote the Scriptures from memory. He had written the Scriptures over, and over, and over, and over again.

And yet, (they didn't have printing presses) the scribes wrote the Scriptures. And yet, Christ said to this man; "You are not in the kingdom of God but you're not far from it."

It's certain that the way of life is to be found in the Bible: *"Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God: Of his own will begat he us with the Word of truth. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation."* If you would know the way of life; turn to the Scriptures.

But my friend; you can be a student of the Scriptures and not know the way of life. That's right; our Lord said to the Pharisees, now listen, in **John**, is it **chapter 5:40**, He said: *"You search the scriptures for in them you think you have eternal life but they are they which testify of me and you will not come to me that you might have life."*

I've often heard people say: "Well, you know; he sure knows his Bible." This scribe knew his Bible too, but he didn't know his Lord. And it's possible to know the doctrines (this man was an authority on the doctrines, and the traditions, and all of these things) but he didn't know the Lord. To know the Word of God is not necessarily to know the living Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

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All right, that's the man. He was a student of the Scriptures; he was a scribe. He was an authority on the Bible. He knew the doctrines and traditions and all of these things but he did not know the Master and Christ said: "*You are not far from the kingdom of God.*" Now that's the man.

Secondly: Now, let's look at this man's knowledge!

What was the question he asked to begin with? Well, he looked at Christ after the Pharisees and the Sadducees had dealt with their questions and had been put to silence and walked away and he kept standing there.

He looked at the Master and he said: "*Master; what is the greatest commandment of all?*" And the Lord Jesus Christ replied: "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength and the second is like unto it: thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*"

Now listen to the man; he said: "*Master; thou hast well said the truth, (that's the truth) there is but one God and there's none other but he.*" Now my friend; I may shock you a little bit but you listen, I'm preaching the Scriptures!

Here is a man who was an authority on the Bible. Here was a man who memorized the Scriptures. Here was a man who studied the Scriptures and translated the Scriptures and transcribed the Scriptures and interpreted the Scriptures.

But, Christ said to him: "*You're not far from the kingdom of God.*" And here's a man who believed in one God, not just any god, not a false god; he believed in the God of David, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of creation.

He said: "*Master; you've said the truth, there is but one God; there's none other but he.*" In other words, this man; it's evident he believed in God and yet Christ said to him: "*Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.*"

But my friend, to believe in one God; (now listen to me) is not to be saved. James wrote in **James 1:19:** "*You believe that there's one God. The devil believes and trembles.*" You believe there's one God and you do well but the devil believes there's one God and the devil trembles at the mention of his name.

When Christ appeared to those, that man who was demon possessed and cast the demons out of him, do you know what those demons said before they came out of that man? "*We know who you are; you are the holy one of Israel. Have you come to torment us before our time?*"

They believed in one God. They believed in Christ as the Son of God, the holy one of God. They believed in judgment but they certainly were not redeemed.

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This man believed in one God; he said: *“Master; you spoke the truth, there is none other but he.”* He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Then he said, “There is no such thing as an idol.” This man hated idolatry. Do you take comfort in the fact that you believe there is one God? Do you take comfort in the fact that you do not bow down to idols and you do not serve false Gods?

Well this man had a strong feeling about idolatry too; he spoke it very emphatically; he said: *“There is but one God and there’s none other God but he.”*

Now, let me show you something else in the next verse, **verse 33**; he went a step further. What did this man know? He knew there was one God. He knew there was no such thing as an idol. Now watch this; he knew that the condition of the heart was more important in the sight of God than all of the outward works and ceremonies of religion. Does that shock you?

Now, listen to what he says in the next verse, **verse 33**. You look at it right there in your Bible. He says, *“You spoke the truth Master; there’s but one God and there’s none other but he. And to love God with all the heart (and with all the understanding, that is the mind), with all the soul and the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as himself, is more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices.”*

That’s exactly what he said. Are you with me? And yet, our Lord said to him: *“Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.”* This is astonishing; especially in this man’s day, because his day was a day of works, ceremonies, sacrifices, and burn offerings.

Most people trusted in these things, he evidently didn’t. Most people depended for their salvation on these very things that he is talking about. He was one of the few that understood that salvation was not in these things and yet, the Master said: *“You are not far from the kingdom of God.”*

Now, this is interesting isn’t it? It’s so applicable to this day when we have so much religion and so much presumption, so much carnal assurance and so much easy beliefs.

Thirdly: The man’s attitude!

Now, we’ve seen the man; he was a Bible scholar, a Bible student, a Bible translator, a Bible transcriber, a man who had memorized Scripture. He was a man who believed there was one God.

He was a man who had no use for idols. He was a man that knew that the condition of the heart was more important than the bowing of the knee. It was more important than burnt offerings and sacrifices. And yet, to this very man, our Lord said: *“You’re not far from the kingdom of God.”*

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Well his attitude must have been bad. Well, let's see; look at the man's attitude. He had a better attitude than the Pharisees and Sadducees. They had already been put to silence and pouted and walked off and would have nothing to do with Christ.

But this man recognized the wisdom of Christ. Listen to him: "*Master;*" he called Him, Master, he spoke well of Christ. He said, "You told the truth." Here was a man speaking to one who was the enemy of the Pharisees and Sadducees and scribes and all that they stood for and yet, here he is standing and talking with him and saying: "You are telling the truth; what you are saying is true, what you are saying is true."

He had an inquiring spirit. The others had gone away but he just kept standing there. He had an inquiring spirit. He had some degree of spiritual perception; he spoke of loving the Lord God. The other Pharisees spoke of tithing, fasting, giving alms, not doing this and not doing that. He spoke of loving God. That's spiritual knowledge.

He talked about loving our neighbor. He talked about heart religion and yet our Lord solemnly declared unto him, "*Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.*"

Fourthly: Wherein did he fail?

And I want you to see this whole picture. While I am painting this picture and while we are asking the Spirit of God to speak to us individually that we "*might examine ourselves whether we are in the faith, that we might give diligence to make our calling and election sure.*" That we might answer the question, "*What think we of Christ?*"

Wherein did he fail? Here's a man who perhaps some of you have already put yourself in this man's place, a teacher, a Sunday school teacher maybe, a translator of Scriptures, a believer in one God, always believed in one God, never had any doubt there's only one God.

"*The heavens declare the glory of God. The firmament showeth his handiwork.*" A student of the moral law; "I believe in what's right and I hate what's wrong."

Here was a man who was a perceptive man, an inquiring man, who knew the truth when he heard it, a man who spoke well of Christ. Well, wherein did he fail? Why was he not in the kingdom of God?

My friend, there are some things missing here!

The first one is this; I find no personal confession of sin. Now I hear this man speaking well of the law, talking about the law, conversing about the law, inquiring about the law, and studying the law.

But I do not hear any confession from his mouth or any acknowledgment of the fact that he had broken that law, that in any way he had sinned against a holy God or in any way that he had not

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personally in his heart, in his thoughts, imagination, words and deeds, kept the law of God that he had broken it and was a sinner before God.

Do you hear anything like that? Go over his whole conversation and there's not one confession of sin, there's not one acknowledgement of sin.

You know, the Scripture tells us this: *“Whoso covereth his sins shall not prosper but whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall find mercy.”* Doesn't the Word of God say: *“If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness?”*

My friend, every person who has ever come to Christ has come to Christ as a sinner, not as a moral man, not as a righteous man, for Christ himself said: *“I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”* And Paul said: *“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief.”*

And as I listen to this man talk about there being one God and talking about the law and talking about the truthfulness of the Master's statement and talking about no idols are to be served; I do not hear this man saying one thing about his personal guilt before God.

Do you know what the law does? The law is a schoolmaster that brings us to Christ. The law is that which God gives to strip a man, to knock his fleshly foundations out from under him, to convince him *“of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.”* *“What the law saith it saith to them who are under the law that every mouth may be stopped and all the world become guilty before God.”*

I hear no confession of sin here at all. I hear no acknowledgment of personal guilt: *“O God be merciful to me the sinner.”* I hear no acknowledgment before God that I have sinned in thy sight and no longer worthy to be called thy son. Make me but a hired servant.

Have you ever seen your sins and actually before God acknowledged them? David said: *“I acknowledge my sins; my transgressions are ever before me.”*

Secondly: I hear no plea for mercy, not in all of this conversation; I hear no plea for mercy!

Oh, when the Publican stood in the temple and cried: *“God be merciful to me the sinner;”* that's a plea for mercy that was heard. When the thief on the cross hanging there in death's agony looked over at Christ and said: *“I'm getting what I deserve; Lord remember me when you come into your kingdom.”* That's a plea for mercy and it was heard.

Every invitation that Christ ever gave in the Bible presupposes guilt; did you know that? *“Ho everyone that thirsteth; come to the water, come to the water,”* that's the invitation, come to the water of life.

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Who comes to the water of life, a man who's thirsty, a man who needs the water of life? *"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."* Who comes for rest, the man who's weary and heavy laden by sin?

All of these invitations presuppose guilt. I want you to listen to David's confession in **Psalm 51** and his plea for mercy, a confession of sin. This is always prerequisite, this is always the condition, and these are God's terms for salvation, repentance and faith.

Paul said; *"When I preach the gospel I preach repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."* And I see neither of these in this man's conversation. Have you ever felt it in your own heart and experienced it in your own soul, I mean genuine conviction of sin and sorrow for sin, and repentance over sin, and grief over sin, and faith in Christ as your only hope, a plea for mercy?

Listen to David, now **Psalm 51**: *"Have mercy on me O God. According to thy loving kindness, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies O God, blot out my transgressions."* Do you hear that? That's a plea for mercy!

"Wash me from mine iniquity. Cleanse me from my sin. Purge me with hyssop. Create in me a right spirit. Renew within me a clean heart for I acknowledge my transgressions; my sin is ever before me." The man was heard!

It can't be said of David, *"thou art not far from the kingdom of God;"* he was in the kingdom of God. It cannot be said of the publican in the temple, *"thou art not far from the kingdom of God;"* he was in the kingdom of God.

It cannot be said of the thief on the cross, *"thou art not far from the kingdom of God;"* Christ said; *"Today you will be with me in paradise."*

I hear no plea for mercy on the part of this scribe, no confession of sin, no acknowledgement of transgression and no plea for mercy.

Thirdly: I hear no confession of the Lord Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour!

Oh, he speaks well of Christ. He talks about Christ being a Master. He talks about Christ being a teacher. He acknowledges Christ as a moralist. He acknowledges Christ as a man of authority but not as the Redeemer and Lord.

"What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is he?" The Scripture does not say; *"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus to be a good man, a prophet, a healer, a moralist?"*

But rather it says, *"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus to be Lord and believe in thine heart God raised him from the dead, (that he was crucified, buried, and raised from the dead, by the power of God), thou shalt be saved."* He was crucified as a substitute, buried as the

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scapegoat, raised as the justifier, ascended and seated as the Mediator between God and men at God's right hand.

Do you know, our Lord said to the disciples one day: "*Whom do men say that I am?*" This is natural men that he is talking about, men like the scribes, religious men, but natural men. "*Whom do they say that I am?*"

And the disciples said; "*Well, they speak well of you. Some say that you are Elias.*" Now, that's quite a compliment because Elias (Elijah) to the Jews was a very great prophet. "*Some say that you are John the Baptist.*" Now John the Baptist was admired of almost all the people.

"*Some say that you are one of the prophets.*" But Christ said, "*Whom do you say that I am?*" And the disciples; Peter spoke for them and he said: "*We believe that thou art the Christ, (that is the Messiah, the Redeemer, the one whom God will send to redeem Israel, all Israel, believers from their sins). Thou art the Shepherd of our souls. Thou art the chief Shepherd, the great Shepherd, the good Shepherd, the substitute, the sacrifice, the sin-offering, and all of these things; that's who thou art, the Son of the living God.*"

Now my friend, I don't hear that out of this man. I don't hear any confession of sin. I don't hear any plea for mercy and I don't hear any acknowledgement of who is Jesus Christ? Now, who is Jesus Christ?

Well, the Scriptures tell me that He's the Redeemer, He's the Saviour, He's the Lord, He's the way of life, He's the bread of life, He's the chief corner stone, and He's the door of salvation. He said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the father but by me.*"

Now, notice last of all: And I do not see this man leaving his crowd and going and walking with Christ. When our Lord came before this crowd, there were the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes. They began to ask him questions and he answered and put them to silence one at a time. He put the silence to the Pharisees, and put the silence to the Sadducees, and they left, they got angry and walked off.

Here's this scribe, a man who knew something about the Bible, a man who knew there was one God, a man who knew that there was no idols. He knew that a heart relationship with God was more important than ceremony, sacrifice, and all of these things.

Here was a man whose attitude was better than the attitude of these other men, he did, he said: "*Master, you tell the truth.*" But here was a man when every man walked off he walked off with them.

When Christ left he didn't follow Him. He didn't walk in His footsteps. He didn't take up his cross and follow Christ; he stayed with his crowd, he stayed in his occupation, he stayed in his present environment, he stayed in everything he was in when he met Christ at the first.

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Our Lord said: *“Take up your cross and follow me, be identified with Me, look to Me, be one with Me, be brought into a saving, living, vital union, with Me. And where I am, there the disciple will be and what I am, that the disciple will be.”*

This is the thing that troubles me a great deal about present day religion. They do not follow the Saviour. They look to Christ to receive what they want. They look to Christ to meet their needs and their particular goals, to make them what they already want to be, instead of becoming what He wants them to be, walking in His footsteps.

This is what’s missing, a confession of sin, a plea for mercy, and a confession of Christ as Lord and Master, Saviour!

Fourthly: To follow Him!

The Lord said, *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*