

LET THE BIBLE SPEAK SERIES
NEAR THE KINGDOM

Mark 12:28-34

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The incident recorded here took place on Tuesday before the Lord's death on Friday. This has been called the "day of controversy." The scribe came to Jesus with a question: What commandment is first of all? (obviously designed to bring about controversy) However, the answer given by Jesus fully convinced the scribe that everything he said was true. By adding his consent to what Jesus had said, the young man showed a readiness in perceiving the truth and a promptness in accepting it. Such was an indication that he was in a condition to readily receive the kingdom of God. One's proximity to the kingdom is not an estimate of feet or inches, but in the preparation and purpose of heart.

This man was different from the Pharisees with their formality, inconsistencies, and hypocrisy; **(Matthew 23)** from the average Sadducee, with his arrogance, skepticism and liberalism; **(Matthew 22:23)** from the publicans with their extortion, from the sinners with their vices, and from the multitude with its indifference. He had a good knowledge of God's word, and knowledge is the first step in coming to the Kingdom. **(John 6:45)** "It is written in the prophets, and they shall all be taught of God. Everyman therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the father cometh unto me." He had a discerning mind which gave him a keen insight into the meaning of God's love. He could distinguish between first things and second things. "Not Far" implies nearness. There are degrees of distance from God. **(Isaiah 59:2)** "your iniquities have separated between you and your God." **(Jeremiah 2:5)** "Thus saith the Lord, what iniquity draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me."

However, being "close" does not imply acceptance. "This man was in the borderland of the kingdom. The road to God is rugged, and blocked at every milestone with difficulties and opposition. If this scribe had confessed the Lord, he would have been thrown out of the synagogue, possibly even stoned to death; and the silence of the record leads one to suppose that this may be as near as he ever came to the kingdom of God. What a great tragedy to have come so near, and yet be so far.

The kingdom is the most exalted institution in all the world. Though it has been the object of man's love and admiration, it has also been the object of great misunderstanding. The mother of

Zebedee's children is not the only person who has misunderstood the nature and purpose of the kingdom of God. **(Matthew 20:21)**

I. The Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God, in the world today, is the church of Jesus Christ.

(Isaiah 2:2) "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it."

a. The Kingdom is Universal -- "all nations" regardless of sex, color, nationality or language -- men of every tribe. In this ideal city of God, not just the one nation of Jews, but all nations, all races from among the Gentiles, would be included. The picture is that of a large stream of peoples flowing into the city. "And many people shall go and say, come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob..." As these people stream into the city, they invite others to join them. There will be a readiness to hear and a willingness to learn (unlike those of Isaiah's day), i.e. the scribe of our text.

b. The Kingdom Belongs to God. The mountain of the Lord's house. It is the house of the Lord. This shows divine ownership. **(Zechariah 8:3)** "Thus saith Jehovah: I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called The city of Truth; and the mountain of Jehovah of hosts, The holy mountain."

The glory of this mountain would exceed all others. Physical Zion was the steep hill in the southeastern section of Jerusalem on which David had built his fortress and on which Solomon later built the temple. It became a symbol of an impregnable stronghold against enemies and the dwelling place of God among his people. The word Zion came to be used in prophecy to refer to the Spiritual Zion to come, that is, the dwelling place of God among His redeemed people where they find security and peace. From it, the law would go forth, and from which, the people would be ruled by His word.

c. The Kingdom Would Be Spiritual in Nature. "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears in pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (verse 4) This is a description of the character of the citizens of the kingdom of God. (not describing the worldly nations in their activities) In the holy mountain or church, they will learn war no more. This is forever a negation of the dispensational pre-millennial idea that Jesus will set up a worldly kingdom. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal..." **(2 Corinthians 10:4)** Christians do not bear arms and kill. "My kingdom is not of this world..."

(John 18:36) Who does fight and maintain order? The civil servant. (Romans 13) He is God's minister, not Christians.

II. Many Have Been Near the Kingdom, Dwelling in the Borderland.

One example is:

a. Felix was near. (Acts 24:24-27) Felix Marcus Antonius was named Procurator of Judea A.D. 52 and served until recalled by Nero in A.D. 59, at which time he was succeeded by Festus. He was an unscrupulous scoundrel. Paul was innocent, but Felix, hoping for a bribe, refused to release him.

He is described as being more hurtful than all the robbers and murderers who infested Judaea. When the occasion offered, he did not hesitate to employ assassins for his own ends. His cruelty knew no bounds, and during his rule, revolts became continuous. Drusilla was a woman of spectacular beauty. She was the third wife of Felix, and at this time, not yet 20 years of age. She was first married at the age of 14 to the King of Emeza. At 16, she was induced to desert her husband by Felix, who used a Cyprian sorcerer to help him carry out his purpose. She and their only son later perished in the eruption of the volcano Vesuvius. Being a Jewess, she was interested in hearing Paul, probably out of curiosity more than anything else. However, what she heard was not what she expected. The subjects discussed by Paul were calculated to inspire terror in any man who fully comprehended their meaning: righteousness of God, self control, and judgment to come. Felix was so moved that he was "terrified." The "Convenient season" never arrived. For many in the "borderland" it never does. They wait too long. How near was this man? We do not know. The degree of nearness was unimportant, in view of the fact that he failed to render obedience to the Gospel.

III. Why Many in the Borderland Never Enter the Kingdom

(Luke 13:24) "Strive to enter at the strait gate: for many I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Strive: "strain every nerve" (Goodspeed) The word means to "labor fervently or agonize." Entering the kingdom is not a thing of indifference, but one of purposeful action on our part. It is a priority, a necessity.

a. Some Never Enter Because of the Pride of Life

(1 Peter 5:5) "...God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble." "Pride goeth before destruction..." The kingdom offers too little for too many. Christ was born in a stable, called fishermen for his ambassadors, entered Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey, wore a crown of thorns,

died on a cross, and was buried in a borrowed tomb. For many, the church is too backward, too narrow, not enough of this world. How sad that some in the church want to change her to look like the denominations and world.

b. Some Procrastinate.

It is easy to put off obedience to gospel. So many have planned to obey, but never do. Near, but oh, so far. They say, "tomorrow." **(2 Corinthians 6:2)** "Behold now is the accepted time, today..."

c. Some Fail to Enter Because They Carry Contraband.

Contraband is smuggling goods, things that cannot be allowed in. Such things as:

Unforgiving heart -- **(Matthew 6:15)** "If ye forgive not men their trespasses..."

Drunkard – his bottle. No drunkard can enter. **(Galatians 5:19-21)**

Thief – "let him that stole, steal no more."

Profane – vile speech. "let your speech be always seasoned with salt..."

Vain worship – **(Matthew 15:19)** "In vain do they worship me..."

d. Some Fail to Enter Because They Fancy They Are Already In.

Those baptized as infants – **(Acts 2:38; Romans 6:17)** An infant cannot believe or repent and is not a fit subject for baptism.

Those sprinkled – **(Romans 6:4)** Baptism is a burial. Sprinkling is not a burial, and therefore, is not bible baptism.

Those who have only believed – **(Galatians 3:26-27)** Faith alone cannot save. One must also repent of sins and confess Jesus, then be baptized in water for the remission of sins. **(Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16)**

Those who join a denomination – **(Acts 2:47; 1 Corinthians 12:13)** "for by one spirit we were all baptized into one body." Denominations are not the body of Christ. They are man-made organizations.

*There is a line by us unseen
That crosses every path
The hidden boundary between
God's mercy and His wrath.*

Are you near the kingdom? How long will you remain in the borderland?