

LET THE BIBLE SPEAK SERIES

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So Near Yet So Far

Good morning and welcomed to Let The Bible Speak. It is good to have you with us today. Our lesson for this program is taken from Mark chapter 12:28-43 which reads as follows "Then one of the scribes came and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that he had answered them well asked Him, which is the first commandment of all? Jesus answered him, the first of all the commandments is hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength, this is the first commandment. And the second like it is this you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. So the scribe said to Him, well said teacher, you have spoken the truth, for there is one God and there is no other but he. And to love Him with all the heart with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength and to love one's neighbor as oneself is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely he said to Him, you are not far from the kingdom of God." 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? 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 promptness in accepting it. Such was an indication that his heart could 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--Mt.23. From the average Sadducee with his arrogance, skepticism, and liberalism--Mt.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. Jno. 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 that were important and things that were not. "Not Far" implies nearness. There are degrees of distance from God. Isa. 59:2 "your iniquities have separated between you and your God" Jere. 2:5 "Thus saith the Lord, what iniquity have your fathers found in me that they are gone far from me..." Mt. 15:8 "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honors me with their lips; but their heart is far from me."

However being "close" does not imply acceptance. This man was close to the kingdom. But being close is not good enough. The road to God is rugged, and blocked at every milestone with difficulties and opposition. There always seems to be something or

someone to stand in the way. 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. I want to talk to you today about being near, but yet far from the kingdom. The kingdom is the most exalted institution in 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. (Mt. 20:21) Many today are still looking for the same type of Kingdom the Jews anticipated in the days of Christ.

I. The Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God in the world today is the church of Jesus Christ. (Mt. 16:16-18)

Isa. 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. 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 peoples 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. Zech. 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." Think about it, **the city of truth.** 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 Spiritual Zion to come, that is, the dwelling place of God among His redeemed people where they would 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 into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (v.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..." 2Cor. 10:4 Christians do not bear arms and kill "My kingdom is not of this world..." Jno. 18:36 Who does fight and maintain order? The civil servant Rom. 13. He is God's

minister, not Christians.

II. Many Have Been Near The Kingdom.

One example is:

a. Felix was near. (Acts 24:24-27) Felix Marcus Antonius, was named Procurator of Judea AD 52 and served until recalled by Nero in AD 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 any thing 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 who are close, yet far, 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 Never Enter The Kingdom.

Luke 13:24 "Strive to enter in 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.

1Peter 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. They want her to embrace all the popular ideas of the day.

To become a haven for all who want to continue in sin, yet claim the hope of salvation at the same time. (Same sex marriage, homosexual lifestyles, immoral conduct, etc)

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" 2Cor. 6:2 "Behold now is the accepted time, today..."

c. Some fail to enter because they rebel against restrictions.

Unforgiving heart--Mt. 6:15 "If ye forgive not men their trespasses...." Forgiveness becomes the bridge by which we reach and receive the forgiveness of God.

Drunkard--his bottle. No drunkard can enter--Gal. 5:19-21

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

Vain worship---Mt. 15:19 "In vain do they worship me..."

Like Nadab and Abihu of old they carry strange fire to offer upon the altar of God.

The profane man with his vile speech.

The slanderer with his sharp and unruly tongue full of deadly poison Rom. 3:13.

These shall not be allowed to pass.

d. Some will fail to enter because they wait till death is upon them, before attempting to enter.

The most pitiful of earth are those who fancy they may sin away the day of grace and then fling the remnant of a misspent life into the Lord's face with a plea for mercy.

The judgment will take place on the basis of the "deeds done in the body." 2cor. 5:10

No one should risk waiting too late.

e. Some fail to enter because they fancy they are already in.

Those baptized as infants--Acts 2:38; Rom.6:17

Those sprinkled--Romans 6:4

Those who have only believed--Gal. 3:26-27

Those who join a denomination--Acts 2:47; 1Cor. 12:13 "for by one spirit we were all baptized into one body."

Note: when I join one organization, that does not make me a member of another one.

Abner was commanding general of King Saul's armies. On the last day of battle he slew young Asahel (ass a hel) in self defense. Hence he fled to the nearest city of refuge and stood around in the gate with the city fathers. He seemed to think that standing around the gate was as good as being in side. Joab, Asahel's brother, spoke softly to Abner, deceived him as to his purpose and then killed him dead in the gate of the city of refuge. He was close, but not close enough. Near but far.

What about you.

There is a line by us unseen

That Crosses every path

The hidden boundary between

God's mercy and His wrath.

For enlightened souls, that boundary need not remain unseen.

That line is baptism into Christ. Are you near the kingdom? How near? Near, yet far?