

"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." Mark 12:34.

Men were always coming to Jesus. There was something about Him that never failed to attract -- a magnetic charm of personality that even His enemies felt. Men came to Him from widely different motives. Some came seeking health -- healing of mind or of body. Some came for loaves and fishes. Some were drawn to Him by mere idle curiosity or speculation. Many came with a hunger for the truth, and a desire for the baptism of power which they believed that He alone could give them.

I. The Circumstances.

Near the end of the Master's earthly life, a group of hostile people had come to Jesus, asking Him questions "to catch Him in His words." Along with them came this young man who is mentioned in our text, a scribe. He was greatly impressed by the wisdom with which Jesus answered His questioners.

This young man had his ideals; his failings; and an eager look. Whatever there may have been in him of self-deception or duplicity, there was far more, namely, a genuine desire for truth and a real heart-hunger, for God. The words of the Saviour make them perfectly clear.

Having been favorably impressed by the way in which Christ had spoken to the Sadducees, this young man felt rising up within him a desire to know just what the Saviour would say about the question which was then uppermost in his mind. He was convinced that Jesus was the very One Who could tell him what he wanted to know about it. Consequently, he asked Him, "What is the first commandment of all?" By his question he did not mean which commandment was the first in order, for he already knew that, but which one was the most important.

Christ did not brush his question aside. He knows when a person is in earnest. Reading that young man's heart, Jesus knew that he was in earnest, so He took the time and pains to give him a very detailed answer. Jesus answered him: "The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these." Mark 12:29-31. Christ taught that we are to love God and to love other people. The man unhesitatingly agreed with Jesus, saying, "Well, Master, thou hast said the truth." One has to admire that young man's frank and generous response. It cost him something to say what he did, because the enemies of Christ did not like it. Then, Jesus looked upon him with a kindly eye and appreciative spirit and said, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."

II. The Classification.

1. Some are far from the Kingdom.

The hypocritical Pharisees and Herodians, who were trying to ensnare Christ in His words, who were asking Him all sorts of captious questions simply to find fault with Him, were far from the kingdom of God. Jesus was never quite so hopeless of any other people as He was of those who were blinded by prejudice and who were determined not to heed His teachings, who were always hunting something to find fault with.

There are numerous people in our community now of whom it can be said without any lack of charity that they are a long way from the kingdom of God. They never use the name of God except in an oath. They never kneel in prayer. They do not have any use at all for the Bible. Their minds and hearts are occupied wholly with other things. All of their attention is given to something else besides the kingdom of God. They are far off.

2. Some are in the Kingdom.

This inference is equally clear. They have heard the voice of Christ. They have seen the vision of their need. They have heard His gospel and accepted His invitation. They have come in all their weaknesses and failures, with all their hopes and their fears, with all their aspirations and their strivings, with all their hunger for something far bigger and better than they had ever known, and in Christ they have found the life that is life indeed.

The challenge of His Kingdom they have heard and accepted; its citizenship they have claimed; its rights and privileges they are now enjoying; its obligations they are endeavoring to discharge; and to its service they are giving their lives. They have their faults, to be sure, but they have given the lordship of their lives to Christ, and they are far happier and much better because of it.

3. Some are not far from the Kingdom.

There are some who are not in the Kingdom, and they themselves would be the first to admit it, but they are on its very border-land. The ideals of Christ have attracted them, the personality of Christ has appealed to them, and the message and challenge of Christ have a real response in their hearts. They are interested in Christianity; they are eager to hear about Christ; and they are hungry for the gospel of Christ. They attend church services, they enter into the song services, they listen to the sermons, they study the Bible, and they seem to enjoy the privilege of being in the presence of Christian people. They have no desire whatsoever to associate with the godless and the wicked. But, while they are not far from the kingdom, they are still outside.

Being near the Kingdom is not being in the Kingdom. A man may be almost saved, and yet be lost. A man may be just outside the door. They are many today like the man of our text. They have been brought up in a land of Bibles, in Christian homes, in Sunday Schools, and among Christian people. Naturally they know many things about religion. It would be easy for them to step over the line and be saved. But they are not saved. They are near the Kingdom, but they are not in it.

III. The Characteristics.

1. Of this particular scribe.

(1) He had lived a decent life.

No doubt he had been reared in a good home, and had lived a clean life. He had never permitted the grosser forms of sin to appeal to him. He was upright in life, as well as clean in mind and in speech.

(2) He was a seeker after truth.

He had been thinking seriously about the biggest things in life. He had been facing its problems and trying to solve its enigmas. At last he was seeking the highest good. He was seeking to know God's will, which is always the first step towards doing God's will. Christ always welcomed and appreciated the man who was seeking genuinely to know. There is always some hope for the man who is a sincere seeker after truth.

(3) He accepted Christ's interpretation of the truth. This scribe was not blighted and cursed with the prejudice which was so characteristic of his class and profession. He had an open mind. When he submitted the question to Jesus as to which was the premier commandment, he was simply raising the subject which had exercised the minds of religious people for centuries. Upon hearing the answer of the Master, the young man was convinced that Christ had given the correct reply. Christ is always right, but do you have the courage to admit it, and to be governed accordingly?

(4) He was deeply moved by Christ's appeal.

One is forced to be sorry for any person who is not moved by the appeal of Christ. I pity any man who can come face to face with Christ, look into His eyes of understanding love, listen to His words of power, hear His matchless appeal, and then not be moved to the depths of his being.

2. Of those who are not far from the Kingdom.

- (1) A good family heritage.
- (2) A considerable knowledge of the scriptures.
- (3) A genuine reverence for Christ.
- (4) A high regard for holy things.
- (5) A conscious need of Christ.
- (6) A personal rejection of Christ.
- (7) A desire to enter the Kingdom in the future.

IV. The Challenge.

This young man, who was mentioned in our text, was not far from the Kingdom. Just the two steps of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ would have brought him into the Kingdom. A marvelous challenge comes to you who are near the Kingdom.

1. You are in the place of wonderful privilege.

You are offered the opportunity of receiving Christ as your personal Saviour, thereby gaining admission into the Kingdom.

2. You are in the place of great peril.

No one is safe anywhere outside of the Kingdom. Even though you may be near the Kingdom, there is a grave danger that you will not enter the Kingdom and be saved. Many souls go out into a Christless

eternity simply because they procrastinate. How foolish for anyone to allow Satan to keep him from entering the Kingdom!

There are various good reasons why you should enter the Kingdom now while you are near.

- (1) To avoid drifting farther away.
- (2) To be saved.
- (3) To influence others who will follow you.
- (4) To enter the Kingdom before death overtakes you. It is tragic to be as near the Kingdom as some of you are and then to go away and to be lost forever.

It is a law of our nature that convictions not acted upon will soon die, that truth not followed will fade from our minds and hearts, that impressions resisted are harder to be met again, that obstacles to becoming a Christian increase with passing time, and that the longer we linger the stronger the habit of procrastination becomes. For these reasons, I plead with all of you who are near the Kingdom to come into the Kingdom now.

"So near to the Kingdom! yet what dost thou lack?
So near to the Kingdom! what keepeth thee back?
Renounce every idol, tho' dear it may be,
And come to the Saviour now pleading with thee."