

“You are not far from the kingdom.”

I heard a story about a young Indian who went up a mountain to find his teacher and when he got there, he asked, “Teacher, how can I find God?” His teacher said, “If you really want to find God then come with me down the mountain to the river.” So off they went together and when they got to the water’s edge the teacher led the young Indian into the deepest part of the water. And despite the young Indian kicking and punching he ducked his whole body under the water and held the young Indian there for two whole minutes. And when he finally let him up out of the water, he said to him, “Young man if you want to find God as much as you wanted air a moment ago, you will find him no problem.”

And I guess the point of the story is, if you want to find something, sometimes it’s going to be painful. I use to live near a city called Edinburgh when I lived in Scotland; in fact I used to live in a place called “The Kingdom”. And I know that there are many people who never knew there was a kingdom in Scotland. That kingdom is called “The kingdom of Fife.”

I had a friend who wanted to go and visit this kingdom, so we went and we drove over the Firth of Forth road bridge and we deliberately went into the kingdom. And if you have ever visited the Kingdom of Fife, you will know it is a beautiful place and I guarantee, you will like what you what you see.

And the reason I told you that is to help focus your minds on Mark 12:34, where Jesus says to a man who is standing in front of Him. “Your not far from the kingdom.” Now in a very similar way, my friend and I were only a very short drive away from the kingdom. A kingdom that my friend had heard about but never visited. A kingdom that was supposedly full of beauty, but my friend had never seen. And in a very true sense, he wasn’t very far from the kingdom.

Now of course Jesus wasn’t talking about the kingdom of Fife, no matter how much us Scottish people would like to believe that. But He was speaking about a kingdom that is just as real and which can only be entered into by the deliberate desire of an individual and He was speaking of the kingdom of God. When you get a minute at home, read Matthew 22 and there you will find the very time when this event took place in the life of Jesus. It was during the final week of the Jesus’ life. He has ridden triumphantly into Jerusalem, the multitude have praised Him. He has just cleansed the temple by turning out the moneychangers and the merchants.

The religious leaders are around trying to trap Him. The Herodians come to Jesus and tried to catch Him out, they ask Jesus, “Is it lawful to give to Caesar?” And Jesus said, “Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?” “Caesar’s,” they replied. Then Jesus said to them, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.”

As soon as they are silenced The Sadducees come along. And they too try to trick Jesus. They asked about a woman who had been married to 7 brothers, all of the same family and so they ask, “Whose wife will she be in the resurrection?” You see the Sadducees didn’t believe in the resurrection anyway. So Jesus says, “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.”

And finally we have The Pharisees, the teachers of the nation. And from Matthew 22, it seems as though one young man, pushed his way forward to ask Jesus another trick question to try and trap Him. And this young man comes to Jesus and he asks the question, which is the first commandment? Which is the greatest commandment of all? Which is the highest? And Jesus looks at this young man and I wonder of there wasn’t a look of sympathy on His face! This man had been so wrongly informed about Jesus, I don’t think he would believe anything that Jesus would tell him anyway.

A couple were driving down this country road when they passed a farm with donkeys and pigs in it. The man asked his wife, “Relatives of yours dear?” His wife said, “Yes, the in-laws.” You see, once you have made your mind up about someone, it is difficult to change your mind about that person. But you can imagine that man standing back and waiting for the answer from Jesus.

And Jesus deliberately quotes from the Old Testament. A passage of scripture that every faithful Jew would recite twice every day. It’s known as “The Schema”, from Deuteronomy 6, where God had said, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.”

I want you notice something about that passage of scripture in **Mark 12**. Because it looks like the scribe was surprised at the answer because notice in **verse 32** it says, “Teacher you have truly said that He is one and there is no other but Him and to love Him with all of your heart, with all of your understanding and your strength and to love your neighbour as yourself is much more than the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” The Bible says that, “the man was amazed”.

And I would like you to notice something else. When Jesus **SAW**, that he answered wisely, Jesus didn’t just hear that young man speaking to Him, He **SAW** on his face an honest expression, when Jesus **SAW** that he answered wisely. Jesus said, “You are not far from the kingdom of God”.

I believe that Jesus saw in that man’s face, faith and honesty. Here is a man who many might call a rationalist, or a ritualist. But there, standing before Jesus was a man who seems to have more understanding than those who had been trying to trap Jesus. And Jesus can bless a person like this abundantly. I would like for us to think about this man’s position and then I would like for us to think about our positions and our position as being near to the kingdom of God.

Let me say a few words about the kingdom of God. For almost **2½ thousand years**, the Jews had longed for the kingdom to come. Way back in Old Testament times, God had promised, He would establish a kingdom, which would have no end. There had been silence from the prophets for **400 years** until John the Baptist came and stood on the banks of the river Jordan and said, “Repent” Why? “For the kingdom of God is at hand.”

But the people thought Jesus was here to do that, but they thought He was talking about a physical kingdom. But Jesus said, “You are to love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you.” So the people were looking for a physical kingdom, a material kingdom. And Jesus says, “Listen it’s not a physical kingdom but a spiritual kingdom.” He says, “This is what the Old Testament prophets were talking about.” You remember Jesus said in front of Pontius Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world, otherwise my servants would fight.”

And He mentions something else about the kingdom too. The kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament is a spiritual kingdom, which is also known by other names. Let me mention one. In **Luke 18:18**, there was rich young man who came to Jesus and said, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit What? Eternal life?” If you go to **verse 25** of the same passage, you’ll find that Jesus said, after the young man had gone away, “How hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

I would like you keep that in mind as we continue because it seems to me that the kingdom and eternal life are one in the same condition that a people can find themselves in. If someone has eternal life, then they are in the kingdom. If someone is in the kingdom, they have eternal life.

Let me go one step further. Jesus said in **John 3:5** “Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Can you see what I’m getting at? There is a condition to which a person might enter, where it doesn’t matter about age or colour or background or education. But which in reality, is just as obviously entered, as my friend went into the kingdom of Fife. Deliberately entered. He went because he wanted to go, not because anyone made him.

And Jesus said, “That’s how a person can enter the kingdom of God.” And it is also true that a man and a woman can be as near to the kingdom of God as my friend was when he was in Edinburgh and near to the kingdom of Fife and not be in it. And it is the same with the kingdom of God. We can be near but not in.

Let’s look at the man in **Mark 12** again. First of all let’s say this about him. He was a religious man. The Bible tells us that he was a scribe, a person who gave some explanation to the Old Testament scriptures. He was a person who possibly stood in front of a multitude of people and read out the Old Testament laws. And yet, I want you to notice, he wasn’t in the kingdom. Jesus simply said to him in **Mark 12:34**, “You are near to the kingdom”.

Here was man, who knew that religion, which consisted of sacrifice and burnt offerings wasn’t the whole of religion. He knew that God demanded the heart, as well as the sacrifice. But he was a man who was only **near to the kingdom**. Here was a man who knew that God was above everyone and overall things and that it was man’s duty to serve Him completely and yet he was a man who was only **near to the kingdom**. Not in the kingdom. This man knew what he ought to do, but he was only near to the kingdom.

It's like the 3 new psychologists who went for an interview with their new professor. The professor asked the first man, "What is the opposite of joy?" The man replied, "Sadness." The professor asked the second man, "What is the opposite of depression?" The man replied, "Elation." The professor asked the third man, "What is the opposite of Woe?" The man replied, "Giddy up."

You see they all answered correctly according to their understanding of the question. Here was a man who started with debate and ended with respect. Here was a man who started with a group but Jesus answered him as though there was only the two of them present. He was near but not in the kingdom. We don't know if that man ever did enter the kingdom, we just don't know.

So let me bring it a little closer to home. How near to the kingdom are you? Are you as near as that man? If Jesus was sit down next to you just now and you were able to talk to Him as that scribe did, I wonder if you would dare to be as open and honest as he was? I wonder if Jesus might lovingly deal with every one of us today in the same way he dealt with the scribe? Lovingly, carefully, consciously, aware of that man's need.

Let me ask you this question, Are you in the kingdom? Or are you near to the kingdom? Well how can you judge? I've made a list of some steps that you might want to note from God's word, to show us if we are near to the kingdom.

If you are near to the kingdom, what do you think about the Bible? What is your honest opinion of the 66 books, which we call the Bible? Have you checked its values? Have you checked its virtues? Have you checked its claims and condemnations? Have you seen that it states very clearly that we are all without hope in this world if we haven't accepted a sacrifice that God's provided?

If you believe that the Bible is the word of God, you are one step nearer to the kingdom of God. Have you seen that within the Bible it clearly states that there are 2 classes of people in this world today? It's not speaking about Jew and Gentile, it's not talking about rich and poor, it's not talking about black and white or male or female or even moral or immoral people. It's talking about 2 classes of people because there are only 2 that stand before God. There are the lost people and there are the saved people.

And if you believe that the Bible is the word of God, then you must have come one step nearer to the kingdom of God. Because the Bible says in Romans 3:23 that, "We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, there's no one righteous, no not one." Do you believe that? Do you believe that without Jesus in your life you are lost? If you do, then you are near to the kingdom. You are near to the kingdom because Jesus said in Luke 19:10, "He came to seek and to save those who were lost."

Does that belief in the Bible point you to see that Jesus is the saviour of all men? If it does, then you are nearer the kingdom than you were just with your belief in the Bible as the word of God. Jesus said one time, to some religious people that were speaking to Him, "You search the scriptures for in them you think you have life and these testify of me." John the baptiser stood next to the river Jordan, he lifted his eyes and saw the master coming towards him and said, "Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

John wrote his gospel and he said he wrote it, "That you might believe that Jesus is the Christ and believing, you might have life." You might have that quality of life, eternal life. Do you believe the scriptures when it says in 1 Timothy 1:15, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners?" Do you believe that heaven gave it's very best, so that it might take us worst and bring us to glory? Then if you believe that, then you are near to the kingdom but you are not in it. The scriptures, the saviour, but you're still not in the kingdom.

Does this move you to do something? For example. Does it motivate you to feel sorry in your heart for the sins that you have committed which sent Jesus to Calvary? Then you're nearer to the kingdom. The Bible calls this repentance. It's probably the hardest step for anyone to make. To say that you are sorry for what caused Jesus to go to the cross.

The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "He who knew no sin became sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God." Repentance isn't just an about turn; it's about revulsion of sin that caused Jesus to have to go to Calvary. And Jesus said in Luke 13:4, "Unless you repent, you shall all die." When the gospel was preached for the first time after the resurrection of Jesus, the first and greatest commandment was this, "Repent everyone of you, repent." And if you are here today and you are sorry for your sins, then you are near to the kingdom.

Because you've got believing, seeing Jesus as the saviour, to repenting, but you're still not in the kingdom. Because the Bible goes on to say in **Romans 10:9**, "**We need to confess Jesus as Lord**". And if you are prepared to confess Jesus, then you are near to the kingdom. And part of that confession means that you are not ashamed to admit it. And a recognition that Jesus understands.

A farmer had some puppies he needed to sell. So he advertised the 20 pups. As he was placing the advertisement on a fence post, he felt a tug on his overalls. He looked down into the eyes of a little boy. "Mister," he said, "I want to buy one of your puppies." "Well," said the farmer, "These puppies come from fine parents and cost a good deal of money." The boy dropped his head and then reached deep into his pocket, he pulled out a handful of change and held it up to the farmer. "I've got thirty-nine cents. Is that enough to take a look?" "Sure," said the farmer. And with that he let out a whistle "Here, Dolly!" Out from the doghouse ran Dolly followed by four little balls of fur. The little boy pressed his face against the fence. His eyes danced with delight. As the dogs made their way to the fence, the little boy noticed something else stirring inside the doghouse. Slowly another little ball appeared, this one noticeably smaller. It came out of the doghouse and slid. Then in a somewhat awkward manner, the little pup began hobbling toward the others, doing its best to catch up.... "I want that one," the little boy said, pointing to the runt. The farmer knelt down at the boy's side and said, "Son, you don't want that puppy. He will never be able to run and play with you like these other dogs would." So the little boy stepped back from the fence, reached down, and began rolling up one leg of his trousers. In doing so he revealed a steel brace running down both sides of his leg attaching itself to a specially made shoe. Looking back up at the farmer, he said, "You see sir, I don't run too well myself, and he will need someone who understands."

The world is full of people who need someone who understand. Jesus said, "If you are ashamed of me, I will be ashamed of you before my Father." When you say that Jesus is Lord, it is admitting that Jesus can meet your needs because he understands your needs. Paul says in Romans, "If you believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, you shall be saved."

And just simply saying that, "**Jesus is Lord**" doesn't mean anything unless it affects your life. You see confession, means it's all of your life saying, "**I believe in Jesus and I'm going to stand up for Jesus no matter what.**" That's confession, it's every day of our lives when we are prepared to stand up and be counted. It's admitting that Jesus is Lord, that He's the master; that He commands; that we respect and His laws are obeyed and not be ashamed of Him.

To say, "**Jesus is Lord**" means that you are prepared to put Him above everything else and to give Him first place in your life. And if you are prepared to confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, you're nearer to the kingdom, than you were when you just believed the Bible. You are still near, but not in.

My friend went to Edinburgh and he could have turned around and never entered the kingdom of Fife. But he went deliberately one day; he even paid to go over the bridge that took him into the kingdom of Fife. And really that's what happens when a person enters the kingdom of God. I'm not saying you have to pay, but what I am saying is that you have to deliberately go and enter the kingdom.

In **John 3** Jesus said, "**Unless, a man is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.**" He was talking to a man, who was a teacher of the Jews, a man who knew the Old Testament. And Nicodemus finally comes to Jesus and says, "**How, How can this be, How can a man be born when he is old?**" And Jesus points him on **3 occasions** in that one chapter to the way that a man might experience new birth. This entrance into the kingdom. This quality of life.

Listen to what He said in **John 3:14**. "**Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.**" That's clear isn't it? Jesus says that, "**we are to look at Him and if we believe in Him with all our hearts, we might enter into the kingdom of God.**"

How does that work out? Is this believing just a mental activity? Surely not. Belief in the Bible sense is never passive; it always motivates us to do something. The people on the **Day of Pentecost** for example. After Jesus was raised from the dead and gone back to heaven were made to realise the truth of the scriptures when they heard of the sacrifice for sin of Jesus. When they heard that Jesus was elevated, that Jesus was able to draw all men unto Him and they cried out and said, "**What must we do to be saved?**"

Let's put it another way. How can we born again? Let's put it another way. How may we enter into the kingdom of God? How can we come into that sphere? That spiritual realm, where Jesus reigns and we are His servants. How can we enter into that kingdom?

And Peter gave them the answer. “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” And on that day, 3000 people that stood near to the kingdom were transported into the kingdom by their obedience to Jesus. By looking at the sacrifice and applying it to themselves.

How does it work out? It works like this. Romans 6:3 “Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” There it is, we are baptised into His death. Entrance into the kingdom, is by your own deliberate admission. You go because you want to go into the kingdom of God.

But what if you don't go in? What if you choose to stand outside of the kingdom?

A heard a story about a ship called “The Royal Charter”. Many years ago it made a journey all the way around the world. The ship was from England and at the end of the voyage; it hit some rocks near Wales. And people lost their lives. In the hull of the first officer of the ship, his wife was sitting waiting. She had his dinner ready for him coming home. She was anticipating the arrival of her husband after going all the way around the world in a boat. The minister had to go and break the news to her, that her husband had been lost at sea. Imagine that, around the world and then shipwrecked in Wales. And the story goes on to say that he will never forget the anguish in that woman's eyes, as she grasped his hands and said, “So near to home and yet lost.”

So near to home and yet lost. What will it be like if you don't enter into the kingdom? How can we explain when we are to stand before the judge and be divided between the sheep and the goats? What is going to be like for those who are here today, who are close to the kingdom but wont go in?

To hear the songs of the righteous and the others going off wailing! To know the brightness of His glory and yet to go into utter darkness! To be with Him into heaven, and for some to go to hell! To have living water at your feet and for some to be parched! To see the bread and yet be dieing of hunger! Who can explain what it is like, if you don't enter the kingdom when you are so near?

Two Indians who were deeply in love used to send each other smoke signals to tell each other of their undying love. And one day a way off in the distance the army set off a test for an atomic bomb. And as that big mushroom cloud went up into the air, the Indian said to his wife, “Wow, I wished I'd said that.”

Loved ones I hope this message has been as clear, there's only one-way into the kingdom. The scribe was near to the kingdom; we don't know if he ever went in. Let me leave you by asking you this question, where are you?