

Norman C. Schwab
Yacolt EV Free
May 26, 1996

So Close But Yet...So Far!
Mark 12:28-34

If you ever ask a salesman how their week went be prepared for the almost closed stories. I could have had a great week if I had only been able to close that one big sale...I was within an inch of it but it fell through. If you ever talk to a fisherman be prepared for the almost stories. Well, we had two on last week..one was almost to shore but then he was a head shaker and spit the hook. Almost making the sale. Almost catching the big one. Almost hitting the homerun. Almost getting the laundry done. Almost putting in the garden. Almost getting there, being close, real near, is not the same as inside, finished completed, done, over, in the boat and signed on the dotted line. Almost only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades.

Some of you may remember the stunt motorcycle rider Evil Knievel. He seemed to snub death in the nose by the heights and lengths he attempted to jump. On one occasion Knievel built a rocket powered motorcycle and large ramps on either side of the snake river canyon. The event was a huge media hype. Everyone had an opinion as to whether Knievel would make the jump or die. The motorcycle started up with a great noise and explosive power...it went off the ramp and into the air heading towards the other side and then anticlimatically the parachute was opened and Knievel and his rocket floated harmlessly down to the river canyon below. He had put months of preparation and millions of dollars to build ramps and cycles and get permission..but he never made it. Halfway there was about the best he did. Almost is OK in some things but when it comes to getting into the Kingdom of God..Almost is not good enough. As my brother used to like to tell me when I'd narrowly miss beating him in some sporting contest; Close but no cigar.

There may be some here today that are close to the Kingdom of God. Close to salvation. Close to admitting your sin and helplessness. Close to accepting God's free gift apart from anything you've done on your own. You have spent a good chunk of time listening to sermons,

reading the Bible, You know what it takes you know the gospel..But...close is not enough.

My purpose this morning is to challenge and encourage. Just as I believe Jesus was both challenging and encouraging to the scribe who asked Him an honest question in this mornings text. Just as the scribe was extremely well schooled in theology and had a through knowledge of the Bible. Scribes or Jewish Lawyers were by their very position, experts on Jewish Law. There may be some here this morning who have read the Bible. They know it well. They understand what it says. They have grown up in the church and have had Godly consistent parents..but never have come to a saving knowledge of Christ. They have never stepped into the Kingdom of God. They are close. They do all the religious stuff. They pray. They come to church or youth group. Every one assumes that they are believers...but they simply are not. They are still counting on their own goodness to get in. They are hardened to the gospel that they have heard so much about, They are close...but that's not good enough. It is possible to be within one inch of the Kingdom of God and not be in. This morning I want to challenge those who are close to accepting God's drawing of them into the Kingdom..step in. Encourage those who are truly seeking. That seeking is placed in you by God. It says in John 6:44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.."

Turn with me in your Bibles to Mark the 12th chapter. This is the section where the religious authorities have been trying to trick and embarrass and discredit Jesus. They have been peppering Him with difficult questions. Jesus has answered with incredible brilliance and skill. Jesus has the answers for all of mans toughest questions and He always points us to the highest priority of loving God who is above all others. Jesus has answered their questions of authority, allegiance, power and now He answers an honest question about priority. The scribe has been watching the debates between Jesus and the other religious leaders and is impressed with His answers. He is attracted to Jesus wisdom and ability to handle the Law. But,

Point #1 Attraction to Jesus wisdom can get us close to the Kingdom...but not in. Where do we see this scribes attraction? Lets look at the passage in verse 28. READ. He was attracted to Jesus wise

answers. He recognized that Jesus answered well. People who are wise attract people. We like to know about how to live better lives. A good and helpful counselor needs only word of mouth to gain new clients. Why? Because wisdom attracts people. There were many people in Jesus day who were attracted to come and gather and listen to the teacher. His wisdom and grasp of the Bible was easily apparent. We flock to the churches where the Bible is well taught. There is much practical wisdom in the Bible and helpful for living life on this earth. We can go to parenting conferences to help us in our parenting skills learning wisdom from the Bible. We can go to marriage conferences learning practical truths to help our marriages succeed. But...while attraction for Biblical insights and desire to hear the wisdom of Jesus is good. That desire to know spiritual things is good...the attraction to Jesus wisdom can get us closer to the point of decision, closer to the Kingdom...but it can't get us it. Close but no cigar.

Point #2 Asking the right questions can get us closer to the Kingdom...but it can't get us in. Look in your Bibles at the end of verse 28. The Scribe asks Jesus an honest question. No hidden political agenda. No traps set for ridicule. He asks a question of priority. Which of all those 613 commandments is the most important. Out of all the commands to obey, which one should I work the hardest at obeying. What is the all encompassing command? Which is to be our highest priority? This man is asking Jesus which is the most important of God's commands to obey. He is asking the right questions that will lead him closer to God. This question stands in stark contrast to the Saducees theoretical question about Levirate marriage and who gets married to whom in heaven. This scribe is asking a good question...asking the right questions can draw us closer to the Kingdom...but they won't get us in.

When I was talking with a girl named Leslie up in Seattle about the things of the Lord, I was impressed with the depth and honesty of her questions. They showed that she was truly seeking God...not just trying to throw up smoke screens and rabbit trails. She didn't run to peripheral questions that baffle even the greatest theologians...she knew she needed to make a decision about who Jesus is. A priority of love must be placed in God. She needed to deal with her sin problem. She was asking all the right questions...she is near to the kingdom. I could

just feel God drawing her to Himself...but she wasn't in. Asking the right questions, being attracted to Jesus wisdom can get us close...but it can't get us in.

Jesus answers the man's question. Because it is an honest question, Jesus answers it outright and not with another question. Jesus answers it by quoting the great Shema from Deuteronomy 6:4 READ. Hear Hebrew word is shema. The Lord our God is One Lord. Jesus answered with the most familiar words to a Jew. Devout jews recite this verse 2 times a day. Some wear Phylacteries or little leather boxes strapped to their forehead and arms with this passage of scripture in it. The Lord **our** God is **One** He is one, unique above all others. He is top priority. He is personal ours.... The passage then calls for a volitional commitment. "You shall...a commitment that is personal, wholehearted and comprehensive. Love the Lord with all your heart, soul mind and strength.

Jesus is not giving a dissertation on the psychological parts of humankind. He is quoting Deuteronomy stating that our love for God should be overwhelmingly comprehensive. Our love for Him is to supreme and incomparable far above all other loves in our life. We are to love Him with everything that makes up our being. Love the Lord with our heart. This is the battleground on which moral battles are fought. The bible speak of the mind wishing one thing and the heart wishing another. This is where Jesus wants to come take up residence Ephesians 3:17 "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." This is the place where our affections are won and lost. It's the control center that represents our true character. The Bible says it is with the heart that man is defiled. The heart is the pump that keeps our pushing life giving blood through our physical body. We are to love God from the most essential part of us.

We are to love God with our soul. The driver of our motives, and internal longings. Our will is to love God with our essential being that immaterial part of us that is our moral nature.

We are to love God with our mind. Our thoughts should be directed in love toward God. We are to love God with our strength. Everything within our bodily powers should be eager to love God, to express our love for God in actions of love.

Jesus and answer to the seeking scribe was simple. Because God is one, He is unique far above all others, we are to love Him totally. Because of who God is our natural response should be to love God. A half-baked, formal cold and sterile love just won't do. It has to be a blood pumping all encompassing love for God that is personal, wholehearted and comprehensive.

Second part to Jesus answer is in verse 31. Love your neighbor as yourself. Who is our neighbor? Anyone who is near us. Who we live near, work near, see, anyone we interact with. Our neighbor is not just those we love. It not our friends and family circle. In Luke 10 after Jesus quotes from Duet. 6 someone asks who is my neighbor? He relates the parable of the good Samaritan, the one who is friend to his enemies is a good neighbor. We are to love our neighbors whether we naturally like them or not. How do we show our love for God? By loving our neighbor. by loving others well. How do we love others well? By treating them as we treat ourselves. Love them, prefer them, look out for their best interests in the same way we love ourselves, protect ourselves, and tend to be self focused. Self centered. Jesus answer makes an assumption about the nature of man. He assumes that we love ourselves, or are centered on ourselves. You may say, "Well, what about those who have such a low self-image that they say and act like they don't love themselves. I think you'll agree that those filled with bitterness and self pity are very focused on themselves and not others. They may not like what they see when they look in the mirror, but all they do is look in the mirror...they have no outward focus...no love for the people around them...no love for their neighbor.

Jesus says. All the commandments all boil down to two. Love God and love your neighbor. Look at the great 10 commandments. The first 4 have to do with loving God, the next 6 deal with loving your neighbor. If our love for God is our top priority it doesn't mean our family is going to get ripped off, because God calls us to love our family, our friends, our neighbor. We show our love for God by loving others well. How's your love life? Is your love a duty or a delight? Which do you struggle with more? Loving God or loving your neighbor? How can you love God more completely? How can you show love for your neighbor this next week? God is to be on top..no one else can get in His way.

We read the scribes response to Jesus answer in verse 32.

Point # 3 Recognizing the truth can get us close...but it can't get us in. The scribe stands up Bravo! Right on! Teacher. That was beautiful. No one has combined Lev19 with Duet 6 to encapsulate the Law. You are right. He is to be number 1 priority. Our love for God should be all encompassing...in fact he adds. Love for God is much more important than burnt offerings and sacrifices. This scribe is close to the kingdom. He's attracted to Jesus wisdom, He's asking the right questions, He even recognizes truth that coming to God is much more than religious ritual; showing up every Sunday, giving money, working on the building, teaching Sunday school, reading the Bible. Without the love for God all those things are just empty religion. I Cor. 13 says we are without love we are just a clanging symbol that makes a lot of noise, may get a lot of attention, may annoy alot of folks but does absolutely nothing. In Samuel it says "To obey, which is to love, is better than sacrifice. They will know we are Christians by our love...not by the rules we keep. Are we known as Christian by the way we love others? This scribe was right on in saying that we do not live by rules but by a love relationship. A loving relationship with God enables a loving relationship to others. We cannot love others well unless we are loving God well. I John We love....because He first loved us."

The scribe understood the nexus of truth from the Bible and Jesus was quick to encourage and challenge him. Look at verse 34. "You are not far off from the kingdom of God." Jesus recognized that His thirst for God's truth was genuine in was quite unlike the other religious leaders who were standing around trying to trap and test Him. He saw a scribe who was honestly attracted to Jesus wisdom. One who was asking the right questions and even understanding truth. He recognized the scribe was intelligent. Jesus I'm sure appreciated the mans' courage in speaking for truth in the midst of his angry colleagues who came hoping to see Jesus get slammed. This kind of open seeking only comes when God is working in a person. This scribe knew the law, He knew the bible, and even understood that the law dealt mainly with the love of relationship then rules to follow...he was near to coming to God...it's encouraging to be near, almost, close. But close is not in, standing next to the door is not the same as being in, Standing in the threshold is

sooooo close but it's not in. It is possible to be within an inch of the kingdom of heaven and not be in. We can be so close and yet so far.

Final point don't be content with just being close..not far..get in! Step into the kingdom. We don't know if this scribe ever came to faith. The bible is silent as to His response. We do know that if he was to step into faith he must believe that Jesus is the Christ the Savior of the world. It's interesting, that is the very next question that Jesus asks in the following paragraph. Who is Jesus. This man must also come to grips with His sin and inability to better himself on his own. He may have tried to Love God and love others on his own strength. But that we know will quickly lead to futility and frustration. We cannot love others well, we cannot love God well until we've dealt with our sin problem.

What does it take to step into the light. Step into the Kingdom?
Simply.

- 1) **Admit** your a sinner. Rom 3:23 All have sinned
Because we sin we deserve the just penalty before God..death.Talk to God, "God I'm a sinner...I've done things that make you sad"
- 2) **Realize** that the reason Christ came to this earth was not just to fill our heads with wisdom...He came to die for you. His death was no accident. He who was perfect, died to pay the penalty of my sin. Talk to God "Thank you for dying on the cross to pay my sin debt"
- 3) Receive Christ free gift of salvation for you. Talk to Jesus and say, I believe come into my heart.

Folks some of you may be able to relate to this scribe. Maybe you've grown up in the church. You know alot of the stories, the doctrine, you understand what it's all about...you are near but you've been putting it off. Until the heart is changed you cannot love God the way you should. Until your heart is changed your relationships will never be what they could be because it will be tough to love others well. Until the heart is changed, it just won't matter. God loves you and wants to begin a love relationship with you. Don't put it off any longer. Close...almost is just not good enough. Do it now. The devil says wait until tomorrow. Now is the appointed time today is the day of salvation.