

2026-06-28

Not Far from the Kingdom of God

Mark 12:28-34

As you know, Monday I had some skin cancer removed from my face. This was about my 20th time for this type of procedure. In April a biopsy proved that cancer was present and the surgery was needed. After marking my cheek with the amount of skin the doctor was going to remove, they numbed the area. I was left in the room alone waiting for the doctor to do his work. Music was playing in the background. It was loud enough for me to hear it all. They were playing the hits of the 1960's through the 80's. The song that first got my attention was "Smoking in the Boy's Room." I have not heard that **song in decades**, yet I could sing right along with the chorus having heard it several times as a youth. I was surprised that while I waited, I could sing along with all the songs, especially the chorus part.

Most of the songs had a message that I no longer agree with, if I ever agreed with them at all. It was interesting that I knew most of the words to the songs. When I think about it, everything we watch and everything we listen to is trying to teach us something. The world and its ways are trying to influence us to believe and act a certain way. And it is working. People believe all kinds of different things. Why? Often times people believe things because they hear the same thing over and over. There are many religions and organizations that are attempting to influence people to believe and act according to their belief system. Christianity is one of those faiths that is trying to persuade people to become part of the kingdom of God. Jesus was doing the same thing. He wanted people to believe the things He taught.

Many people, even religious people were and are interested in what happens when we die and where people go when they die. Jesus was dealing with some of these issues, trying to help people know the truth. Why did people listen to Jesus and consider what He taught to be the truth? Jesus spoke with authority (Luke 4:31-36). He taught Biblical truths not traditional beliefs. They saw His power to cast out evil spirits from people's lives and they saw those people's lives changed. They watched how Jesus treated other people. He healed them and at times, fed them. He called out the religious leaders for who they were, hypocrites (Matthew 23). During these days of teaching in the temple, the religious leaders asked Jesus some hard questions. They were easy questions for Him. He answered each one truthfully and with skill.

Mark 12:28 *"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 was reasoning together with the Sadducees. He was not lecturing them. He was not trying to put them down or make them feel stupid. They already believed enough foolish things about scriptures that were not true. Jesus was trying to help them understand the scriptures they were studying. He wanted people to open their hearts in order to know God. **Jesus wanted people to see God as a living God, active in this world and our lives.** He did not want them to be ignorant of who God is and how He works. These events are recorded with short discussions, a condensed version of the actual event. Since the scripture records that they were “*reasoning together*,” these were longer discussions than what we have recorded. This scribe who came to Jesus knew he would get an honest answer to his question along with an honest reasoning from Jesus.

The Jews had listed the commandments found in scripture. They came up with a list of 613 commandments. 365 of those commands began with “*You shall not.*” 248 of those commands began with “*You shall.*” They divided them up between ritual commands and ethical or moral commands. Jews debated over what commandments were more important. Laws about keeping the Sabbath were important. So were laws about circumcision. Every Jew then and every Jew today knows what was and what remains the most important commandment. **Every good Jew quotes the Shema every day.** This man is a scribe. Not only did every scribe quote the Shema every day, they carried it written on a little piece of paper and attached it to their forehead or their arm in a little box. My guess is that if these Jews believed in tattoos, they would have this tattooed on their bodies. But they did not believe in tattoos (Leviticus 19:28). This scribe wanted to know if he was right. I think this man truly wanted to know the answer because of who Jesus was claiming to be. Jesus answered the scribe by quoting Deuteronomy 6:4-5, which is known as the Shema, which means “*Hear*,” the first word of this scripture.

Verses 29-31 “*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.’”* What surprised the scribe was, Jesus quoted two “*You shall*” commandments together. He said they were both of equal importance. We are to love God with our whole being. God does not want a half-hearted commitment from anyone. He wants total commitment in our love for Him and our love for other people. Any half-hearted commitment to God is no commitment at all. And to believe you can love God and not love people is also wrong. Jesus made the connection for us so that everyone understands the mind of God. **Loving God is shown by loving people.**

John writes a lengthy discussion about the importance of loving God and loving people. He begins by stating, *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love (one another) does not know God, for God is love”* (1 John 4:7-8). The disciples understood that to love God was to love other people. These actions cannot be separated. John would finish that section with, *“if someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”* (4:20-21). We might think that because I can see my brother, those people I know in need, that is why I do not love them or help them. If this is the way we think, then we really do not understand God and we do not know God. God is a God who gets involved in doing what He can to help others. *“God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8). **Christianity is a participation faith.** Christians get involved in helping others. That is what God has demonstrated for us. That is what Jesus has done. He left heaven, came to earth and He got involved in ministering to others. This is what God expects of His followers.

James phrased this same teaching using different words. He used faith and works. *“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?”* (2:14). After his illustration of seeing our brother or sister in need and doing nothing but saying a meaningless prayer and then saying that the demons have faith in God but they show no works, James asked the question, *“O foolish man, do you not know that faith without works is dead?”* (2:20). Do you know this? How do we love God? How do we show our faith in God? **Our love and faith in God are seen in our involvement in helping people.** We can talk all we want to about how much we love God and how much faith we have in God, but they are just empty words if they are not backed up with actions. Real love for God, real faith in God is seen by God in the things we do for others in need.

Paul puts this same concept in his writings. *“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 2:3-5). Life is not only about us. It is also about how we treat others.

Verses 32-33 *“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.’”* This scribe agreed with Jesus on every point. He quoted verses from

Isaiah 45 declaring that there is one God “*and there is no other*” (45:5-6, 18, 22). He also agreed with Jesus that the Jewish sacrificial system and all their burnt offerings were not the most adequate way to show one’s love for God. **Showing God we love Him is seen by loving our neighbor.**

Verse 34 “*Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’ But after that no one dared question Him.*” This scribe was close to the kingdom of God but he was not inside. **How does a person get inside the kingdom of God?** Knowing that there is one God and that Jesus is God is not enough. Knowing that our love for God is seen in our love for our neighbor is not enough. Knowing the answer is not good enough it is in doing.

In the judgment, how does Jesus, the Judge, tell the difference between the sheep and the goats, the righteous and the unrighteous people when He is inviting the righteous into His kingdom? (Matthew 25:31-46). Of course, we can all tell the difference between sheep and goats. They look different and they sound different. But in this case, when it comes to determining who is righteous, it is not about what you wear or look like and it is not about what you say or sound like. **It is all about what we have done towards other people in need.** It is all about our actions! How we have seen those in need and how we responded or did not respond. Here, our actions speak along with our words what we really believe. When we do things, even to the least of these My brethren, we do it to Jesus (25:40).

Questions to ask yourself:

Do I really love God? How does He know I love Him?
What do my daily actions towards others say about me?
Would Jesus invite me into His kingdom because of how I treat other people?
Would other people want to follow Jesus because of how I treated them?

Actions to take:

Look for ways to help others. Do a good turn daily. (Even more than one)
If you think you cannot help others, change the way you think. You can help others. Get yourself in the right mental and physical shape to help others.

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