

**ARE YOU
“...NOT FAR FROM
THE KINGDOM”
OR ARE YOU
“...IN THE KINGDOM”**

As a believer in Jesus, I have heard and been told many things about the Word of God and about Jesus. Most of all in this hour we are being told many things of what we are to now believe and accept and what we are not to listen to or take not into account any longer. The most prolific is whether we are to any longer accept or view things found in the Old Testament as needful for the believer in Christ. The question, or should I say, what is being taught these days, is whether or not the Old Testament and even the Gospels are necessary for the believer in Jesus today to either study, none the less to even read any more.

We hear many people preaching about the “new” Jesus these days. They tell us that there is no longer a need to read or even look at the writings of the Old Testament and even many of the New Testament writings. Now, this is nothing new. There has always been this type of discussion rising up within the circles of the believers. It really is nothing new.

If we look at the writings in the New Testament from Paul, John and even Peter, we read of factions that had risen up (and still do) in the church. These factions would try to take people away from the truth and put them on the path that would, if not dealt with, take them away from the true Jesus and ultimately God, the Father. So you see this isn't a new strategy of the enemy. He is just adjusting to the times we are in.

In addressing this I would like for us to simply take a look at one of the simplest events in the life of Jesus but yet it tells us mountains of truth. If we look at it and simply read the account, we may miss the most important aspect of the account.

Let's look at Mark 12:28-34 (KJV) *“And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? ²⁹ And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: ³⁰ 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. ³¹ And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. ³² And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: ³³ And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. ³⁴ And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly (HCSB -intelligently) he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that dared ask him any question.”*

This seems like a very simple and easy reading from the Word of God. We have all heard and have read this account. However, I think that a very simple but yet profound statement is made by Jesus which is actually the key to whole scenario. We sometimes miss these simple things, yet they are so valuable to us.

We see that the scribe had come to Jesus. We know that there were many of the scribes, Pharisees and other religious leaders that came to Jesus to try to trick Him into answering a question in such a way that they would be able to trap Him and then accuse Jesus of being a false prophet or a false Messiah or even a rebel against Rome. However, as we know and as it is written, they never could accomplish their task. Jesus always knew what they were after and always answered in such a way that they could never find any fault with what He had said.

Here we see another scribe coming to Jesus. In Mark's Gospel it simply tells that a scribe had been listening to Jesus and decided to ask Him a question. In Mark's account we do not get the full aspect of where this man was coming from. However, in Matthew's Gospel it tells us a little more about this scribe, In Matthew 22:35 it tells us that this man was a "lawyer." Now, we can say that there was a mistake in the two Gospel accounts. However, they are actually saying the same thing.

At that time a "scribe" and a "lawyer" were the same thing. The scribes were experts on the Word of God which meant that they were experts on the "laws of God." They were not what today we would consider a lawyer to be. They were not legal advocates. No, at that time a "lawyer" was an expert on the Word and the laws of God. In Matthew 22:35 we read that this man actually came to Jesus to try to "tempt" Him into saying something that they could entrap Jesus with and then accuse Jesus of being a false prophet and ultimately, a false Messiah.

The man asks Jesus a question. It seems as though He asks with nothing else on His mind but the simple truth as seen in Mark's account. In Matthew's account it tells us that the "lawyer" was asking a question but in a tempting way as it states in Matthew 22:35, *"Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, **tempting him**, and saying..."*

As we go on in both accounts we see that the man asked the question concerning which was the greatest of the commandments. Now when we speak of the "commandments" we would immediately think of the Ten Commandments. However, in that time that was not necessarily the way they were looked at. Ultimately, if we do look into the Word we see that the "two commandments" that Jesus quoted were actually another way that the 10 Commandments were referred to as found in Old Testament.

In Deuteronomy 6:4, 5 we are told this by God as He tells Moses and the people, *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And **thou shall love the LORD thy God with all your heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.**"* As we know this "commandment" encapsulates the first five of the Ten Commandments. In Leviticus 19:18 it tells us, *"...Love your neighbor as yourself..."* Again this encapsulates the remaining five of the Ten Commandments.

In other words the two commandments that Jesus mentioned were the two main aspects of the Ten Commandments – loving God and loving your neighbor (others). We see in Mark 12:32 and 33 that the lawyer/ scribe had agreed with Jesus. What else could he say? It was the truth. Knowing that the lawyer/scribe had agreed with Him, we see Jesus then say the key to this whole section of scripture. We see that Jesus said in Mark 12:34, *"...Thou art **not far** from the kingdom of God."*

What did Jesus mean by saying this? After all, the man had agreed with what Jesus had said. Why then did Jesus say that he was "not far" from the Kingdom of God? Why did not Jesus tell the man that he had answered correctly and that he was ready for the Kingdom? The answer of course was that the scribe/lawyer did indeed answer correctly. However, the real issue was that he was not truly living it. After all, we see in Matthew's account that the man was looking to "tempt" Jesus into saying something that was incorrect. Obviously, he did not catch Jesus "off guard." Jesus had answered correctly.

Even though the scribe had agreed with Jesus the problem was not that he knew the truth but rather the problem was that he was not living the truth. Oh my!!! What did I say!!! Could a person say the right things but yet not be living it out within their own lives? Hmmm...

Here we see a man who knew the scriptures. He knew the truth when it was spoken and when he heard it. He could not disagree with what Jesus spoke. We read in Mark 12:35 that nobody else dared to ask Him any more questions. Jesus told them what they all knew and He told them the truth. He taught the simple and basic truth about being a true believer in God.

Being a true believer in God is simply, loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and being. In the same way, we are to also love others. It is not two sides of the same coin. No, it is not a “two sided coin” at all. They are both the same thing to the heart of God. If we say we “love God” then we express that love to others. As we express “love” to others, then we are truly expressing our “love to God.” That is what it means to be a true child of God. This aspect of being in true relationship with God was and is still found in His Word.

The Jewish leadership missed it. The people missed it. They wanted it but the problem was – were they living it? Was it “real” to them? Was it who they were? The answer was that it was not any of those things in the lives of the religious leaders or the common Jew. It was not really accepted by anyone. It was not truly believed and expressed by those who even knew the truth. No one could in and of themselves. It was because they were - as well as everyone who ever lived – sinners. We all were separated from God.

You see, that is what it truly means to be a Child of God. It is one thing to know the truth but it is quite a different thing to actually own it and let it be who you are. That is what it truly means to be a believer in Jesus and a born again child of God. It is a real thing. Not simply something we do on a Sunday or something I tell others who I am. No it is a lifestyle. It is a new life that happens to me when I believe and ask Jesus to be my absolute, supreme and final authority. My spirit is made brand new and alive unto God.

It is a type of lifestyle that it is expressed in everything I do. It is who I am. I am a child of God. I believe in who Jesus is. I can do this because if I truly am born again than the Holy Spirit lives within me. It is the Holy Spirit who now leads me and guides me through every aspect of my life.

This is where I believe “the rubber hits the road.” It is one thing to say to someone that I am a believer in Jesus but it is quite another thing to live the lifestyle that Jesus walked and lived in. That is where the entire New Testament as well as the Old Testament comes into play.

The whole Bible tells me how I am to live my life now as a born again and renewed child of God. I do not need the sacrifices to make me right with God. No, it is Jesus who makes me right with God. However, every other word in the entire Bible is there for me to read, learn and now establish my life, my activities – all that I am and all that I do – to be God’s child.

It is only God’s Word that “...is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”(Psalm 119:115) It is God’s entire Word. This verse reveals an important truth – I am to live like a Child of God is to live just as Jesus did. Jesus lived out God’s teachings **perfectly**. Now, so am I. The scripture tells me that, “*Thy **Word** (God’s Word) is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.*” It is a metaphorical statement meant to emphasize the wisdom that comes from following God’s instruction. It will lead and direct my life – if I allow it to.

Another scripture to always keep in mind is Hebrews 4:12 which tells us, “*For the Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*” It is only God’s Word that is Truth. It is only His truth - God’s Word - that goes down deep into an individual’s heart (spirit).

Jesus told the scribe/lawyer that he was “*not far from the Kingdom.*” Unfortunately, he was **not in** the Kingdom. As we know, no one was in the Kingdom - yet. Jesus needed to die and rise again and then go and be seated on the right hand of the Father. We do not know if that scribe ever did enter the Kingdom – even though he was close.

I believe many, today, are in the same situation. They are “*not far from the Kingdom.*” Unfortunately, they **are not in** the Kingdom - yet. It is one thing to know everything we must know to be in the Kingdom. However, that is not actually being in the Kingdom. It is only when we truly accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior – not simply in word but it is all important that it is what I believe with all my heart, soul and being.

And then – most important – it must be expressed in my life. It must be who I am. I may not be perfect but when I do something that I should not have done, the Holy Spirit immediately comes and reveals it to me. I then must choose to turn from that way and repent. If I can, I must make that wrong that I did into a right that I should have done.

The most important aspect that we must truly take to heart is what Jesus said at the conclusion of his time with this scribe/lawyer. We must truly be honest with ourselves. The time is getting shorter. We may know all the right answers but that does not mean that we are “in the Kingdom.” Are we or could we also be “*...not far from the kingdom?*” or are we now **in the kingdom of God** as His child and as a joint heir with Jesus. Only your heart, as well as the Father, knows this for sure.