



**SUNDAY MORNING, AUGUST 24, 2025 | PASTOR JONATHAN BARBER**

**MESSAGE TITLE:** NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM

**MESSAGE SERIES/OCCASION:** GOSPEL OF MARK SERIES

**MESSAGE TEXT:** MARK 12:28-34

**INTRODUCTION:**

**Opening Illustration:**  
**Almost a Billionaire**

In the last few chapters of the Book of Acts, Paul goes on trial several times. He gives his defense and preaches the gospel before the Jews and priests, the Roman Chief Captain, Felix, Festus, and finally, King Agrippa. It is Agrippa that is of note this morning, because he bears this legacy with his own mouth: “almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” This was in response to Paul’s declaration of his own testimony, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Agrippa was deeply moved, and after Paul asks him, “King Agrippa, do you believe?” Agrippa replies, “Almost...”

Is there partial credit for “almost?” Tragically, no.

Our text today introduces us to another individual who “*almost*” had his life and eternity transformed. He *almost* found entrance to the kingdom

of God! Indeed, Jesus said that he was “not far from the kingdom of God.” But...

**Mark 12:28–34** <sup>28</sup>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? <sup>29</sup>And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments *is*, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: <sup>30</sup>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. <sup>31</sup>And the second *is* like, *namely* this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. <sup>32</sup>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: <sup>33</sup>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* neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. <sup>34</sup>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*.

**Proposition:** “Not far from the kingdom of God” is still further than you want to be. Seek the Lord, surrender your intellectual pride, and settle your faith in Jesus today.

The scribe in our text today did 3 things well, but he stopped just short of the 4<sup>th</sup> which was the key to his journey to the kingdom.

What did he have correct?

### 1. Curiosity about the Truth

<sup>28</sup>And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well,

He had watched in earnest as wise, intellectual men that he knew and probably respected, tried to reason with Jesus and

catch Him in His words. He knew what they were doing, but Jesus' poise and precision with His answers drew him in.

- **He was sincere**

- Was he a sceptic or sincere?
- Key word – discreetly (34)
  - It's a compound word: *having* and *mind*; it means to answer in a "having mind" way.
  - To answer understandingly, sensibly, or prudently
  - To have one's wits about you; to answer carefully and precisely
  - It does *not* mean to answer deceitfully or subtly
  - In other words, this scribe was asking a sincere question.

- **He was a seeker**

<sup>28</sup>...[he] asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?

- To come to Jesus openly and ask questions in front of all present was bold.
- The question he asked was hotly debated in their day.
  - The Pharisees and Sadducees spent much time taking the hundreds of laws and regulations that they obsessed over and categorized them and prioritized them.
  - They often argued over which commandment was the most important
- The word "first" means primary, most important, or preeminent.
  - It does not refer to numerical order in this context.
  - Consider the phrase, "firstborn among many brethren" in Romans 8:29.

- See also King David (the youngest son) referred to as the “firstborn” in Psalm 89:20-27.
- This seeker seemed genuinely interested in Jesus’ take on this debate. He wanted to know truth.
  - Seeking is good.
  - Curiosity is good.
  - Intrigue is good.
  - You are closer to the kingdom, but there is farther yet to go.

### **Application:**

## **2. Confrontation by the Truth**

<sup>29</sup>And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments *is*, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: <sup>30</sup>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. <sup>31</sup>And the second *is* like, *namely* this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

Jesus’ response is amazing as usual. Jesus takes them to 2 commands that they were all familiar with (Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18)

**Deuteronomy 6:4-5** Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: <sup>5</sup>And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

**Leviticus 19:18** Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

The first is known as the *Shema*. Jews even today quote this in prayer twice a day. This was a familiar commandment. Most of

the commands that the scribes argued over were concerning humans relating with humans. Jesus says, no, the *first* commandment concerns your relationship with God, and the *second* commandment concerns your relationships with others.

- **Love God with everything**

- Heart

- Your affections, desires and passions
    - Your center of your universe
      - What everything revolves around
      - Your orbit

- Soul

- Your emotions and feelings
    - Not robotic but relational
    - “soul-mates”

- Mind (Jesus added this one)

- Where does your mind dwell when it is in neutral? God wants to be there.
    - What you dwell upon; meditate upon.

- Strength

- Energy, effort, time, and toil
    - Laboring for God

- **Love others like you love yourself**

Loving self comes naturally. Loving others not so much. Our love one for another is to be a demonstration of our faith.

**John 13:34** A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

**John 15:12 & 17** This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. <sup>17</sup>These things I command you, that ye love one another.

**1 Thessalonians 4:9** But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

**1 Peter 1:22** Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

**1 John 3:11** For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

### Application:

The seeking scribe had a curiosity about the truth followed by a confrontation by the truth. He was “not far from the kingdom of God,” and he was inching closer. His response to Jesus answer was also a good response:

### 3. Consensus with the Truth

<sup>32</sup>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:

<sup>33</sup>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* neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

- **There was agreement**

- He had intellectual assent
- **James 2:19** Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

- **There was application**

- He knew the Scriptures that pertained to this topic and He applied them
- Those Scriptures are:

**1 Samuel 15:22** <sup>22</sup>And Samuel said, Hath the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey *is* better than sacrifice, *And* to hearken than the fat of rams.

**Psalms 51:15–17** <sup>15</sup>O Lord, open thou my lips; And my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. <sup>16</sup>For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give *it*: Thou delightest not in burnt offering. <sup>17</sup>The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

**Hosea 6:6** <sup>6</sup>For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

**Micah 6:6–8** <sup>6</sup>Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, *And* bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, With calves of a year old? <sup>7</sup>Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, *Or* with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn *for* my transgression, The fruit of my body *for* the sin of my soul? <sup>8</sup>He hath shewed thee, O man, what *is* good; And what doth the LORD require of thee, But to do justly, and to love mercy, And to walk humbly with thy God?

There are also the writings of Jeremiah and Isaiah!

- **There was acknowledgement**
  - “Well said, Master!”
  - “You have spoken the truth!”

#### **Application:**

So what did he lack? He had **curiosity**, he engaged with Jesus’ **confrontation**, he even came to some **consensus**, so what did he lack?

#### **4. Compliance to the Truth**

<sup>34</sup>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*.

What happened here?

Jesus saw that he answered discreetly (prudently, discerningly, wisely). In other words, he had the right head knowledge. What he didn’t have was heart dependence.

“Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.” What does this mean?

- **Not far from the kingdom means you’re is still outside of the kingdom.**

- There's no "close enough" when it comes to salvation.
  - **Matthew 7:21-23** Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. <sup>22</sup>Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? <sup>23</sup>And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.
- o **Not far from the kingdom means you did not act upon what you knew.**

**John 14:6** Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

**John 1:12** But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

**Romans 10:13-14** For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. <sup>14</sup>How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

**Many had already called on Jesus to save them. Many more would follow. This scribe stopped short of making Jesus *His* Savior.**

**Isaiah 45:22** Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

**Application:**

**Proposition:** “Not far from the kingdom of God” is still further than you want to be. Seek the Lord, surrender your intellectual pride, and settle your faith in Jesus today.

**Takeaways:**

**Wednesday Night Small Group’s Discussion Guide**

Text: Mark 12:28-34

1. Having just gone through a series of insincere questioning by those seeking to entrap Him, Jesus still takes the time to meaningfully engage with this scribe. Why? What do you think Jesus saw in this man?

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2. Why was this scribe (and the other religious leaders of his day) so consumed with which commandment was the most preeminent? Why was this so important to them?

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3. Jesus gave His answer from the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4-5), a passage that every Jew recited daily. Why do you suppose He chose this text to convey His message?

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4. What does it mean to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength?

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5. What are some practical indicators of where our love lies?

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6. Loving our neighbor can be hard! What are some ways that we can overcome the barriers to loving others?

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7. The scribe agreed with Jesus' answer and added that these two commandments are greater than all "whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. Was he correct? Why or why not?

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8. The scribe acknowledged Jesus' teaching as true and wise. What keeps some people from moving from agreement with truth to actually acting upon it?

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9. Jesus tells the scribe, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” What does this mean, and how might someone today be “not far” yet still miss the kingdom??

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10. How can our love for God and love for people serve as a measuring stick for spiritual maturity in the Christian life?

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**Prayer Requests, Praises, and Special Needs:**

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