

Close but not In

Mark 12:28-34

Your going to see what happens when someone thinks they're in for the score but actually comes short. Close but not in.

Video

Utah wide receiver, Kaelin Clay makes a 78 yard catch and run to the endzone and begins celebrating with his team. Oregon defenders notice the referees haven't blown the whistle or raised their hands to signal a touchdown. So Joe Walker picks up the ball and runs it all the way back for a 100 yard touchdown the other way. Kaelin Clay stopped carrying the ball inches too soon. Close but not in.

The other night I was playing a game with some friends and 3 times in a row, I came in second. My friend was quick to remind me...only winning counts. Close is not a win

But that's just a game, right?

Today we're going to meet a smart religious man who has a chance to make the ultimate touchdown: to be written in the book of life (Rev 20:15). He has encounter with Jesus...and asks the most religious question of all.

What's the greatest of all commandments? The man is pleased to agree with Jesus' answer. Yet when his is invited to enter the Kingdom of God...he does not dare. So close. But

Jesus predicted that on the day of judgement, many will say to Him, "Lord, Lord" ...but only those who do the will of the Father will enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 7:21). And God did not send His Son just so we would see Him as a great teacher. So many people striving to be good - deny God the one thing that would make all the difference.

Prayer

For those just joining us...

Jesus has been answering a series of questions from his enemies...sent by the religious council (Sanhedrin) that oversees the life of the Jews – and particularly the greatest temple ever constructed in Jerusalem. They are mad as hornets because Jesus disrupted their temple business on one of the busiest days of the year. Jesus declared final judgement on them and the Temple system. Jesus walks freely in that same temple because His enemies fear the crowds surrounding Him. We come to the fourth question of the day.

V28a Teachers of the Law

Teachers of the law or scribes are part of the Pharisee sect, according to Matthew (22:34). These are the experts in God's written law and its interpretation. They believe in the supernatural...resurrection, heaven

and angels. But they also accept traditions and rules of human origin so they have damaging the faith of the Jews beyond repair.

V28b Good Answer, Good Question

This spokesman for the scribes is most pleased that Jesus has finally stumped the narrow-minded Sadducees whom they were forced to work with in the Sanhedrin (because of their hold on the high

priesthood and their political influence). No doubt their trick question to make heaven look like chaos had been used against the Pharisees before. Jesus corrected their wrong view of heaven and exposed their lack of knowledge and lack of faith.

This scribe is smart. Why? He listens. He's not just waiting for a break in the conversation to shoot his question. He listens and reflects on Jesus answer. He judges that it is a good answer.

(Jesus' answer magnified the very words of scripture. And Jesus used a well-known passage - affirming God's promise to His people, Ex 3:6 - to bring clarity to God's plan for humanity to live beyond the grave.) A good answer

deserves respect.

The rabbinic tradition counted 613 commandments in the Torah (1st 5 books) and they knew some commands were more 'heavy' (serious consequences) than others. It was not unusual to test a rabbi with a question about which ones were the most important. The teacher's question is not leading or designed to trap. He's seeking to know the depth of Jesus' understanding of

God and Scriptures. A good religious question seeks to know what is righteous. Which commandment is the first of all (NRSV)?

V29-30 The Shema

Jesus' reference to Deut 6:4-5 is called the Shema. Every good Jew recites the Shema in the morning and the evening...even to this day. Jesus adds the phrase, "with all your mind" to the

command. As William Barclay puts it...this is a love that dominates our emotions, directs our thoughts and which is the dynamic of all our actions.

Commentator David Garland explains our **heart** is the command centre of the body...controlling feelings, desires and passions. Where commitment takes root. That's why David wrote so many songs for God and sought after Him. God had gotten deep into the control center of His life and for most of it, He sought to please, obey and trust Him. Whereas the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son...stayed at home to do the right thing, but his heart was bitter (Lk 15:29).

The **soul** is the source of vitality in our lives. Many would say – where God breathed life into. It is the motivating power that brings strength of will. The Apostle Paul loved God with all His soul...consumed to bring the Gospel far and wide to Gentiles and fellow Jews no matter what the cost (Phil 3:13, 2 Cor 11:23-29).

We think and understand with the **mind**. It directs our opinions and

judgements. Knowing God includes thinking clearly in truth about Him. We must think about our faith. And our thinking is wonderfully transformed by God's word (Rom 12:1-2) Over the centuries, believers have dedicated their highest thinking to the glory of God. From hymn writers like John Newton, Isaac Watts and Fanny Crosby to book writers like John Bunyan, Jonathan Edwards, CS Lewis, FF. Bruce, Corrie Ten Boom, Joni Ericson, J I Packer, Henry Blackaby, John Stott and Randy Alcorn.

Strength is our physical capacity and all we own. God's servant writer, James, urges us to put our faith into action. Don't just pass by someone in need with a hopeful word...use your resources to do something about it. The widow (12:41-44) Jesus will point out at the end of this chapter is an excellent example of loving God with all she had to live on.

What love is God expecting from us? We live in day where expressing love has much to do with feelings. One thoughtful Christian has helped people see that not everyone gives and receives love the same way. And that by paying attention, a person can express love effectively...whether an act of service, giving time, physical touch, words of affirmation or giving gifts. Using this idea, it would be fair to say that God's 'love language' is

obedience. For disobedience is equally detestable to Him. Eve and Adam ate from the tree of knowledge...tricked into thinking God was withholding good from them. They disobeyed and God cursed creation as a result.

⁵ But those who obey God's word truly show how completely they love him. That is how we know we are living in him. ⁶ Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did. (1 Jn 2:5-6 NLT)

And how did Jesus live? Jesus obeyed God. His life is characterized as a humble servant (Luk 22:27, Isaiah 53, Phil 2:3-8, Heb 4:15).

People spin their wheels in vain, trying to please God their own way. This is religion. There is only one God and He has made His demands clear. We show our love by putting God's will ahead of ours. He is to be trusted and obeyed. And the amazing thing is that God in turn gives us the capacity to do it by the power of His Spirit in us. And we can pray for a greater capacity to receive and give God's love. Listen to Paul's prayer for the believers in Ephesus.

Read Eph 3:16-19

God wants us to experience life to the full in Christ...by the power of His love. Jesus' answer does not end with the First Commandment. He goes the second mile...the second supreme commandment.

V31 A Second Greatest Command

Jesus brings Lev 19:18 into the shema. Jesus was the first to do so. Today, it is known as the golden rule. It takes both love for God and those He has created in His image to obey His will. A word about loving ourselves. Loving self is a reference point for how to treat others...not our focus. One well known teacher today reasons that you can't give something you don't have in you. Sounds good on the surface but loving self does not give us more of God's love. Certainly, we can honor God by taking care of our temple and soul. But let's not be driven by self-love, like the world councils. Ultimately, we find our true worth from God, not humans. Jesus set the example for what loving others is all about. Jesus, Son of God – co-equal with God, Creator and Judge: came down and humbled Himself to serve...even to death on the cross (Phil 2:5-8ff) The picture Jesus wants us to remember is washing the disciple's feet...on the very night He was betrayed. Vital teaching just before paying our ransom...being crushed for our sin, a lamb to the slaughter. Some of Jesus' last instructions to His disciples were very specific about love for others. He commanded them to, "Love each other as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12). Do you think this applies to His bride...us, the church? This brings

Jesus a joy that transfers to us so that our joy may be complete (Jn 15:11).

It's better to give than receive.

Now in any group of believers, we're going to find different personalities, giftings and levels of maturity. One person may unintentionally irritate another. We'll talk about irritating on purpose another time. Can we love someone we don't honestly feel affection for?

It's the difference between being motivated by obedience to God and being motivated by feelings. The more we know God the more we see people like Christ does. It's amazing what happens when we determine to pray for someone we don't naturally get along with. Jesus died for them and wants them to experience His love, just like you. Just think. When someone does not meet our expectations...ain't it great that God didn't wait for us to meet His expectations. (Parable of the unmerciful servant)

V32 There is no other God

The scribe is excited to commend Jesus's answer. There is no other God (Deut 4:35). Yahweh spoke the universe into existence and reached down into history to make Himself known. Any person's attempt to make a different god or change the way God relates to humanity is futile and wrongheaded. Like a piece of clay telling the master what to do.

V33 To Obey is better than Sacrifice

The scribe continues to repeat what Jesus says with slight changes...understanding instead of mind, same thing. And leaving out 'soul'. But I would like to draw your attention to the scribe's example of love's superiority. Burnt offerings sacrifices are the portion dedicated solely to God. This is the most sacred offering. Yet it is meaningless without love. The scribe has a keen understanding of what pleases God (Lev 19:18; 1 sam 15:22, Is 45:21; Hos 6:6) and Jesus commends him for it.

V34a Not far to go

Jesus has found common ground with this scribe. Even enemies may be near the kingdom. Think of the Pharisee Saul...who became the greatest missionary of the early church. Is this one ready to believe Jesus as Savior?

V34b None wanted in

The scribe had a very good religious question. And Jesus gave the perfect answer...the golden rule. Notice I said a religious question. The problem is, a person can stake their lives on following that rule...thinking they can work their way into God's grace. Religious efforts (attending church services, singing with gusto, volunteering to clean, praying when called upon), doing the right thing (being honest and fair) and giving charity to others in the

community...are all good but doesn't answer the question, "What have you done with Jesus?" The man never asked the spiritual question, "How can I be saved?" The man probably assumed he was saved by being a religious Jew.

Many people in Canada heard the Gospel about Jesus when they were young at a summer camp...beginning to believe. But came home to find a path for being a good without following Jesus as Lord and Savior. By the time they are adults, the bible is just moral stories. Even the golden rule, just a basic guideline, depending on the situation. Some continue a religious tradition. Others stop caring and become controlled by lust, pleasure, greed and pride. Certainly, there is still hope for a miracle...lest we forget the thief on the cross beside Christ.

Let us be the people that encourages the little ones, teens and adults to continue a relationship with God, with Jesus as their Savior and Lord daily. Let us pray that our children grow spiritually healthy...knowing God and sharing His love. Everything else is a distant second. God asks what have we done with His Son.

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God

did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

When Jesus said, "You're not far from the Kingdom of God." Remember this: the most respected leaders of Israel's greatest city 2000 years ago...dared not come closer to the kingdom of God. And led many astray.

Can people tell that Jesus is our Savior?

There's good people trying living by the golden rule...and think they're in. Just like that football player. The tragedy is there's no 'near' heaven location for eternity. It's either one end zone or the other. Like the team that picked up that ball on the goal line and ran it all the way back...the only other place is hell.

But let's be honest. If loving God with all our heart, soul mind and strength is what it takes to get in...we're not getting in. How can we ever offer perfect love acceptable to God?

Who will rescue us from these bodies of death?

Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 7:24).

Jesus met the perfect standard of love that God expects. And He paid the ransom for us who can't keep it.

So, lets us be a thankful people. One beggar telling another where the food is. Continuing running the race of endurance to the finish. Living not by

our might and power but by His Spirit. Let us not be silent – that people need Lord. These are God's terms. There is no other but Him. The most important spiritual question for people is **"What have you done about Jesus?"**