

MARK 12:28-34

NINE WORDS -- "THOU ART NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN"

There is a condition and position of being so close, so near...yet not in.

Do you have the assurance and confidence of being accepted by God today into His eternal life?

Year: 1703, England, town of Epworth.

Samuel and Susanna greeted the birth of their 15th, yes 15th, of 19 children.

John Wesley was destined to alter the course of the 18th century.

- Brilliant, devout and deeply religious, he followed his father into the priesthood at 25 of the Church of England.

- He soon joined brother Charles and friend George Whitfield in the "Holy Club" to visit the sick and poor and prisons. Pray and meditate 1 hour per day, study the Greek New Testament and devotion, fasting two times per week.

- Seven years later, still unconverted, he joined the 1735 G. Moravian Brethren Missionary Temperance to Georgia. He nearly died, returned, deeply troubled.

* On morning of May 24, 1738, at 35 he flipped open Bible.

- Text read Mt. 12:34, 9 words -

- He had listened to G. M. B. share simple faith in Christ, he was going to visit the local G. M. B. leader to see what they had that he hadn't found.

By good works, prayers, devotions, fasting, communion, self-denial, Christian work and Bible study.

All only led to further unconverted emptiness!

Note Christ's message to a 1st century seeker just like 18th century John Wesley!

Mk. 12:28-34 Christ said all 10 = love God and man

Augustine said "love God and do what you like!"

10 C's:

Jesus complimented this man!

Jesus was warning him too!

Close, but lost!

Within an inch of heaven, bound for hell!

He was perceptive, brave, honest and close to the truth!

The scriptures give us many who were close: but missed the life of God for definite reasons.

I. Cain --

- A. perfect dad, supernatural mom, heard of God, Eden and all.
- B. Rejected it all in hatred. 1 Jn. 3:11-15 (lack of love = death)
- C. * Are you lacking love?

- II. Esau -- Heb. 12:14-29
 - A. grandson of Abraham, heir of covenant, lost it all because of bitterness.
 - B. * Are you bitter this morning?
- III. Agrippa -- Acts 26:28
 - A. proud and skeptical. At feet of Paul said no!
 - B. * Are you proud/self-sufficient?
- IV. Felix -- Acts 24:25
 - A. found conviction of God inconvenient.
 - B. * Are you inconvenienced by God?
- V. Judas -- Lk. 22:5
 - A. greed and unbelief
 - B. So close - 3 1/2 years looked like special leader externally, but fruit of heart was not saving faith!
 - C. * Are you greedy for earthly gain?

Well, are you not far from the kingdom of God?

Wesley faced death at 35 in Georgia and had no assurance or comfort of his acceptance by God. Do you?

On May 24, 1738, John Wesley read Mk. 12:34.

Journal: "In the evening I went very unwilling to a society in Aldersgate St.... reading Luther's preface Romans. At a quarter to 9 while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed! I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation. I was assured that He had taken away my sin -- even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

Is that you this morning? It can be. History records John Wesley was converted at 35. He became a spiritual dynamo. He rode 4,500 miles per year on horseback and preached 42,000 sermons in the next 48 years. He literally turned England and frontier America to Christ.

In conclusion, five unsettling truths.

1. You can grow up in church at the knees of a Godly mom and dad and never come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.
2. You can study the Bible, theology, join the ministry, and still never embrace Jesus Christ personally.
3. You can hear clearly the grace of God as the only hope of salvation all your life and still be hoping in your own goodness!
4. You may become gospel sealed and hardened, fooling everyone, even to be preached as if in heaven at your funeral -- and wake up in hell!
5. You may be within an inch of heaven this morning. A single step makes all the difference -- gangway plane/ship, either on board or not. Has God accepted you? Are you sure?