

Are We There Yet (in the Kingdom of God)?

- Hey mom/dad, there yet? When heard? Parents, I know. Favor: whether kids grown or little, raise hands. Our FL trip (before left WI; then in FL). Universal parenting experience for fam vacas.
- Can't help but think re that when I look at today's Gos, bec this man, tchr/law basically asks J: there yet? He's on journey; wants be in kngdm/God; wants have rel w/God. So asks J: what's most imp com; what I need do; what God want from me? J answers by summrzng 10 Coms. But unfortunately instead realizing 'I need Sav,' this man thinks, 'Yeah, I can do that. And if I do that, will that get me in? There yet?' But J: No; not far from kngdm/God; but not there yet.
- I think we need reflect on this today: why wasn't he there yet? What take get him there? And what re us? Where are we on journey toward kngdm/God; we there yet; what'll take get us there? We've got ask same bsc qustn kids ask parnts on vaca, & this man asks J here on his spiritual journey: there yet?
- One thing need undrstnd re this man: diff from other tchrs/law. Actly genuinly intrstd in J' tchns. Our les takes place mid Mk 12; earlier in ch, J just bombrdd w/trick qustns from Jewish ldrs who just want trap J in words. E.g.: pay taxes to Caesar? J: to Caesar/God. Then: woman, diff husbs bec widowed many times; in hvn, whose wife? Not going be marg in hvn as you know it. So, just trying trick J. But not this guy: he genuinly wants know God's will for his life. So asks J: **vs. 28b**. I want know, bec I want be in kngdm/God; and I want know if I'm there yet.
- But instead starting w/com, J: **vs. 29**. Doesn't start with com at all; starts w/words from 1st Les, Dt 6; basically mini creed; almost like Jewish pldg/allgnc. This little phrase, "Hear," so imp: recited daily at temple, and faithful Jews'd include this in prayers every morn/eve. So this where J starts, w/this super famlr psg. You want know God's will? Let's start w/this:
- 1st word: hear/listen. J: open ears what God has say. In every other wrld relgn, & in natural relgn of our sinful hrts, what's always 1st word? DO: this/that; here's what have do please God. If do this: hpy/angry. That's way we natrly think re relgn: what I need do? How this man thinks (what do?)! But J doesn't start w/do; starts w/hear/listen, bec God/Bbl has msg wants you hear. That msg: countrintv; stands in contrast to way we by nature think re relgn. God wants you hear his grace/love; focus first on who he is, what he's done for you. Only then: move on to what God wants you do, how wants you live. But can't start w/do; start w/hear, listen.
- So J: Hear, OUR God. He's our God! We have personal rel w/him. He's not angry judge, detached diety; loving Father; OUR God, who loves us. Why love us? That's big question! Think: why should God love us? Bec smthng we've done? Well, just think what you've done; think of evil thoughts, wicked words, sinful actions. Ask self, why should God love me? Truth is: shouldn't! We've given him no reason to love us; there's nothing in us that's inherently loveable. But msg God wants you hear: he loves you anyway; he just does! From depths/hrt, God loves us, despite million reasons we give him not to. It's just who God is: he's our God.
- So, hear...one. This wk: VBS here at ch; over 80 students, awesome! In lessons, focused on character traits of God – how God is: one (one true God; all other gods, false); almighty (can do anythng; evthng does, in love for us); holy/sinless/perfect; and loving (sent his Son JC be our Sav). We focused on who God is, what he's done for us. That's Gos. And that's where J begins when answers this man's question: what's most imp com. J: **Hear...one**. Starts w/Gos.
- But from there, J lays out very tall order. **Vs. 30-31b**. Think re that: love Lord w/every fiber of being, perfly, compltly, always, w/o fail. And, on top that, put that perf love for God into practice in daily life by lovng evone around you equally perfly, compltly, always, w/o fail. That's what God demands! See what J doing here? Summarzng 10 Coms into 1st table & 2nd. 1st table/section: re love for Lord (no other gods, don't misuse, remem Sab). 2nd table, rest coms, re love for neighbor (honor parents, authority; don't murder/hate; don't adultery; steal; slander; covet) – all this has do w/ppl around you. So what J saying here is: God wants you obey 10 Coms perfly! That's what he expects!

- Which brings us to very imp fork/road. 2 paths can take. On 1st path, you say: yeah, I can do that; can follow God's coms; and I think God's going be pretty happy w/my efforts; it's not going be perf, but that's fine. 1st path focuses on self, and that's path this tchr/law took. Remem? "Yeah, J, keeping these coms even more imp than sacrfcfs. I can do that for you. So now have I made it; am I there yet?" What J say? Not far from kngdm/God, but not there yet. And evone: shocked. But J was teaching: no one who follows 1st path will ever make into kngdm/God, bec none us can keep God's coms perfly; impssbl. And if we keep focusing on selves, then we'll always be not far, but not there.
- So here's 2nd path at this fork/road, the path J wants us follow. When J says: love Lord/God perfly & neighbor perfly, he wants us respond by saying: whoa, I can't do that! Haven't done that! God, have mercy on me, a sinner; mercy, bec I can't do this on own; I need you, your forgvnss/grace. And that's exactly where J wants you be, bec now, focusing not on self, but on J. And that is point this entire lesson; that's what J trying teach this man and us: when you are confronted w/God's holy law (and reality you can't keep God's holy law), you need realize that you need J!
- When J spoke these words: Tues of HW. Means in few short days, J'd face cross, be tortured to death, to take away sins/wrld. Did that for us. J: perfect fulfillmnt of law/love. J loved Lord perfly: obeyed God's will & came down from hvn to earth to accomplish God's plan to save us. Also loved his neighbor perfly, you/me: faced death on cross for us, to save us, bec loves us! Think re J: fighting temptn entire life; in Gard/Geth praying for strength; willingly allowing self be arrested/crucified. Did that for us! All love! Loved God perfly; loved us perfly. And nowhere is that more clearly seen than when J willingly gave life for us on cross. And now, bec/J, all our sins, all times we've not loved Lord or neighbor – they're all forgiven, forever! God has washed them away. This: truth God wants you hear/bel. And this is path that leads to kngdm/God. That is what God wants you do. He knows you can't keep his law, but he wants you bel in one who did: in holy Son J! J takes away all your sin, and in exchange gives you his rightsnss, to bring you into God's kngdm – not just close, not just "not far," but actually there!
- So bel in J, dear friends! I know many you St. John's members; many you joining us today from community as honored guests. What I'm saying all you: J has done everything to save you. Bel in him. Trust in him. Trust in what he's done for you. Not only die on cross; also rose from dead; has power over death. And smday, he's going raise you from dead & bring to hvn evone who bels in him as their Sav. So trust in J! That's right path to take.
- This tchr/law basically asked J: am I there yet? J: no, not yet. I don't want that for you. I want you to know what J's done for you and how you can have true peace in kingdm/God. If you don't know J as Sav, you're kinda like traveller driving around, don't know where going; wondering: there yet? And maybe you're not far, but you're definitely not there. But when you see your sin&Sav – when you know/bel that Xp J has taken away your sins on cross and when put trust in him – then you're there! Then in kngdm! That's Xianity. So are we there yet? Through J we are. Thanks be to God!

Mark 12:28-34

²⁸ One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

²⁹ "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

³² "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. ³³ To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

³⁴ When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.