

Not Far From the Kingdom

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Date: 23 January 2022

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! Mark chapter 12, I'm going to begin reading in verse 28. Look there with me, Mark chapter 12, verse 28. And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another. And seeing that he answered all of them well, asked him, Which commandment is most important of all? Jesus answered, The most important is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said to him, You are right, teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him.

[1 : 19] And to love the Lord, or love him with all your heart, and with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

And when Jesus saw that he answered him wisely, he said to him, You are not far from the kingdom. And after that, no one dared ask him any more questions.

May God bless the hearing and the preaching of his word. May God bless the hearing and the gospel. Though standing just four feet tall, Charles Steinmetz was often referred to as the little giant.

Steinmetz, a German-born engineer who immigrated to the United States in 1888, was an accomplished engineer. He spent the bulk of his career working at the electrical powerhouse General Electric and became well-known among the other giants of science of his day, the men like Einstein and Tesla and Edison.

But perhaps one story captures his genius most powerfully. Early in the 1900s, one of Henry Ford's gigantic generators was down in Dearborn, Michigan, and his team of engineers had been working on the problem, but they were baffled.

[2 : 46] They simply could not get this generator to work properly, so they called Mr. Steinmetz for help. After arriving, Steinmetz went to work.

Refusing help from any one of their engineers, he asked only for a notebook, a pencil, and a cot. He spent two days listening to the generator and making all sorts of notes in his notebook.

And on the second night, he asked for a ladder. He climbed the ladder, took a piece of chalk out of his pocket, and wrote a large X on one particular component of the generator.

He told Ford's engineers, if they take apart that component, they will find the problem. Henry Ford was thrilled.

Henry Ford was thrilled. They could get back to business, back to making cars. A few days later, though, he received a bill from Mr. Steinmetz for \$10,000.

[3 : 56] Now, this is in the early 1900s, so you can imagine that was quite a bill. And Ford, who was obviously flustered by the bill, returned the bill to Steinmetz with a request for him to itemize it.

A few days later, he received the itemized bill, which read, making one chalk mark, \$1. Knowing where to put it, \$9,999.

There's your bill. Ford paid the bill. Doesn't matter what you know if you don't know where to put the X.

In a similar way, in our text this morning, one of the scribes comes forward to see if Jesus Christ knows where to put the X. As we've seen, it's a day filled with questions.

We've rehearsed that. All these questions coming at our Lord, and right after Jesus answers the Sadducees, one of the scribes comes alone, comes up alone to ask his question. Now, the scribes, as their name implies, are a group of people who give themselves to studying the law of God.

[5 : 04] They give themselves to carefully studying it, interpreting it, and teaching it in the synagogue. Now, the law in the Old Testament contains 613 commands.

That's a lot. So they can't all be equal. One of the things the scribes would often argue about is which commandments were lighter or heavier, which commandments were of lesser importance, which commandments were of greater importance, even which commandment was greatest of all. So when a new rabbi came to town, or a new rabbi stepped into the pulpit at a local synagogue, it was not uncommon for a scribe to ask him, what is the law really about?

What is most important? If you took up a piece of chalk, where would you write the X in the law of God?

And this is the very question one of the scribes comes to ask Jesus. Look in 28. He comes up. He hears them disputing, seeing that they answered them well. He says, which commandment is most important of all?

[6 : 13] Unlike the other questions of the day, the scribe doesn't seem to be insincere. He seems different. He comes up. He hears how Jesus answers.

He sees how he answers them well, and Jesus answers him directly. And how he answers him pleases the scribe and perplexes him. In a word, Jesus says, all who truly love God leave everything to follow Jesus.

All who truly love God leave everything to follow Jesus. So we're going to break this out three points. The first is love God above all. We're going to study Jesus' answer.

What is he saying? In answering his question, Jesus confirms that the most important commandment is to love God above all. Look at verse 29. The most important is, hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is a question Jesus is prepared to answer. Jesus is not baffled at all by any question, but let alone this one.

[7 : 17] He's quoting Deuteronomy 6, 4 through 5. Named after the Hebrew word, to hear, this scripture is often referred to by Jews as the Shema. It's a scripture devoted Jews recited every morning and every evening.

It's a scripture that many wear a tiny leather box on their forehead or wrist to see while they are praying. And many Jews would hang it in their house. Perhaps like we hang, choose whom you will serve this day on your way out of the house or something like that.

It was a vital summary of what they believe about God. Perhaps like the Lord's Prayer. For us, it was what they need to hear every day more than anything else.

And upholding this command, Jesus is saying several things. He's saying, the Lord is greater than all. The Lord is greater than all. The Lord is greater than all, greater than everything else.

The Lord our God, that should be all caps, the Lord is one. It's a way of saying, there is one God above all, and the one God above all is our Lord.

[8 : 27] Isaiah 45, 5 says, I am the Lord, there is no other. Besides me, there is no God. For people surround, for people sojourning among nations with different gods, this was a profoundly important, stabilizing, locating statement.

The Lord is greater than all. It's no less true today. Even though our idols aren't made of wood, none of them stand up to the Lord.

So the Lord is greater than all. The Lord is to be loved above all. This flows naturally. If the Lord is greater than all, He is to be loved above all. So Jesus says, you should love the Lord you've got with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

We're to love Him with all of every facet of who we are. Now, interestingly, the word with in English kind of brings this idea of means, like that we're to love the God through or with the help of our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

So we're going to, the love for God is going to pass through those things and we're going to love Him through those things. And of course we are, right? We're loving through our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

[9 : 44] But the word more accurately refers to source here. We're to love God from our heart. Love Him from our soul, from our mind, from our strength.

The love for God doesn't pass through these places within us. It starts there. Interestingly, it moves progressively out, beginning in our hearts, our feelings, our thoughts, the core of who we are.

Some people say the control center of who we are. That's where the love of God starts. It starts in our hearts and it moves into our soul, our life, our physical energy. When Hebrew authors talk about soul, they're not talking about this kind of immaterial, mysterious thing.

He's talking about our life. The essence of our embodied existence is offered up to the Lord. Then our mind, our understanding, we take every thought, cab to make it obedient to the Lord and our will, our strength, our talents, our capabilities, all we're able to do in our power.

like many tributaries forming to form, coming together to form a gushing river. Our love for God comes from every facet of who we are, joins up into this wonderful stream of love and worship of God.

[11 : 06] So it's got to come from everywhere. But then he says, we got to love God with all of every facet of who we are. So it's got to come from everywhere and it must remain undiluted.

All your heart. So there's an undivided loyalty from us that God demands anything less is unacceptable. Any alloy, any mixture is unacceptable.

He demands all. Now we might think, that's crazy, but how many of you would marry a spouse that ran around one night a week? Nor would the Lord.

But notice one more thing. He says, He doesn't say the first and greatest commandment is to fear the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. He doesn't say the first greatest commandment is to serve the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

He doesn't say the first great commandment is to obey the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength. He says, it's to love. What does it mean to love God? But to treasure Him, to honor Him, to adore Him, to desire Him, to delight in Him, and that's just astounding to me.

[12 : 32] God's not gathering a group of people who do the right thing, That's not what Jesus came for. He came for a group of people who love the right things. Now, there's at least two things this means.

How do you obey this command? I mean, that would just, besides fall at your feet and say mercy. On the one hand, this command warns us that what we think we love may not actually be what we love most.

What we think we love most may not actually be what we love most. I was reading recently about a Russian film. I don't watch many Russian films in my free time, but I was reading about this Russian film called The Stalker.

Tells the story of three men on a journey. The professor, the writer, sounds like a game of Clue, you know? The professor, the writer, and the stalker.

Clearly, you guys don't play Clue. But the professor, the writer, and the stalker. The stalker is leading the other two men to a place he calls, or called in the movie, The Room.

[13 : 38] So the professor, the writer, and the stalker, they're going to this place called The Room. And the stalker is leading them. He promises them that the room will give them their heart's desire. The room will make all their dreams come true.

The room will secure exactly what you want. You know, sign-ups are in the back. I mean, we'd all go, right? I want to go to that room. The stalker keeps leading them, and the others keep eagerly following.

They want their dreams to come true. That's right. Isn't that what we want? But as they get closer, they begin to get cold feet. They stand outside, just outside the room.

The stalker says, this is the most important moment of your life. Your innermost wish will be made true here. You will now have exactly what you want.

But the professor and the writer asks, what if I don't know what I really want? The stalker says, that's for the room to decide. The room reveals all.

[14 : 43] What you get is not what you think you want, but what you most deeply wish for. Would you enter?

I don't think so. We're all too painfully aware of the difference between what we think we want most and what we most deeply want.

We think we want to love God, but we're ready to throw in the towel when that promotion passes us by. We think we want to serve God, but we throw in the towel when the only opportunities extended to us are not what we imagined.

We think we want to fear God, but our deepest anxieties surface when our children misstep, or when we find out someone doesn't like us, or when we don't get the respect we think we deserve. We're so vulnerable to saying we love God, but really wanting peace, money, relationships, health, success, comfort more than Him. And so trying to obey this command is going to come up against that.

[15 : 59] On the other hand, this command invites us to continually reorder our loves until what we love most is God. I'm going to introduce you to St. Augustine, who famously said this.

Now there's a lot of love in this quote, but I think it's very, very helpful. He says, You don't have to master everything he's saying.

I think the most important thing is we're called to love in right order. So much of life, the friction, is disordered love.

We've got to love God above all, all our hearts, soul, mind, and strength. We're called to love our neighbor, our family, our calling, but we must love them in the right order.

And because we're sinners, this command is an invitation to continually reorder our loves. I commend you, or I encourage you to do this daily.

[17 : 23] That's what's going on in the Lord's Prayer. Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors. Search me and know me. See if there's any unclean way in me, lead me in the way everlasting.

Psalms 139. But this should also be done in painful seasons in a more extended time. Corrie ten Boom, the famous survivor of the Nazi death camps, said, I've learned that we must hold everything loosely, because when I grip it tightly, it hurts when the Father pries my fingers loose and takes it from me.

When it hurts bad, God is telling you, it's time to reorder love.

Because you've begun to hold something too tightly and love something too much. Now, if you put that to work, that'll change your life.

100% satisfaction guaranteed. Point two, love your neighbor as yourself. Love your neighbor as yourself. So love God above all. Love your neighbor as yourself.

[18 : 34] Jesus continues and goes beyond what the scribe asked and adds the second most important commandment. He says, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There's no other commandment greater than these.

Again, Jesus is quoting the Old Testament. He's quoting the law. And, you know, in so many ways, he's helping us see that, you know, he's not a revolutionary. He's a reformer. He's not coming to throw everything away in the Old Testament.

He's coming to reform it, to bring it to a proper understanding and appreciation. So he's quoting Leviticus 19, 18. And in joining this commandment and saying, love God above all and love your neighbor as yourself.

God is, he's saying, you must not stop at loving God. Confronting a lot of the scribal type of worship, which pulls away from society into places where you can't get mixed up with people that are going to mess up your love for God.

He's saying, you must love God and love your neighbor. Love for God and love for others is connected. You cannot love God rightly if you don't love your neighbor. You cannot love your neighbor rightly if you do not love God.

[19 : 41] So love your neighbor as yourself. In that simple command, Jesus tells us who we are to love and how we are to love him. Who we love?

Our neighbor. Now, philosophy of life 101 says, you scratch my back, I scratch your back. You be nice to me, I'll be nice to you.

You wrong me, I'll wrong me. You love me, I'll love you. In fact, Benjamin Franklin, I read this recently. He encourages you as soon as you move into a neighborhood to ask your neighbor for some help.

Because immediately, it brings in this dependent relationship. Otherwise, you go years and you're like, man, I really need that saw. I know he's got 15 over there, but I'm not going to ask him. You know, I'm not going to go over that line. You miss out.

That was a side note. So philosophy of life 101 is, do you scratch my back, I scratch your back. But all throughout the gospel of Mark, Jesus has been turning that on his head. He has not loved those who love him.

[20 : 39] He's not loved those who we think should be on the inside. The very people who profess to love him, he's walked right past. And Jesus has gone after those who don't seem to love him at all. The roughneck disciples, the tax collector, the demoniac, the Gentile woman, and so on and so on and so on.

And in Matthew, Jesus commands us to do the same thing. Matthew 5, 43-44, you have heard it said that you shall love your neighbor, hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Now, that's not saying anything different than what he's saying in Mark. If you truly understand what love your neighbor means, no one's excluded. It's natural and easy to love certain people.

And Jesus understands that it's natural and easy to love your friends. Matthew 5, 46, for if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? For even tax collectors do the same. Tax collectors were the bottom of the barrel.

The most ungodly and unlovely people in society. But they love their friends. Whip-dee-doo. It's natural and easy to love your family. As the wicked Ben Wade says in the movie 310 to Yuma, as he throws somebody off a ledge, even bad men love their mama.

[21 : 51] Don't talk about anybody's mama, even a bad man's mama. It's natural to love your family. But who we call love? Who's our neighbor? Whoever needs love, even when that includes our enemy.

So how are we to love them? Call to love them as we love ourselves. Philosophy 101. Philosophy of life 101. You scratch my back, I'll scratch your back. That works until your back needs scratching and there's no one around who owes you something.

So you move to a new town that's broken. That's why we're called to love others as we love ourselves. Now notice, Jesus does not say, love your neighbor more than yourself.

Jesus is not saying, let others walk all over you. Jesus is not saying, become a doormat. He does not say, let your life be at the beck and call of someone else.

Don't love your neighbor more than yourself. But notice, Jesus says, love yourself more than your neighbor. If we had a tendency to make an error in this century, this generation, it's this one.

[23 : 02] I saw a meme recently that sums it up well. You cannot pour from an empty cup. Take care of yourself first. Is that right? I don't think so.

Robert Gundry says, love for God isn't the standard for loving your neighbor, so it's not total allegiance such that they walk all over you. For the command to love God outranks the command to love your neighbor.

But, listen, loving yourself doesn't outrank loving your neighbor. So don't love yourself more. In fact, love for God has a goal.

2 Corinthians 5.14 says, love for God has a goal. That stream of love to God has a goal, not of pampering and preparing a nice little cozy life for ourselves, but of dying to ourselves.

I love this verse, the love of Christ in control. Because we concluded this, that one has died for all, therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

[24 : 02] So love has a goal. And so, instead of love your neighbor more than yourself, or love yourself more than your neighbor, Jesus says, love your neighbor as yourself.

He's applying the golden rule to love. Do unto others you'd have them do unto you. This command is brilliant.

Now, the most famous parable Jesus ever spoke is an explanation of this very command. Now, you remember that story in Luke 10. The lawyer comes up and says, what is the greatest commandment? Jesus says, love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.

And the lawyer says, ha, ha, ha. Who is my neighbor? And Jesus tells him the good parable of the good Samaritan. Now, often we read this story like we're called to be good Samaritans. We read it like we're walking down the road, and we see someone in need, and we decide, should we help them?

Oh, yeah. We want to be unlike the religious guys who do not help. We want to be like the guys who come in to help. That's often the way we read it. But Jesus does not tell the story that way. [25 : 12] Now, you've got to unstick some things to hear this. Because Jesus reverses the expected roles and sets the reverse trap for this lawyer. Jesus says, a Jewish man is lying on the road, dying.

He's walking down from worship at the temple in Jerusalem. The track was dangerous. He was beaten and robbed. First comes a priest. So a Jewish man is down on the road. First comes a priest. Then comes a Levite.

And just when you expect him to say, then comes an ordinary Jew that was up at the temple with him. He says, a Samaritan. Do you see?

It's not the Jewish man who comes upon a needy Samaritan. It's a Samaritan who comes upon a needy Jew. Now, do you understand what's going on?

It's not a Jewish man who comes upon a needy Samaritan. So it's not our first interpretation of this story. It's a Samaritan who comes upon a needy Jew. Now, Jews and Samaritans hated each other. It was legendary.

[26 : 10] More than I hate the Gators. And what does this dying Jew want from this Samaritan? Help! Help!

He doesn't care that it's a Samaritan. He doesn't care that it's someone he hates. He just wants help. To the surprise of everyone, the Samaritan stops and helps. Do you see how different the story is?

Jesus pictures you not the one who is helping, but the one who's being helped in a way you would like to be helped. With this story, Jesus corners a lawyer.

He must answer Jesus' question not with who he would help, but who he would like to help him, which is anybody.

Anybody. If you're on the side of the road, you're not taking applications. You're saying, help me.

[27 : 15] So who's your neighbor? Anyone who needs help. How are we called to love them? By showing them the same undeserved kindness we'd want for ourselves.

To love them as we love ourselves. On the one hand, this command pushes us not to scratch the backs of those who scratch our backs.

Now we've been doing a lot of back scratching today, but it pushes us not to scratch the backs of those who scratch our backs. That's not love. That's not undeserved kindness.

That's an exchange. That's a trade. And that's often the only love we do. What the scripture is saying, don't limit your love to those who deserve it.

Now that may be somebody whose life you see is all jacked up because they've made bad decisions. And you're like, I'm not giving them anything else.

[28 : 17] Well then, you're not loving anymore. You're making an exchange. But it can be a difficult co-worker. I'm going to take the score today to see whether I'm going to treat them kindly.

An overbearing parent. An obnoxious sibling. A spouse. You know, in certain areas we play score with our spouse so much that love is thrown out the window. And we only give them love when they deserve it.

So it pushes us not to play that game. To unhinge our love from so many of these things. On the other hand, this command pushes us not to scratch their backs when it wouldn't help them.

We're supposed to love our neighbor as ourselves. There's sometimes you don't scratch. You don't pour a drink for an alcoholic. You don't buy a box of donuts for a glutton. It's not loving.

The only limit to love is that which would be unloving. Because it's not the way we would love ourselves. We're called to love our neighbor as ourselves.

[29 : 24] Now, obviously there's so much in that command that I didn't get to. But there's a few attempts. Point three, follow Jesus. Point three, follow Jesus.

The scribe is impressed with Jesus' answer. This guy gets it. I mean, he's amazed by Jesus. The scribes have been asking questions of Jesus all along.

Mark 1, who can forgive sins but God? Who, or that was actually Mark 2. Who, and Mark 2 also, who, why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? Later on, why do your disciples not walk by the tradition of the elders?

Or later on again, by what authority do you do these things? Who gave you authority to do them? And this question is the culmination of them all. This is the scribe's greatest question.

This question for a scribe is the big test to see whether Jesus is a capital T teacher. Which commandments, most of all? The response of Jesus is brilliant. It sums up the Ten Commandments in a single command.

[30 : 29] All that we're commanded to do for God and all that we're commanded to do for others. And the scribe is amazed. Look at it. He's just fallen all over himself. You are right, teacher. You have truly said. And he is the one.

There is no other. And to love him all over your heart and with all your understanding, all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself is much more than all the whole burnt offerings and the sacrifice. The scribe is amazed. He commends to me.

He says, teacher. All the other questions are teacher before the answer. This is a question after as a commendation. I pronounce you teacher as one of the scribes.

He acknowledges his wisdom and understanding. He says, you're right. Better translation is, whoa! Beautifully said. Wonderfully. The scribe rejoices and repeats it back to him.

You're right. You truly said all this. No God besides you. All this is much loving God, much more than all the burnt offerings and the sacrifices. And the scene concludes with Jesus' response back to him.

[31 : 30] Look at verse 34. He says, when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, you're not far from the kingdom. What?

What's the correlation, Lord? Must have been a very perplexing statement for this scribe. One of the teachers.

The scribe has been the one evaluating Jesus. But Jesus alerts him. I'm the one evaluating you. Jesus tells him he's not far.

I think what he means is that you're not far, not because of your learning, not because of your obedient lifestyle, not because you've studied the book of the law. You're not far because you understand that the heart of the law is not sacrifice, but love.

So he says love is greater than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. He sees so much. But Jesus tells him, you are still far.

[32 : 43] You're not far. You're not far. But you're still far enough. Because he fails to see who's standing right in front of him.

The secret of the kingdom is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's what Jesus came to do. The secret of the kingdom is that Jesus is a long-awaited king who is ushering in a new kingdom.

In the same way, at the transfer of power in Rome, officials were sent throughout the empire to announce the good news. Mark is saying Jesus has come announcing good news of a new king and a new kingdom.

While this must be most perplexing to describe Jesus in inviting him to come and leave everything to follow him. So in this word, he's saying you are not far, but you're far enough away that you must bow down to Jesus to come.

You know, we've mentioned throughout the gospel of Mark, there's 13 times there are these people that are outside the camp under the shadow of death. People that are not a part of Israel that God brings in in these dramatic encounters while they're alone.

[33 : 54] Blind Bartimaeus. The man with stumbling speech. Whatever. All of them, demoniac. All these profound encounters. And it seems like text saying, will this scribe be one?

Will this one be the last one? Though he appears to be on the inside and among the people of Israel, Jesus said he is on the outside, but Jesus invites him to come. Now, in 1703, the great evangelist, John Wesley, was born.

Evangelist in England. He was son of a preacher. Had a good upbringing with a devoted mother and father. He went to Oxford for school. That's where all the hoity-toity did when they were over there. He went on to teach there.

He was ordained as a priest in the Church of England before he was converted. You know, there's some order issues there. When he returned to Oxford after becoming a priest, he joined a group of undergraduates, unkindly nicknamed as the Holy Club.

Maybe the equivalent of the Holy Rollers. They included his brother, Charles Wesley, who wrote And Can It Be? Scores of other songs I'm not remembering right now.

[35 : 06] George Whitefield and others. The guys who would go on to start Great Awakening. Though still not yet converted, John devoted himself with these men to prayer, scripture reading,

fasting twice a week, visiting prisons, leading Bible studies, all these types of things.

He imagined himself to be a Christian. In 1735, he accepted an invitation to preach the gospel in the New Land, in Georgia, to the Indians. It was a total disaster.

He, in his word, he said, I failed as a missionary, struggling under difficult conditions and nearly dying. When he returned to London, or to England, he wrote in his journal, I went to America to convert the Indians, but oh Lord, who shall convert me?

Not all was lost because in his travels, he encountered some German Moravian Christians whose simple faith in Christ made a deep impression on him. When he returned home, he sought out Moravian leaders in London and became more and more convinced of his unbelief, more and more convinced of his unbelief and his need to turn to faith in Jesus.

And on the morning of May 24, 1738, Wesley opened his Bible at random, something Mr. Taylor told us not to do this morning, and his eyes randomly fell on this very verse.

[36 : 26] You are not far from the kingdom. Wesley resolved that before the end of the day, he would cross that invisible line into the kingdom of God.

In his journal, I quote we have for you, he says, In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society at Aldersgate Street, a meeting, a gathering, where one was reading Luther's preface to the epistle to the Romans, the letter to the Romans.

About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warm. I felt I did trust Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

The rest is history. The rest is history. But how about you? Have you crossed that invisible line into the kingdom?

Have you placed your trust in Jesus Christ? Perhaps like the scribe, you've learned much about the things of God. Perhaps you've grown up in church.

[37 : 47] Perhaps you've read your Bible and prayed every day. Perhaps you've tried to obey God. Perhaps you've memorized Scripture. That's great. That gets you not far.

I mean, that's what he's trying to say. It gets you not far, but not far enough. So it does get you close. It gets you not far, but it does not get you not far enough.

It does not get you close. Have you turned to Jesus Christ? Do you know the peace that surpasses understanding? Do you know the blood that takes away our sins? Do you know that you are no longer not far from the kingdom of God, but that you have been brought near?

If you do not know, Scriptures say don't let the devil keep you away. Don't let the pride of admitting that you don't have this figured out keep you away. Don't let the things of this world keep you away. Let all who hear these words, hear the words that you are not far. Well done. You are in church.

You're on a Sunday morning. There's so many things Jesus could have said about us this morning. [38 : 55] He could have said, you are far. You are dead. You are a lost cause. You've messed it up so many times. I'm done with you. But Jesus said, you're not far.

And he would say to us, gathered in the assembly of the church, we are not far, but we're not far enough if we don't come and turn to Jesus Christ. I just think this just begs us to search our hearts to see if we've really laid it down completely to Jesus.

Because the religious clothing is so dangerous and can keep you not far when you need to be brought near.

So I proclaim to you, appeal to you, if you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, believe that God raised him from the dead, that he is the plan for the world, that he was sent forth, that he might be a propitiation, that he might satisfy the wrath of God that was due for your sin, you will be saved.

You will pass that invisible line into the kingdom of God, that God is gathering from every nation, tribe, tongue, and people. All who truly love God leave everything to follow Jesus.

[40 : 26] Let us pray. Father in heaven, thank you for these few minutes. Thank you for the privilege of sitting under your word. Lord, we pray.

God, for all who are still not far from the kingdom, Lord, we thank you and praise you for the free offer of the gospel that we can come to you. For all those who have been brought near, fill our hearts with the assurance that is the essence of faith.

Lord, root us and ground us in these things and mark our lives in deep and profound ways of love for God, love for others, a life that only makes sense for someone who's thrown it all away to follow

Jesus Christ.

We thank you. We praise you. In Jesus' name. Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com. Thank you. you