

NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM

by Carl McMurray

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. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the 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 wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.
(Mark 12:32-34 ESV)

I thought I might freeze to death one midnight in January when I got off a train in Russia at the wrong stop and found myself in the middle of a dark wilderness watching my train accelerate away from me into the night. But, I didn't. There is a simple, but big difference between freezing to death and not.

The scribe in the above text might have been an upstanding fellow since Jesus complimented him and seemingly commended his answer. But, when it came to the kingdom of God, being "not far" from it is still not in it. It's a simple but big difference.

I've known people over the years who were good people, "give you the shirt off their back" people. People who recommended the church to friends. People who attended worship regularly, including seeking out a place to worship when they were traveling. Sometime they were people who put extra cash in the plate when there was a special need or showed up to volunteer when there was a call for workers to turn out and give a hand with some project for the church or another Christian. They were just great people, but they had only one problem. These people that I'm thinking about were not Christians themselves. They had never obeyed the Lord and been baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. They were "not far" from the kingdom, which in plain English means, they were not in it! They were still in a lost condition, outside of Christ. For all their good works they still had not humbled themselves to be obedient to God's word.

The scribe in the text above at least had a good reason why "not far from" was as close as he could get to the kingdom. You see, the kingdom of God had not been established on earth yet. That was to come after Jesus' death and resurrection. "Not far from" was as close as he could get at that time. This is not the case for you and I though. The kingdom of God has come. Terms of entrance have been arranged and preached. There is really no reason to just get close to the kingdom anymore. We can be transferred out of the power of darkness and into the kingdom of Jesus, today, by simple obedience and faith. There is a simple, but big difference between being "not far from" the kingdom and being in it. It is the difference between being lost and saved.