

August 22, 2004
AM Service
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

"You are not far from the Kingdom of God."
Mark 12:28-34 NLT

28 One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the discussion. He realized that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

29 Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. 30 And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' 31 The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."

32 The teacher of religious law replied, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth by saying that there is only one God and no other. 33 And I know it is important to love him with all my heart and all my understanding and all my strength, and to love my neighbors as myself. This is more important than to offer all of the burnt offerings and sacrifices required in the law."

34 Realizing this man's understanding, Jesus said to him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." And after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Lost in Colorado:

I had the wonderful opportunity several years ago to attend a seminar / retreat in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The retreat grounds were surrounded with a beautiful landscape including golden / reddish colored mountains. There were five of us that went, I was with two other men and two ladies we were all friends. One of the guys would get up early every morning and go "hiking" to find an inspirational spot to do his devotions.

One morning he returned very excited about a waterfall he had discovered deep in the woods. He was anxious to take us there for all to see. He took the other man in our group to see it at a time the rest of us couldn't go, then made arrangements to take all of us one afternoon when our seminar activities for the day were over.

On that afternoon we followed these two men on a trail through some mountain valleys, over a creek and into a more wooded area. As we got deeper into the woods we discovered something they had not counted on. Since their last journey to the waterfall a snowfall had caused several small trees and branches from some larger trees to fall and cover the trail. This caused us to not only lose the trail to the waterfall, but soon we were lost and couldn't find the main trail back home either.

Since they had been there before the two men told us, me and the two ladies, to stay put. They would go off to try and locate the main trail. At first we could hear them talking and we even called out to each other and we could also hear the sound of crackling branches under their feet. But after awhile the noise faded and even if we called out to them there was no reply.

As time passed and the sun began to set, panic was starting to creep into ...the ladies... in one of the ladies in particular...okay me too a little, but each time I felt it I suppressed it by not allowing myself to dwell on it. I tried to use my wit to get us laughing and keep “them” calm. I asked them if they remembered how on the first day of the seminar we were warned to “not go off into the woods alone, especially without telling anyone?” (I’m not sure how much that helped them, but I reminded them of it.). And suggested that “I bet that story they told us about two young girls getting lost and not being able to be found for several days was probably just made up to scare us ... I guess that didn’t work, huh?”

Finally we heard out two friends calling out to us, “Where are you?” And we began to call out to them, “Over here!” They said, “Keep talking so we can find you.” When they got to where we were they said that they were able to get up on higher ground and could see where the main trail was. They couldn’t get to it from where they were but they could see it. And my one friend who had come to know the area pretty well could now get us back on the trail and out of the woods. To our surprise, although we had been lost, we had been very close to the trail all along!

Is it possible to be close to the trail home and still be lost? Not just in the great outdoors but in our search for God too, without someone who knows the way we will never make it home to God in heaven.

Jesus met a man one time who was almost where he needed to be, but was still lost. This man came to hear Jesus. He was an honest spiritual seeker who understood and agreed with the things Jesus was teaching. Then in **Mark 12:34** Jesus said to him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." He was not far from the trail home, but he was still lost. **He was “not far” from the Kingdom of God but he was “not in.”**

I think there are many like that today. They would say they understand and even agree with Jesus. They come to His meetings. They like Him and may even look like they belong to Him. They are close to the trail but still lost. And their situation may be dangerous and getting more dangerous.

Olympic Game at Mount Carmel:

Have you been watching the Olympic games? There have been some exciting events or matches. In our OT readings we have been in 1 & 2 Kings. In 1 Kings we hear of that great prophet Elijah and in 1 Kings 18 we read of the Olympic game he was involved in called the “My God is better than your god match.” The event wasn’t for a gold medal but to determine Who was the real God. Elijah was the only prophet of the Lord God but

there were 450 prophets of Ba-al (BAY uhl) a false god that the people were worshipping in some cases along with or besides the Lord.

1 Kings 18:20-39 NLT

20 So **Ahab summoned all the people** and the prophets to **Mount Carmel**. 21 Then **Elijah stood in front of them and said, "How long are you going to waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!" But the people were completely silent.**

22 Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only prophet of the LORD who is left, but Baal has 450 prophets. 23 **Now bring two bulls.** The prophets of Baal may **choose whichever one they wish and cut it into pieces and lay it on the wood of their altar, but without setting fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood on the altar, but not set fire to it.** 24 **Then call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by setting fire to the wood is the true God!" And all the people agreed.**

25 Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "**You go first**, for there are many of you. Choose one of the bulls and prepare it and call on the name of your god. But do not set fire to the wood."

26 **So they prepared one of the bulls and placed it on the altar. Then they called on the name of Baal all morning, shouting, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no reply of any kind. Then they danced wildly around the altar they had made.**

27 **About noontime Elijah began mocking them. "You'll have to shout louder," he scoffed, "for surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or he is relieving himself. Or maybe he is away on a trip, or he is asleep and needs to be wakened!"**

28 **So they shouted louder, and following their normal custom, they cut themselves with knives and swords until the blood gushed out.** 29 They raved all afternoon until the time of the evening sacrifice, **but still there was no reply, no voice, no answer.**

30 **Then Elijah called to the people, "Come over here!" They all crowded around him as he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been torn down.** 31 He took twelve stones, one to represent each of the tribes of Israel, 32 and he used the stones to rebuild the LORD's altar. Then **he dug a trench around the altar large enough to hold about three gallons.** 33 **He piled wood on the altar, cut the bull into pieces, and laid the pieces on the wood. Then he said, "Fill four large jars with water, and pour the water over the offering and the wood." After they had done this,** 34 **he said, "Do the same thing again!" And when they were finished, he said, "Now do it a third time!" So they did as he said,** 35 **and the water ran around the altar and even overflowed the trench.**

36 At the customary time for offering the evening sacrifice, **Elijah the prophet walked up to the altar and prayed, "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command.** 37 **O LORD, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God and that you have brought them back to yourself."**

38 **Immediately the fire of the LORD flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the ditch!** 39 **And when the people saw it, they fell on their faces and cried out, "The LORD is God! The LORD is God!"**

The reason for this match was stated by Elijah in v21 when he said to the people, "**How long are you going to waver between two opinions?** If the LORD is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!"

This same question needs to be asked today to many who would say they are Christians. "How long are you going to waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him! But if (e.g.) money is god, then follow it!"

You can be very close but not in. Choose today, how long are you going to waver between two opinions? Let's have our own match. Who is your ultimate help in trouble?

Truth on Jay Leno:

I remember hearing Sylvester Stallone on the Tonight Show with Jay Leno talk about his baby boy who was very ill (I believe he was born with a very serious problem). He said with all his money he couldn't do anything for his son. His money couldn't make the boy well; it couldn't even comfort him while his son was sick. How about at the last Judgment when we will have to face God what will be the way into His heaven, how much money we have, how hard we worked, how good we tried to be, how we lived life here trying to make ourselves happy? No Jesus will be the only way into heaven. **John 14:6** NKJV Jesus said to him, "**I am the way**, the truth, and the life. **No one comes to the Father except through Me.**

I believe most here this morning believe in God. And believe that God is the Almighty, the Creator, the "main man." So why do you live like he is not that important? Why is He not top priority?

You agree we should love God and love others...you are not far from the Kingdom of God but you're not in. You can be close to the trail and still lost. Choose today to stop wavering between two opinions. If the Lord is God follow Him!