

Main Idea: In Matthew 23:23-28 Jesus gave three illustrations that expose the true condition of the merely religious. They are like a blind guide, a dirty cup, and a whitewashed tomb.

- I. The blind guide – He majors on minor issues (23-24).
 - A. This is what the Pharisees did.
 1. They gave God insignificant things.
 2. They failed to give God the most important things.
 - B. This is what Jesus said about it.
 1. Major on major issues.
 2. Beware of the deception of “selective obedience.”
 - II. The dirty cup – He cleans up the outside and neglects the inside (25-26).
 - A. The Pharisees focused on surface issues.
 - B. Biblical Christianity is just the opposite.
 1. It starts on the inside.
 2. It shows up on the outside.
 - III. The whitewashed tomb – He appears righteous but is not (27-28).
 - A. A Pharisee appears righteous on the outside.
 1. He's clean on the outside.
 2. He's corrupt on the inside.
 - B. A Pharisee is in big trouble and doesn't even know it.
- Take Inventory: Let's consider carefully three sobering possibilities.
1. It's possible to act like a Christian and not be one.
 2. It's possible to know how to be a Christian and not be one.
 3. It's possible to think you are a Christian and not be one.

Harvest Offering – for Scioto Hills Camp

Parent and baby dedication (at beginning of service): Anthony and Kalee Haney, and Tillie; Austin and Sydni Haney, and Solomon

Blind guides. Dirty cups. Whitewashed tombs. What do these three word pictures have in common? The answer is, they refer to a group of people that Jesus confronted in the passage before us this morning. These are certainly not complimentary terms. Jesus used these memorable phrases to expose the true condition of a group of religious people who were standing in front of Him. Sadly, they may describe us as well. Let's listen carefully to what Jesus had to say, as we continue our series in Matthew 23, “*The Danger of Being Religious.*”

Scripture Reading: Matthew 23:23-28

Years ago I read Kent Hughes thought-provoking book, *Are Evangelicals Born Again?* I highly recommend it. Pastor Hughes confronted the common notion that if you possess the right label, you're right with God. He was convinced--and I agree--that there are countless people in churches who call themselves “Christian” who've never truly been born again. He began his book with the following true story:²

“Are evangelicals born again? This long-smoldering question was aflame once more in my mind after the events of the day. For in a convention hotel room, I had just watched an evangelical church leader come to Christ.

“The hour had left me exhausted. Initially I had been incredulous as the man recounted his enviable heritage. He was the son of a prominent theologian and minister. From childhood he had attended Christian schools and had graduated from

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at Matthew 23, see the messages preached at WBC in 1999.

²R. Kent Hughes, *Are Evangelicals Born Again*, pp. 9-10.

an evangelical Christian college. He had married a Christian from another notable family. He was successful in business, a leader in his denomination, and a board member of several prestigious Christian organizations. His children were believers.

“My initial incredulity faded as he carefully explained that since his youth he had sensed that he was not a believer, but conforming to conventional piety had come easy to him. As a boy he had 'gone forward' and been baptized. He knew his Bible and offered admirable prayers over dinner and in public.

“Yet all the while he was quietly aware, almost sardonically so, that he had never truly bent his knee to Christ--and so was not born again.

“He tearfully explained that he would never have come for spiritual help if his illegal business practices had not been uncovered. He had come to the end of himself. There was nowhere to turn but to Christ--and he did. As we knelt together, I witnessed a moving, passionate outpouring of genuine contrition for sins. This man, this evangelical churchman, now believed in Christ, repented, and was truly born again.”

When we open our Bibles to Matthew 23, we're placing ourselves in a passage that warns us about the danger of being religious. What a pointed message Jesus preached that day! He was in the temple, probably on Wednesday of Passion week, and in just a couple of days He would be nailed to a cross.

Jesus' primary audience for this message, according to verse 1, were His disciples and the crowds. He warned them about the dangerous influence of teachers who “do all their deeds to be seen by others” (verse 5).

Then in verse 8, Jesus pivots, looks to the back of the crowd, and begins to address the scribes and Pharisees directly. Out of concern for their eternal destiny, He spoke words they certainly did appreciate but desperately needed to hear. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”

Hypocrisy. The scribes and Pharisees were not the spiritual leaders they thought themselves to be. In fact, they were flat out lost, deceived by their father the devil, as Jesus said elsewhere. And one of their biggest blindspots was that they were hung up on *externals*. They had reduced righteousness to ritual and religious activity.

What do you do when you're in the presence of a religious hypocrite? What do you do for their sake, and just as importantly for the sake of those under their influence? How do you help them see just how dangerous their predicament is?

Here's how Jesus did it. Word pictures. In Matthew 23:23-28 Jesus uses three word pictures to expose the true condition of the merely religious. He says they are like a blind guide, a dirty cup, and a whitewashed tomb.

But this isn't a history lesson. Jesus may be talking to us, for I too may be a blind guide, a dirty cup, and a whitewashed tomb. How can I know? Jesus is going to give us three indicators of the person who has settled for mere religion.

I. The blind guide - He majors on minor issues (23-24).

A. This is what the Pharisees did. Listen to Jesus in verses 23-24, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe the mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. ²⁴ You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!

Jesus' first illustration has to do with giving, specifically *tithing*. When it came to giving, what was Jesus' observation of the Pharisees? It was twofold.

1. *They gave God insignificant things.* Like what? Jesus mentions “mint, dill, and cummin.”

In the Torah (in texts like Leviticus 27:30 and Deuteronomy 14:22ff) God instructed His people to give Him a tithe of what their fields produced, namely corn, wine, and oil. In other words, they were to honor Him by offering a tenth of the produce of their main crops.

So what did God have to say about spices like mint, dill, and cummin? Very little, and that's the point. The Pharisees wanted to do *more than* God commanded to show their seriousness. They tithed even their common garden growth.³

Historian William Barclay sheds light on the practice, “Mint, dill, and cummin are herbs of the kitchen garden and would not be grown in any quantity; a man would have only a little patch of them. All three were used in cooking, and dill and cummin had medicinal uses. To tithe them was to tithe an infinitesimally small crop, maybe not much more than the produce of one plant. Only those who were superlatively meticulous would tithe the single plants of the kitchen garden.”⁴

And that's exactly what the Pharisees were. They were so meticulous about tithes that they made sure God received one-tenth of even one clump of mint.

Please don't misunderstand. Giving is good. God commands us to give to Him, and if we are not giving to Him, we are robbing Him. In His Word, God has a lot to say to His people about giving. This includes specifically *tithing*, which was prescribed in the Old Testament for the Israelites.

Leviticus 27:30 states, “A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD.” Apparently God commanded the Israelites to offer *three* tithes: 1) the general tithe paid to the Levites, who in turn gave a tenth of that to the priests (Num 18:21, 26); 2) the tithe associated with the sacred meal involving offerer and Levite (Deut 14:22-27); 3) the tithe paid every three years to the poor (Deut 14:28-29).⁵

So God commanded the Israelites to give, and specifically, to give tithes. He told them to bring at least ten percent of their possessions to the sanctuary. All they owned had come from Him, and giving the first portion back was their way of saying “thank you” for it all.

Proverbs 3:9-10 elaborates, “Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine” God wanted His people Israel, and by extension us, to honor Him by giving Him the firstfruits of our income.

In fact, Malachi 3:8-10 indicates that if we don't give to God we're actually *robbing* Him. “Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me? But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse--the whole nation of you--because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, says the LORD Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.”

In the New Testament, we find helpful passages like 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 and 2 Corinthians 8-9 which reinforce the importance and privilege of giving. Jesus Himself taught that it is more blessed to give than receive (Acts 20:35).

³ Bruner, 823.

⁴ Barclay, p. 293.

⁵ Taken from *NIV Study Bible*, footnote on p. 182.

Dear friend, everything we have has come from God. If we are not giving to Him regularly and generously from the first portion of our income, we are robbing Him of what He deserves.

Jesus isn't downplaying the importance of giving here. Rather He's confronting the pharisaic approach to giving. The Pharisees gave. They even gave God such *insignificant* things as garden spices. What then was the problem?

2. *They failed to give God the most important things.* Jesus calls them the “weightier matters of the law.” As Carson explains, weightier doesn't mean “more difficult”, but “more central, more desive,” or as the NIV puts it, “more important.”⁶

This was the Pharisees' problem. They neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Isn't that ironic? The Pharisees prided themselves as sitting “in Moses' seat” (verse 2), as being experts in God's law. But Jesus said they missed the “weightier” matters of the law.

Jesus' words seem to reflect what the prophet Micah said centuries earlier, in Micah 6:6-8, “With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

No, God is not impressed when we give Him things, even meticulously, if we fail to give Him the most important things, the things that reflect His character. Justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Yet this is precisely what the Pharisees were doing.

B. This is what Jesus said about it. Listen again to verses 23b-24 in the NIV, “You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.” Jesus' words are quite practical. He makes it clear that the Pharisees (and those who think like the Pharisees) need to take two actions.

1. *Major on major issues.* Jesus said, “You should have practiced the latter.” That is, you should have majored on justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

You see, the tithe wasn't the only thing God commanded His people to give Him. He also told them to present their lives to Him, lives characterized by justice, mercy, and covenant faithfulness. Again, this was His message through Micah centuries before.

But how do you measure that kind of giving? You really can't. How much *justice* did you give God last week? How much *mercy*? It's not quantifiable, so it's easy to overlook. Yet it's essential, according to Jesus, who said, “You should have practiced the latter.”

And notice His next phrase, “Without neglecting the former.” Here's the required balance. Listen to Jesus. Christianity is not about externals *only*, but it does include externals. We'll develop that further momentarily. For now, a second insight.

2. *Beware of the deception of “selective obedience.”* Jesus gives a captivating word picture in verse 24, even humorous. He says, “You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel?” Can't you just imagine the scene? A person is walking along and taking great care to prevent himself from swallowing a tiny bug. Yet all the while he's munching on a large camel, hooves and all!

There may be a pun here. In Aramaic (which Jesus was speaking) the words for gnat and camel sound much alike. They are *qamla* and *gamla*. According to the Law, both

⁶ D. A. Carson, *Matthew*

the gnat and the camel were unclean creatures. The rabbis had a saying, “He that kills a flea on the sabbath is as guilty as if he killed a camel.”⁷

We talked about their “scribal nit-picking” last time. The Pharisees, who were sticklers for details, missed the heart of what the Lord desired from them. They were hung up on gnats and choking on camels.

Certainly, the greatest (actually the *worst*) example was what they did to Jesus. They will in two days condemn an innocent man and think they’re righteous in doing so, yet refuse to enter Pilate’s judgment hall lest they be defiled (John 18:28)! How’s that for straining a gnat while swallowing a camel?!

Beloved, beware of the deception of selective obedience. It’s so easy for us to set up a few (or many) externals and think, “There! God must be pleased with me. Sure, I’m not perfect, but look what I *just did for Him!*”

This is how selective obedience works. We tend to justify our disobedience to God’s Word in one area by our obedience in another. For instance, think of the minister who fails to love and provide spiritual leadership for the members of his own household, yet spends countless hours in church ministry. He works hard at the church, and he develops quite a reputation too. “Now there’s a godly man!”

Or is he? Is he pleasing God? He’s not. Why not? Is it wrong to serve in the church? Surely not. But it is wrong to think that ministry in the church compensates for negligence in another area of our lives. Beware of selective obedience.

How about you? You may be obeying God’s Word in many areas of your life. That’s good, maybe. But is there any area in your life where you are disobeying God? Is there any command in His Word, anything that He wants from your life, that you are ignoring? Are you justifying this disobedience by pointing to your meticulous obedience to God in other areas of your life?

This is how selective obedience works, and it shows up in lots of ways. Think of the man who does unethical things at work, yet proudly shares that he reads his Bible every day. Or think about the teen who uses ungodly language at school, yet salves her conscience by inviting her friends come to the youth group with her. That’s called straining out a gnat but swallowing a camel.

This is the first word picture. The blind guide. He majors in minor issues.

II. The dirty cup - He cleans up the outside and neglects the inside (25-26).

Liten to verses 25-26, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.²⁶ You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.” In His second illustration, Jesus offers a clear contrast between the pharisaic approach and true Christianity.

A. The Pharisees focused on surface issues. Jesus said they cleaned the outside of the cup and dish, but didn’t touch the inside which was full of greed and self-indulgence.

I’ve been reading [thanks Scott Bruns] Michael Reeves’ book *Evangelical Pharisees*. Quite insightful, and I’ll be sharing a few insights from it. Here’s the first. Reeves observes, “The Pharisees had a remarkable ability to look like what they were not.”⁸

That’s what happens when you focus on surface issues. You come across, at least initially, as being a person who is quite godly, though in fact this is certainly not the case.

⁷Bruner, 825.

⁸ Michael Reeves, *Evangelical Pharisees*, p. 63.

The Jewish law had a lot to say about uncleanness. The issue wasn't dirt so much as ceremonial "rightness." They had a long list of rules to insure ceremonial cleanness.

The Pharisees had already confronted Jesus about His lack of conformity to their ceremonial rules. Back in Matthew 15:1-3, we're told, "Then some Pharisees...came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, 'Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!' Jesus replied, 'And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?'"

It's interesting that Leviticus 11:33 declared any earthen vessel was unclean if the inside of it was touched by something unclean. For instance, if a lizard fell into a clay pot, the contents became unclean and the pot had to be broken. But the Pharisees went the extra mile and took steps to protect the *outside* of the cup as well.

Listen again to Michael Reeves in his book *Evangelical Pharisees*. "The Pharisees' externalism worked on the...assumption...that humankind is morally neutral. As such, they believed, we all have the ability to make ourselves good and righteous simply by the performance of good and righteous acts."⁹

The Scriptures of course teach that, "There is none who does good" (Psalm 14:3, a text Paul quotes in Romans 3:10ff). But the the Pharisees didn't buy that. Their approach to a God-pleasing life was "outside-in." They focused on looking good on the outside. Do good, and you are good, would be a good pharisaic motto.

But can obedience to a rule (or a thousand rules) make a sinful heart clean? Not at all. Rules and ritual may look impressive, but they lack the power to change the heart. But this was the approach of the Pharisees. They focused on surface issues.

B. Biblical Christianity is just the opposite. Listen to Jesus again (26), "Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside will be clean." You'll notice two characteristics of genuine, biblical Christianity here.

1. *It starts on the inside.*
2. *It shows up on the outside.*

Jesus said *first* clean the inside of the cup. "First" indicates where we're to start as well as where we're to place the emphasis. True godliness works "inside-out."

Becoming a Christian begins on the inside with a heart change. The Bible calls this regeneration, and it is the work of the Holy Spirit. Once regeneration occurs, a once dead heart begins to beat. Of course, you can't see the heart change. It's on the inside. But the heart change immediately produces change you can see. Regeneration (which is a work that God alone does) results in conversion (which involves actions that are visible).

So when you were regenerated (or born again), what happened? You admitted the truth about your sinfulness, to yourself, to others, and most importantly *to God*. You acknowledged that your so called good works were actually filthy rags in His sight. And then, as a lost hopeless sinner, you cried out to the Savior that God sent to rescue you, His dear Son. You turned from your trust in self (that's repentance) and put your total trust in Him (that's faith). You believed that He died in your place on the cross, and secured eternal life for you by walking out of His tomb alive.

At that moment, God justified you (declared you to be righteous in His sight), and His Spirit began the ongoing progressive work of sanctifying you. For God's purpose is to transform all He saves into the likeness of His dear Son.

Friends, when God does the miraculous work of salvation, He always starts on the inside. Yet He doesn't stop there. The proof of a heart-change is a life-change. Christ

⁹ Michael Reeves, *Evangelical Pharisees*, p. 65.

enables sinners to “clean up the cup,” so to speak. Jesus said, “First clean the inside of the cup...and then the outside will be clean (26).”

Someone might say, “Well, as long as my heart is right, that's all that matters.” Not necessarily. If your heart *is* right with God, it will show up in external actions. You'll give evidence of it by a life lived in conformity to God's Word. If it doesn't show up, it's time to check your heart.

Beware of two common perversions of Christianity. First, some people, like the Pharisees, settle for simply cleaning the outside of the cup. They think being a Christian is merely cleaning up your act. That's mere morality.

But on the other hand, other professing Christians settle for a deficient sort of internal, cup cleansing that doesn't affect the outside. “My faith is a *personal* thing.” And it's so personal it has little effect on how they live. So they carry a Bible to church on Sunday yet don't read it much nor apply its message Monday through Saturday.

That shouldn't be. Jesus said, “Clean the inside of the cup, and the outside also will be clean.” There's a connection. If the inside *is* clean, it will follow that the outside will be clean, too. And God will get the glory for it all.

In the 18th century John Newton, the author of “Amazing Grace,” shared this well known testimonial. “If I ever reach heaven I expect to find three wonders there: first, to meet some I had not thought to see there; second, to miss some I had thought to meet there; and third, the greatest wonder of all, to find myself there.”¹⁰

That's the confession of a person who's been changed inside-out. This brings us to the third word picture. A blind guide (he majors on minor issues), a dirty cup (he cleans up the outside and ignores the inside), and a whitewashed tomb.

III. The whitewashed tomb - He appears righteous but is not (27-28).

Listen again to Jesus in verses 27-28, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness.”²⁸ So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

A. A Pharisee appears righteous on the outside. The picture Jesus used here would have been familiar to any first century Jew. A common place for graves was alongside the road which created a potential problem. According to Jewish law, anyone who touched a dead body became unclean. If you were traveling and stumbled off the path into a burial site, you defiled yourself.

Now suppose you were on your way to the temple to worship, and happened to stumble on a grave. You now had a problem for at that point you became ceremonially unclean. Is that bad? Yes, it meant you couldn't complete your act of worship.

To help eliminate this danger, once a year just before Passover (during the month of Adar) it was customary to whitewash grave-sites with lime. The intent was to warn traveling pilgrims to “stay away!” and avoid ritual uncleanness. It made quite a sight, tombstones shining in the sun.

According to Jesus, this is a perfect picture of the Pharisee.

1. *He's clean on the outside.* In fact, he's quite impressive, just like the ornate tombstone glistening in the sunlight.

2. *He's corrupt on the inside.* “Full of dead men's bones,” is how Jesus put it. It's a case of “what you see is *not* what you get.”

¹⁰ Taken from Hughes, 16-17.

C. S. Lewis said there are two kinds of sinners that he called the Animal self (the fleshly sinner) and the Diabolical self (the spiritual sinner). He said, “The Diabolical self is the worse of the two. This is why *a cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute*. But of course, it is better to be neither.”¹¹

In the first two illustrations Jesus confronted what the Pharisees *did*. Now in the third He exposes what they were *like*. “You are like a white-washed tomb!”

Then in verse 28 Jesus lays it on the line. Verse 28 is the punchline. “In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.” This is serious. According to Jesus...

B. A Pharisee is in big trouble and doesn't even know it. He *appears* righteous--to men, that is, and only on the outside. He appears righteous, *but He isn't*.

So is the solution to *not* appear righteous? Obviously not.

Remember, a Pharisee is a person who majors on external issues. Quite frankly, a lot of the externals he champions are good things. The problem has to do with his motivation for doing them.

A modern-day Pharisee might say, “If you want to please God, then read your Bible every day. Be in church when the church doors are open. Don't support an entertainment industry that mocks God's standard of holiness. Don't cheapen the Lord's day by shopping and treating it like any other day.”

At times, the problem of the Pharisee isn't the standard he keeps, but why he keeps it. Too often we think, “If I have standards, I'm being a legalist.” No, I'm being a legalist if I think that keeping my standards contributes one ounce to my right standing with God.

Let that sink in. Here's why the Pharisee is in trouble. He appears righteous. He thinks he is righteous. The reason he thinks he's righteous is because he does the “right” things. But it's merely *external*. And on the inside, unseen to the naked eye, is a heart full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

In fact, the Greek word for “wickedness” [KJV “iniquity”] in verse 28 is *anomios*. It literally means “lawlessness.” How ironic! The Pharisees prided themselves in keeping the *law*, but Jesus said in their hearts they were *lawless*.

Friends, though the Pharisees who heard these words in Matthew 23 are dead and gone, the spirit of pharisaism is very alive today. That's why we need to give careful attention to these words of Jesus.

Take Inventory: Let's consider carefully three sobering possibilities.

1. *It's possible to act like a Christian and not be one.* Just like the evangelical leader Kent Hughes described earlier. I'm struck by the fact that the people Jesus called “whitewashed tombs” were the most devout, the most religious people in first century Judaism. I wonder what He'd say if He visited our church this morning.

Most of us here today call ourselves “Christians.” But in light of Jesus' words, I encourage you to ponder a question. Are you truly a Christian?

In 1677, Henry Scougal wrote *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. Fifty years later the Lord used this book to convince George Whitefield of his need to be born again. Scougal demonstrated that true religion is, as Michael Reeves puts it, “more than a matter of orthodox opinions, moral behavior, and emotional ecstasy.” It is “a delightful and affectionate sense of the Divine perfections, which makes the soul resign and sacrifice itself wholly unto him, desiring above all things to please him, and delighting in nothing

¹¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 92, taken from Michael Reeves, *Evangelical Pharisees*, p. 13.

so much as in fellowship and communion with him, and being ready to do or suffer any thing for his sake, or at his pleasure.”¹²

This is what a Pharisee lacks, “a delightful and affectionate sense of the Divine perfections.” In other words, God is not beautiful to Him. God is not His treasure. God’s redeeming work in Christ is not the theme of his song. The Pharisee does not see himself as a sinner, and thus, Christ is not an amazing Savior to him.

And so he acts as though he knows Christ, but he is not in Christ. He talks about being born again, but has never experienced this miracle, nor does he think he needs it.

My friend, have you ever truly been born again? Have you experienced the transforming, inside-out work of the Spirit?

2. *It's possible to know how to be a Christian and not be one.* It's possible that you could show someone else how to be saved, but still be lost. You know the gospel. You know that Jesus Christ lived a perfect life, then died on a Roman cross to pay the sin-penalty for all who would believe on Him, and three days later He arose from the dead. You know that the Bible teaches that whosoever will call upon the Lord will be saved.

It's possible that you know all that. You know what needs to happen, and yet you refuse to humble yourself before God and submit your life to Jesus Christ.

It's amazing the difference one step can make. When you're standing at the entrance to an airplane, take one step and you're on your way to a new destination. Don't take that step, and you're going nowhere.¹³

Jesus told a teacher of the law in Mark 12:34, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” The man was close--but he still wasn't in. Just think of it. A person can be close, even within an inch of the kingdom, and yet spend eternity separated from God. There is no reward for being close.

3. *It's possible to think you are a Christian and not be one.* In Matthew 7:21 Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” May God help us.

I'd like to finish by praying a prayer from John Newton, “I trust you find the name and grace of Jesus more and more precious to you: His promises more sweet, and your hope in them more abiding; your sense of your own weakness and unworthiness daily increasing; your persuasion of His all-sufficiency to guide, support, and comfort you, more confirmed.”

Testimony of salvation: Dee Dee Travis

Closing Song: #183 “*Beneath the Cross of Jesus*” (all three verses)

Closing charge: Let the redeemed of the Lord...SAY SO.

Invite to this evening’s annual business meeting, and to tomorrow evening’s “Issues in Counseling Night: An Opportunity to Grow in Our Ability to Help Those Who are Suffering.”

¹² Quote taken from Michael Reeves, *Evangelical Pharisees*, p. 84.

¹³ Observation by Hughes, *Mark*, p. 120.