

Almost There

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 December 2019

Preacher: Fred Stone

[0 : 00] I first noticed the title of this musical, Almost There. I thought about how Jesus once told a Jewish teacher that he was almost there in terms of entering the kingdom of God.

It took place in the context of several Jewish leaders basically attacking Jesus. They were bombarding him with questions, trying to confuse him.

Trying to make him look bad. Well, Mark, the Gospel of Mark tells us how a scribe, a scholarly teacher, he was involved.

He asked Jesus a question about what's the greatest commandment? I want you to look with me on the screen how Jesus answered. 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.

[1 : 12] There is no other commandment greater than these. Now, when that scribe heard the answer, something changed.

The light came on for him. And he responded, not as a critic, but as an honest seeker who understood that Jesus had spoken truth.

Look at what he said. 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.

He's on board with Jesus. He understands. Jesus is speaking words of truth, of wisdom. Well, Jesus took it that way.

Look at how he responded to this scribe. And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, you are not far from the kingdom of God.

[2 : 28] Jesus was telling him in effect, you're almost there. You're almost in the kingdom of God. Now, when Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God throughout his ministry, he was talking about more than a future kingdom, sort of like what we would think about heaven.

Jesus was talking about, when he spoke about the kingdom of God, living under the kingdom of God, living under God's authority. Jesus was talking about living as a follower of himself as a person's Lord and Savior, and living under God's authority.

When Jesus told this man that he was not far from the kingdom of God, he was saying two things. Look with me. It was a word of encouragement. Think about it.

You are not far from the kingdom of God. You are almost there. Why would he say that? Well, that man believed correctly.

He believed that Jesus was speaking the truth. He believed that God was more concerned with us having a heart of love for him and people than just following a bunch of rules of a religion.

[3 : 50] This man was almost there because he believed the truth. He had some right beliefs.

But almost there is not there. He was not a part of the kingdom of God because he was not trusting Jesus. He was not a follower of Jesus.

I am confident that almost everyone in this room today, you believe what the Bible says about Jesus coming into this world, which is what we celebrate at Christmas.

I have no doubt that just about everyone in this room, you believe the Christmas story as spelled out in Scripture. You believe the things that we have been singing about or heard sung about Jesus.

Such beliefs, thinking rightly according to the truth of Scripture, makes us almost there in terms of being a part of the kingdom because you cannot become a follower of Jesus without knowing who he is and the truth about why he came.

[5 : 10] But until a person puts their trust in Jesus as their own Savior and Lord, you remain almost there, not there in the kingdom of God.

And so that makes what Jesus said more than just a word of encouragement. It was a word of warning. You are not far from the kingdom of God, but you are not there.

If you're not there, you are outside the kingdom of God. Jesus was telling this well-informed teacher that it was not enough to just believe correct doctrine, right facts about God.

It's not enough just to say, I believe the Bible's true. Jesus was telling him, it's not enough for you to just have a favorable impression of me.

And that applies to everyone. Believing all the right things, the right facts about God, about Jesus, about the Bible, it is very important.

[6 : 26] And I'm not in any way downplaying it. But it's not enough for us just to have this intellectual knowledge, this factual information and be a Christian.

James tells us that demons believe the facts about God. Look at this from James chapter 2. You believe that God is one, you do well. Even the demons believe and shudder.

They tremble. The only way that we can be right with God and a part of His kingdom, a part of His family, now and forever. It's to have our faith, our trust, our confidence in Jesus as our Savior.

And if we do that, we'll recognize that He really is King Jesus, the Lord, and we'll submit to Him, to His authority and really seek to follow Him, be faithful followers of Him.

If a person does not know God, through a personal relationship with Jesus, it doesn't matter how close they are. For a person to be or for a person to die almost there, believing a lot of what the Bible says.

[7 : 51] For a person to die like that almost there. Or for a person to believe nothing and shake his fist at God, the end result will be the same.

They will be eternally separated from God in hell. And we all need to let this sink in because it applies to us, to our family members, to our friends, to everyone.

As we come together this morning to celebrate the birth of Jesus, the coming of God's Son into this world, I want to encourage you to think about yourself, about your relationship with Jesus.

Make sure that you are now in the kingdom of God, which means that you are living under His authority. You are truly following Jesus, your Lord.

You know, the only way for anyone to know that they have a right relationship with God, the only way for anyone to know for a fact that they are a part of the kingdom now is to have that true faith, trust, confidence, commitment, love for Jesus.

[9 : 18] He is the way to the Father. Jesus made it clear on one occasion. He said to him, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

That last sentence, no one comes to the Father except through me, also can be said, anyone can come to the Father through me, through Jesus. If you are not a Christian, you can come to faith in Jesus right now.

Admit your need that you're not. Turn from your sin. Change your mind. Put your trust in Jesus as your Savior. Trust him that when he died on the cross, which is why he came into this world, that he was dying for you, paying the penalty for your sins.

If you know Christ as your Lord and Savior, let this be a time of worshiping him, thanking him, renewing your commitment to him as your king.

I also want to encourage Christians in this room, if you have family members, friends, people you work with, people you go to school with who are not Christians, there is no better time than this season, the Christmas season, for you to talk with them about their relationship with the Lord.

[10 : 41] I encourage you to ask God to help you get prepared to share the gospel with them and ask him to prepare them and work through your love, your friendship, your sharing the gospel, the call of them, that person you love and care about, the faith in Jesus.

Would you pray with me? Father, help all of us in this room being here today to worship Jesus, celebrate the true meaning of Christmas.

Help us all to think about where we stand in relationship in relationship to being in your kingdom, in your family.

Father, for anyone in this room who does not know Christ, call them to faith right now. Do that miraculous work in them right now.

Open their eyes to see Jesus as he really is, your son who died on the cross for their sin.

[11 : 59] Father, help all of us right now to evaluate just how faithfully we are living under your authority, under King Jesus.

And if there's changes that we need to make, help us to make them now. And in an attitude of prayer, let's all just listen to the Lord and respond to him in the way that we need to.

I'd be happy to pray with you here at the front in the next few minutes. Let's just listen to the Lord prayerfully, carefully, and respond to him.