



Links Players

“Close...or In?”

When Jesus saw that the man answered him wisely, Jesus said to him, “You are close to the kingdom of God.” And after that, no one was brave enough to ask Jesus any more questions. (Mark 12:34, (NCV))

As golfers, we all have stories of how close we came to what might have been. For example: “If that putt drops on 18, I break 80 - and it was so close!” Or “Just another foot, my shot clears the bunker and is on the green!” Maybe you can relate to these examples of “close but not quite.”

Golf is filled with examples of “close but not quite.” For example, Phil Mickelson is only one major away from accomplishing the professional Grand Slam of golf – having won all four major championships.

In the history of professional golf, only five men have achieved it: Gene Sarazen, Ben Hogan, Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player, and Tiger Woods. So how close has Phil come to joining that legendary group? He has finished 2nd in the US Open a heartbreaking six times.

On a similar note, let’s look at Sam Snead. Like Mickelson, he won three majors but no U.S. Open. How close did Sam come to the Grand Slam? He finished second four times, but also consider this fact: If Sam had shot 69 in the final round, he would have won 5 US Open titles – and tied for two more!

If you read the extended version of today’s story (Mark 12:28-34), the man’s elaborate answer prompted the compliment from Jesus, and the story ends there. But after reading this passage again, I began to think of it from a different perspective: how did the man react to what Jesus said?

Was he pleased that he had answered correctly? Was he content to know that he was “close to the kingdom of God,” as Jesus had said? Or perhaps he had a different reaction. Did hearing the words “you are close” prompt him to respond, “Teacher, I want to be more than close. What must I do to be in the kingdom of God?”

As followers of Christ, we know the answer to that question. Jesus said in John 14:6, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” And Paul writes in Romans 10:9, “If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Entry into the Kingdom doesn’t require credentials, a recommendation, or a list of good works. It’s just Jesus. Not Jesus plus something else - just Jesus.

Returning to our Scripture, verse 34 ends the story, so we don’t know what happened after Jesus commented. But because Jesus was The Great Teacher, I think his compliment was meant as encouragement and an invitation to ask the follow-up question.

And if that's what Jesus was doing, it's a good lesson we can apply in our lives. We all know people that aren't in the kingdom. Some may be close; some may be far away. But whatever their situation, our role is to share the gospel's good news with them. And where we see signs of progress, let's offer them an encouraging word and an invitation to take another step, just as Jesus did in this situation.

Prayer: Father, thank you for the gift of your son, Jesus Christ. Please help us share this gift with others so they may also be part of your Kingdom. Amen.

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