

Going the Second Mile Matthew 5:38-42

We've all heard the expression, "Do your duty." Well, the Christ once again tells us something that no human would have ever thought of. Christ is telling us, "Do more than your duty." That is going the second mile.

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you do not resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." (vv. 38-39) In the 1st Century a slap on the cheek was a way of insulting someone. A slap on the other cheek was yet another way of insulting someone. Today it would be like an insulting comment.

When somebody slaps you, what is your natural impulse—it's to slap them back. Someone insults you; the first thought is to insult them back. That's the way we think. But Jesus said, "If you are a follower of mine, as hard as it may be, you should turn the other cheek. Jesus is talking about personal revenge, not social justice. This has nothing to do with the social Justice issues.

What Jesus is talking about is retaliation, revenge, retribution. It's what Paul said in Rom. 12:19, "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written 'Vengeance is Mine. I will repay,' says the Lord." In other words, you never get even by trying to get even.

Let me give you a simple rule. Be quick to defend others but be slow to defend yourself. Abraham Lincoln once said, "I never give an explanation of my actions to my critics." He said the reason is simple. "My friends don't need an explanation and my enemies wouldn't believe it."

Now that is wise advice, but having said that I think it is worth noting that Jesus suggested two cheeks, not dozens of them. He was not advocating we become a doormat to people who try to abuse us or walk all over us. Paul went on to say in that 12th chapter of Romans and verse 18, "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men." Now sometimes that is not always possible.

Sometimes self-defense is not only warranted and necessary, but it's good for the other person. But forgiveness, and not revenge, should be our first response.

"If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also." (v.40) Now the situation that Jesus describes was very common in Bible days. If one person took another person to court, and the person did not have the money to pay the judgment, the court could order payment of the lawsuit in clothing. You could take the man's tunic; you could take the man's shirt, but you could not take his coat.

Now the shirt was a type of tunic that was worn as an undergarment. The coat was an outer garment that served as a blanket at night. Most people in those days owned only one coat and perhaps one or two shirts.

Jesus goes beyond both the law of the land and the Mosaic Law. He said, "If you lose a lawsuit, but the judgment does not satisfy the plaintiff, and there are still bitter hard feelings, voluntarily give more than the judgment if it will make things right, and thereby you can settle things not only legally, but you can settle things morally.

In a situation like this when you give more than you are asked, you are showing that you regret any wrongdoing on your part; you are showing that you have no bitterness toward the other person, and you are showing that you want to make things right. There are times when you should not see how little you can give, but how much you can give.

"And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two." (v.41) Remember that Israel was occupied territory. It was controlled by the Roman Empire. The Romans had a law that greatly embittered the Jewish

people. By law a Roman soldier could compel a Jew to carry his weapons, or his knapsack, or any burden that he had, one mile. It didn't matter whether the Jewish person was working in his field or on his way to the synagogue to worship, the Roman soldier had the right to conscript this man and force him to carry his burden. Every Jewish boy had marked off one mile from his house and had memorized the exact distance. Whenever a Jewish boy or man was compelled to go that mile, he would walk that mile down to the very foot, put that burden down, and with a bitter look on his face make the point "not one foot more."

Now the Pharisees had all of life boiled down to the minimum. They practiced what I call a "minimum morality." They boiled life down to just the minimum of what they had to do.

I heard about a mother who said to her little boy one time, "I want you to eat a little bit of spinach." The boy said, "How little can I get by with?" The Pharisees were always trying to figure out how little they could get by with.

"Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away." (v.42) Now the implication here is that the person doing the asking has a real genuine need. If it is a real need, you should meet that need. Now that does not mean that you are required to respond to every foolish or every selfish request.

I want to tell you what you already know. It's not easy going the second mile. But let me tell you this. If you only go the first mile, you're a victim. If you go the second mile, you're a victor. The first mile is the lone mile; the second mile is the love mile. The first mile is the slave mile; the second mile is the smile mile.

The successful people in life, and the really happy people in life, and the really blessed people in life are second milers. Going the second mile will make you a success. Clock watchers never ever climb very high. There is something more important than quitting time. There is something more important than getting every little second out of your lunch hour. There is something wonderfully Christian about someone who goes beyond and above what is asked for, or required, or expected, just as a habit of life.

This country we live in is a result of a man going the second mile. Shortly after the battles ended the American Revolution, but before the peace had been negotiated, George Washington was with his troops in Newburgh, New York. But they began to grow very restless because they hadn't been paid. Washington had begged the Continental Congress to do what they said they would do and pay the soldiers, but they refused.

Well, some of the officers began to organize a rebellion. They talked about marching on Philadelphia, which was at that time the seat of the reigning national government and overthrowing that government and letting the army rule the nation.

With the fate of America in the balance, George Washington made a surprise appearance before these officers. After praising them for their service and thanking them for their sacrifice, he pulled from his pocket a copy of a speech that he wished to read. But then he fumbled with a paper and finally reached for a set of reading glasses—glasses those men had never seen him wear before. Washington made this simple statement: "I have already grown grey in the service of my country, and now I am going blind."

Historian, Richard Norton Smith, wrote: "Instantly rebellion melted into tears. It was a galvanizing moment, and the rebellion was put down because they had seen before them a second miler. Becoming a Christian is one thing; being a Christian is another one. Every chance you get for the glory of God, for the goodness of others, and because of the grace of God, go the second mile.