

4.11.21
The Extra Mile
Matthew 5:38-42

This morning we are going to get back into our study of the teachings of Jesus as found in the Gospel of Matthew.

We are nearing the 3rd way point of Jesus' sermon. A sermon in which Jesus covers a number of teachings but the core of which is, is your heart right with God. Are you living, breathing and having your being in your God. Is not only your behavior holy, is your heart pure and holy.

Jesus cuts right to the heart with His teachings and some of them are pretty hard like the one we are going to examine this morning. In fact, I am not alone in saying that this particular teaching of Jesus might be the hardest teaching.

Let's begin by reading a portion of our scripture this morning.

Matthew 5:38-42, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you."

Let's pray.

In this teaching of Jesus, He begins with a familiar statement, "You have heard it was said." This is the 5th time Jesus has used something similar and He will use it one more time.

You have heard it said meaning a couple of things. First, the people were mostly illiterate. They could not read or write so they depended on the religious leaders to read and teach them from the books of the Old Testament that were available. Mostly, the first five books of the Bible which contains the history of Israel and the laws God gave Moses.

When Jesus said in verse 38, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’” Jesus was referring to the Old Testament Laws of Justice. If someone’s cow got out for example and it trampled all over your wheat, the owner of the cow was to make amends to the land owner for the cost of the wheat.

The laws concerning justice are found throughout the laws of Moses. Burn for a burn, wound for a wound and bruise for a bruise. If a person digs a pit and does not cover it and then a neighbors donkey falls in it, then it is the fault of the one who did not cover the pit. They shall pay the owner of the donkey a fair price.

This is the letter of the law which God handed down to Moses and how the Israelites tried to live. It is only fair and just that if I have been wronged or injured, somebody needs to pay. That is called justice.

This seems fair and right to us. It is what our court system is set up on. If we have caused wrong to someone then we have to make things up. It is the right to do and what we can expect from someone who wrongs us.

As Jesus was quoting this law from the Old Testament everybody was in agreement. But then Jesus continues in verse 39. “But I say to you...”

When Jesus said this then the people knew something different was coming. But I say to you. Jesus tells His listeners that He wants them to take on a higher road.

Look at this picture which is on the front of your bulletin.

PIC 1

If you notice the road on the right is a lot more traveled. The one on the left, not as much. Jesus points to an alternative perspective, to an alternate route, the path less traveled. The higher road.

Compared to the lower path, the path on the left takes you to a place that will be more difficult. It will be a path that is not smooth but filled with rocks, bumps and holes. It will be slippery under-foot at times. Because it is always going up, it is not comfortable. In fact, taking this path goes against our most basic instincts of survival and self-protection.

As we come to this teaching of Jesus it may give us pause as we consider these two paths. One the one hand, an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth seems right and just. On the other hand, well, just look again at what Jesus said in...

Vs. 39-41, “Do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone want to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces to go one mile go with him two.”

In this teaching Jesus is telling His followers that what is expected of a disciple as they are walking and living in the Kingdom of God is that they will go beyond the required or normal response.

Turn the other cheek when slapped. Give not just one coat but your other one as well. Walk an extra mile. Do more than is expected. This is the different path. This is the path of a disciple in the Kingdom. It is a path that is less focused on making things right and more focused on walking a path that creates better future relationships.

Such an approach takes extra work for sure. It requires us to pause for a moment, think about things on a deeper and bigger level and then respond. It requires that we be less reactionary and more thoughtful.

Let's think about verse 41 for a moment.

Vs. 41, "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two."

During the days of Jesus the Israelite people were a defeated people. They no longer owned their land and the government of the land was set up and ruled by the Romans. In other words, whatever the Roman government said that was the way it was. Even if it was unfair. Like this statement. Whoever forces you to go one mile.

It is a documented fact that one of the laws of the Roman government had, if a soldier had bags or equipment he needed moved from one place to another he could demand whoever he wanted to be his bag carrier.

If you were a Jew and you were walking down the street, on your way to an important meeting, and a Roman soldier picked you out of the crowd to carry his bags you better do it because the alternative was to disobey the law, possibly be beaten and thrown in jail. A much worse fate than carrying his bags for a mile. By law, all they could demand was one mile and then I guess they found someone else to carry their bags the next mile.

Jesus jumped on this unfair law to make a point concerning how a disciple handles themselves. Yes it is unfair but you know you have to do it because by law it is the right thing to do. But Jesus is saying don't do it grumbling and complaining all along the mile but carry those bags in such a way that by the end of the first mile, you are ready to offer your service to carry them another mile.

Here's how I have seen it broken down.

1st mile mentality – **You do it because you know it is the right thing to do. You take the path less traveled but...your attitude may not always be the best**

After hearing the teachings of Jesus, you have come to realize that demanding your pound of flesh for some wrong that was done to you is not the right way. You are obedient not to return evil for evil even if your heart is not purely given over to it. You try not to grumble and complain, you don't vent out towards that person but inwardly, you are steaming a little or a lot. In fact, you may even mention to others what is going on and you try to justify why you're so upset so you can feel better about yourself.

But then, the Holy Spirit begins to convict you. You get more quiet and you get into the later part of this teaching of Jesus.

Matthew 5:43-45a, “You have heard it said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons (and daughters) of your Father who is in heaven...’”

As you begin to pray for yourself to be more like Jesus and you begin to pray for the person who wronged you, you sense something within you beginning to change. Your heart softens. You don't feel the offense so intensely and sometimes, you realize that maybe it was just you. Maybe you were being overly sensitive. Maybe you thought things were happening and things were being said when they were not.

Even if the person was evil in their intent as Jesus says in verse 39, you decide to move on beyond the first mile and to keep going on in the relationship. It is broken, messy and very difficult but you are determined to follow the steps of Jesus on the higher path. Once you make that mental and emotional adjustment you've hit the second mile intersection Jesus mentions here.

As you step out into that second mile the following is what I think you can expect.

2nd mile mentality: You begin to realize that your step has quickened. Your heart is beating a little faster and you're feeling good, strong. The burden, the baggage that was put on you isn't as heavy as you thought.

You begin to look at that person who did you wrong with different eyes. You strike up a conversation with them and realize they have stuff going on that you didn't know about. Their job is demanding, their marriage is tough, their kids didn't turn out like they hoped, they have some health issues or a number of other things.

As you engage with them and hear what is going on in their lives then your heart softens even more. You look down at the path you have chosen and realize, yes it is hard but it is worth it. The air is clearer, the view is brighter and so is your spirit. You are moving in tune with the Holy Spirit. You decide that even two miles wasn't so bad because now Jesus is walking with you.

Now, you have come to the next intersection. Two miles lie behind you and you decide to continue on an extra mile or two. In that third mile this is what I think you can expect.

3rd mile mentality. You realize that your poor attitude could have been a stumbling block for the other person's spiritual growth and for yours. Your focus is no longer on your self but on the other person and how you can serve them. Your wants and wishes no longer matter, it is how can I serve them.

In this third mile mentality you are truly taking up the character of Jesus. You might not realize just how many miles you have walked with this person, you might not realize just how much like Jesus you have become but the impact on them, the relationship you have with them, the impact on the family of God and the kingdom of God has been incredible.

Jesus has taken your offering of walking the extra mile and He has done a work in you and in those around you.

This is what occurs when you take the path of a disciple. The power of Jesus works in you and in your circumstances.

As Christians who have decided to follow Jesus, the extra mile is the path we have chosen but we know we cannot do it alone. It is too strenuous. Too difficult. We rely heavily upon the following truths.

1 Peter 5:6-7, “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”

In our humility we come to God and tell Him it is just too much. The road is too hard to traverse ourselves, the burden too heavy. This is what it means we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. We just confess life is just too hard on our own.

When we do this an amazing thing happens. Not only is our burden lifted and we feel free but God begins to take that burden and do some amazing stuff with it.

You see,

when you give your stuff to God it is no longer your stuff. It is His stuff now and God takes tremendous care of His stuff.

You thought you could do a good job of taking care of your stuff but wow, can you imagine how well God will take care of your stuff if you give it to Him?

Not only is this true of your stuff but of your entire life as well. I hope you have come to a place where you have given your life to God.

I wanted to share a verse with you that I believe will help you understand just how well God will take care of your life.

Psalm 16:5, “Lord, You alone are my inheritance, my cup of blessing. You guard all that is mine.” NLT

6, “The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places, indeed, my heritage is beautiful to me.” NASB

Sometimes, most times, when we think about how we are in a relationship with God it is in a service type of attitude. We are here to serve God. We have been brought into a relationship with Him through His Son Jesus so we can serve Him.

While we do want to have an attitude of humility and service, the reality of our relationship with Him is He wants to serve us. All throughout scripture you will read about how Jesus and God the Father was serving the people He created and He loves. He sent His Son to serve us and as extreme as that was, that is just the beginning of what He wants to do for you.

Jesus never meant for you to go the extra mile on your own. He will be your bag carrier if you let Him.

This morning, let's take a moment of prayer, confessing our inability to handle life on our own and asking, with all humility, if He would come and serve us in the powerful way only the Son of God can.

Let's Pray