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## Go the Extra Mile

*“If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.” (Matthew 5:41)*

Jesus is a master—not only *the* Master, as in Lord and Savior, but *a* master—at teaching. He has a knack for saying something that on the surface seems so simple, yet when you look at it more closely, the depth is difficult to fathom. I see this especially when I read His Sermon on the Mount as it is recorded in Matthew 5-7.

I fear many of us have become so accustomed to these teachings that in our familiarity they lose their edginess, the radical nature of the life Christ calls us to live.

In a simple phrase, He has a way of turning the world, mine included, upside down:

The way to be first is to be last.

The way to be strong is to be weak.

The way to gain is to lose.

The way to be free is in surrendering everything to Him.

The way to live is to die.

The way to find yourself is to deny yourself.

Then there is this from Matthew 5:41: *“If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.”*

On the surface, this appears innocent enough. Understood in the culture of Jesus’ day, it is hard to stomach. The Jews were living beneath Roman occupation. It was understood that if a soldier asked a Jewish citizen to carry his pack, then that person must carry it for 1000 steps—the equivalent of one mile. It was insulting. It was an infringement to the rights of all Jewish citizens. They hated

the Romans. They hated being asked to do something this demeaning.

Do you see why this is hard to stomach? *“If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.”* Why would Jesus ask this kind of thing? Making matters worse, Jesus also said:

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you” (Matthew 5:38-42).*

The tunic was the long linen or cotton inner garment. People normally would have more than one of these. The cloak, however, was the blanket-like garment that was worn as an outer layer. This is the one that would keep them warm. People normally had just one of these. The cloak was important enough that God sought to protect the ownership of it:

*“If you take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate” (Exodus 22:26-27).*

Literally adding insult to injury, Jesus now says, *“If someone strikes you on the right*

*cheek, turn to him the other also.*” Slapping the cheek was a way of insulting a person. Jesus is not addressing passive resistance to all evil. Nor is He suggesting that we never fight or defend ourselves. There is ample from Scripture that would say otherwise. He is, instead, dealing with how we handle it when someone insults us.

In a world of bumper stickers that say, “I don’t get mad, I get even,” what are we to make of this? As I said, so much of this Sermon on the Mount confronts us with radical truths that challenge one’s mind and soul, not to mention day-to-day life.

Those who are called to follow Christ have a higher calling than to seek revenge. We are not called to a life of fairness but to a life of righteousness. We are citizens of a Kingdom guided by much different values.

*“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17).*

We are people of a kingdom that Jesus said is not of this world. We are called to live up to a different standard.

This is not to say or suggest that those who bear the name of Christ or His cross must then become doormats and open ourselves up to abuse. Jesus put limits to His teaching. He did not say that we should go as far as they would like. He said “go with him two miles.” He did not say that we should not resist evil. There are times that the Christian is called to bear arms into war. He did tell us, though, to not resist the evil person. There are boundaries that we must maintain. Jesus himself, when He was being questioned and beaten before Pilate, asked why they did not ask for witnesses. He also asked why He was being struck. These were His lawful rights that belonged to Him according to Jewish law. There is no doubt a tension that we walk as Christians in an unredeemed world between going the extra mile and yet holding up healthy boundaries.

What is the point of it all? What exactly is at stake in all of this? It is by this that we live as salt and light. Just prior to this teaching, Jesus said:

*“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:13-16).*

Salt and Light. I have taught my share of devotions on how salt adds flavor and seasoning to the lives of people that are otherwise stale and flat. Salt, however, is also known for cleansing and preserving. That is not always a pleasant process. It can cause great pain.

In regard to light, I love to sing “This Little Gospel Light of Mine ” with children and adults. It is a fun song. But let us not forget that light also exposes those things that love the darkness. That is not always a fun tune to sing. When we live our lives in such a way that we are willing to forfeit our rights or even our property, we will not be hiding our light under a bushel basket. We will be serving as salt and light in a world that walks according to a different call.

Jesus recognized that we live in a world that operates by different values and principles than what He taught. Trying to mesh those two doesn’t work. It is like trying to mesh together two different computer operating systems. Several years ago, our school operated with the Apple system. Later we shifted to a Windows-based system. The old computer disks would not work on the new computers. They operate on two different systems. One would not recognize

the other. Jesus Christ calls us to operate under a different operating system than that of society—a different way of thinking and a different lifestyle. One does not recognize the other. But how will the world ever know that unless we demonstrate it, not only in our speaking but in our willingness to go that extra mile?

Those who saw Jesus ascend understood that the mission challenge He gave would require them to go into a world functioning under a different operating system. As the Spirit gave them power, I believe their willingness to not insist on fairness, and even willingly forfeiting their rights, gave them credibility before an unbelieving world. We today have that same mission challenge before us in a world that is not unlike the one they entered in the first century. As we do this, we reflect the very image of Him,

*“. . . who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (Philippians 2:5-6).*

Of course, this same teaching applies not only to our relationships with unbelievers but with believers as well.

*“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10).*

“Go the Extra Mile” makes a perfect theme for a wedding sermon. The wedding

text that most couples want at their wedding is 1 Corinthians 13. It is a beautiful text—flowing beauty and rhythm. But, have you considered what it calls the bride and groom to embrace within their relationship?

*“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a).*

This is a higher love than what the world is familiar with, for those who have been married a while know that for these verses to be a reality, one must be willing to go the extra mile and then some. It requires that one be willing to give up the rights associated with “me” in favor of “we.”

When Jesus said, *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations. . .”*, He knew their going and our going would be into a world that would be unfair and would take advantage. It is in this light that His promise becomes even sweeter: *“Surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

**Prayer:** Lord, it is so hard to go that extra mile. You know that better than anyone. How did you do it? Help me. Give me a heart that is willing to go the extra mile with those people that are so hard to live with at times. I can do all things as you give me the strength. **Amen.**

**Challenge:** For whom might you be able and willing to go the extra mile this day?

**Scripture Reading:** Matthew 5

**From the Book of Concord:** “Therefore it is God’s real intention that we should allow no one to suffer harm but show every kindness and love. And this kindness, as I said, is directed especially toward our enemies. For doing good to our friends is nothing but an ordinary virtue of pagans, as Christ says in Matthew 5[:46–47].

Once again we have God’s Word by which he wants to encourage and urge us to true, noble, exalted deeds, such as gentleness, patience, and, in short, love and kindness toward our enemies. He always wants to remind us to recall the First Commandment, that he is our God; that is, that he wishes to help, comfort, and protect us, so that he may restrain our desire for revenge.

If we could thoroughly impress this on people’s minds, we would have our hands full of good works to do” (The Large Catechism, The Fifth Commandment, pp. 412-413.193-196).