**The Second Mile**

**July 26, 2020**

*Matthew 5:38-42*

*“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 anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”*

Many of us are raised with the idea that when we get picked on, we need to stand up for ourselves. We need to make our voices heard and not let anyone walk all over us or take advantage of us. When someone mistreats us, we need to be strong and not take any of that from anyone else. Whereas we probably shouldn’t let people treat us like doormats, Christ calls us to a different sort of response in these verses.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus teaches His followers to treat others with respect and approach one another with grace and humility. He tells listeners that the last shall be first and the first shall be last. Paul carries on Christ’s teaching in his letter to the Philippians by saying that humility means valuing others above yourself, looking to the interests of other people before our own. To me, these thoughts from two of the greatest Christian teachers in history don’t line up with a culture that teaches us to give people what they deserve, and to look out for ourselves. I’m not arguing that we should allow others to bully us or knock us down. But maybe we should look to Christ’s way of responding to oppression…

Back in the first century, when Jesus was walking around in a nation that was Roman-ruled, it was common for Roman soldiers to be roaming the streets, hauling all their gear on horseback or even carrying their stuff themselves. The Romans adopted this “rule” that allowed them to force a Jew to carry their gear for one mile – no more no less – so they wouldn’t get worn out carrying it around themselves. This wasn’t an option for these Jews. If a soldier told a Jewish person to carry their stuff, they had to drop whatever they were doing, and haul it for a mile. Imagine the resentment, frustration, and anger Jews had toward Roman soldiers, for more than one reason, but for this reason in particular.

Now, Jesus doesn’t tell His followers to refuse the request of Roman soldiers. He doesn’t even say “do what you’re told and don’t fuss.” He tells listeners to joyfully do not only what they are required to do, but to do extra as well. Think about what effect this would have:

Roman Soldier: “Yo. Carry my pack.” Jesus follower: “OK” \**walks one mile*\*

Roman Soldier: “Ok, you can put my stuff down.” Jesus follower: “I’d like to carry it another mile for you.” Roman Soldier: “Uhhh, why?” Jesus follower: “Because I am a disciple of Jesus, and He told us to do this for you.” Roman Soldier: “Tell me more about Jesus.”

By going the extra mile, not only were Christ followers doing something extremely kind and unexpected, but they were opening the door and creating an opportunity to talk about Jesus.

Sometimes, following Jesus doesn’t make a whole lot of sense to us. It requires us to step out in faith and consider our own needs less. But it produces a stronger relationship with Christ and a continued opportunity to tell others about Him.

*Questions for Reflection and Discussion*

1. Why is it so hard for us to consider the needs of others before our own, especially if other people are mistreating us?
2. Does following Jesus always make sense? Why or why not?
3. What does it mean in your own settings to go the extra mile for someone else? If you do that, especially for someone who you don’t really like or respect, what kind of impact might that have on your relationship with that person?
4. What is the difference between letting people walk all over you and responding in the way Jesus asks us to? Is there a difference?
5. When Jesus was tortured, beaten, whipped, and eventually crucified, how did He model what He taught in this passage? Would you say He was letting people treat Him like a doormat?
6. What is something you could do this week that goes the second mile? If someone asks you why you’re doing what you are doing, what will you be prepared to tell them?