

Going the Extra Mile

We recently started a class on leadership and one of the things mentioned was getting out of your comfort zone. This is difficult for most of us because we don't want to be in an uncomfortable situation. Often it requires doing a little extra. This is going to be our theme this morning as we consider going the extra mile.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus did a lot of teaching that was new to the people. One of those new concepts is seen in Matthew 5:20 where Jesus would say ***“Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:20)*** The Pharisees and scribes were so legalistic that they kept the letter of the law and nothing more. What they did was merely a mechanical exercise. So you see them on the street corner praying to be seen of men or tithing for the praise of others. The Pharisaical attitude is doing only what is required and nothing more. But Jesus tells us that we need to have a different attitude; one that exceeds the minimum.

Then he gives an illustration as to what he was talking about. ***Matthew 5:41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.*** Going the extra mile entails doing more than is required; more than the norm. During the time of Jesus' earthly ministry the Romans were in charge politically and they had a law where if there was a load to be moved, they could compel a Jewish citizen to carry that load for up to one mile. Often this would entail carrying the soldiers pack.

This practice began under the reign of Cyrus. Since post-offices were then unknown, for royal commands to be delivered safely to different parts of the empire, Cyrus stationed horsemen at proper intervals on all the great public highways. Much like the pony express, they delivered the message to one another, thus intelligence was rapidly and safely communicated. These heralds were permitted to compel any person, or to press any horse, boat, ship, or other vehicle that they might need for the quick transmission of the king's commandments.

The Jews fiercely resented such impositions, and Jesus' teaching is rather than resisting, or even resenting, the disciple should volunteer for an extra mile. The word here translated as mile refers to the Roman definition of 1000 paces, slightly shorter than a modern mile. The mile was a specifically Roman unit of measure. This sheds a little light on Simon being compelled to help Jesus carry the cross. ***Matthew 27:32 And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.***

For the next few minutes I would like to examine a few areas where we can go the extra mile; do more than the minimum. One area we can go the extra mile is Bible study. You may read your Bible on a regular basis, maybe even daily which is good; but that's what the Pharisees' would do. ***2 Timothy 2:14-15 Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. (15) Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*** Going the first mile might be studying. Implied here is studying things that are profitable; not things that would undermine the hearer.

But to go the second mile might be expand your study in teach others. Jump back up to verse 2 of this chapter. ***2 Timothy 2:2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.*** Let us not be content with simply studying, but share it with others who then shall teach others also. This is called duplication. You know that new converts get it when you see them duplicating. This is what Paul meant when he said ***1 Corinthians 11:1 Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.***

What about worship. The Pharisaical attitude would be not to forsake worship on Sunday morning. Attending each Sunday morning worship would be going the first mile. After all we read in **Hebrews 10:24-25** *And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: (25) Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.* Once I have done that then I have fulfilled my obligation. But what about going the extra mile; doing a little more than is expected.

Let me point out that the word in verse 25 is “assembling” and not “the assembly.” It is broader than just Sunday morning; it embraces whenever the church assembles. When Peter was in a Jerusalem prison, notice what the early church did. **Acts 12:5** *Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.* This was more than just a Sunday morning gathering. We read in verse 12 that MANY were gathered in the house of Mary. **Acts 12:12** *And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.* The church was having a prayer meeting and the members were gathered together.

If we were to have such a meeting would you come? Sad to say my guess is that most of you would not. I base my statement on looking at Sunday night and Wednesday night attendance. This is going the extra mile and more that 50% of those in the sound of my voice have the “one mile – Pharisaical attitude.” Meeting one time a week is enough to meet their obligation.

Let me challenge you to make up your mind that you are going to come back tonight and Wednesday. It hasn't been too many months ago that we regularly had 55 to 60 for Sunday evening and Wednesday night Bible class. Now we are in the low 40's. What's happen? Could it be that we have become content with simply going one mile. QUESTION. Is it good to attend these extra services and take advantage of studying the inspired word of God? I think most would answer that yes it is a good thing. If you so answered let me remind you of what James said. **James 4:17** *Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*

What about the matter of forgiveness. Forgiveness is something we all deal with from time to time; either we are seeking forgiveness or we are extending forgiveness. We are told in Ephesians 4:32 to **“forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.”** Paul was writing to Christians in the church at Ephesus and instructs them to forgive one another. Jesus gives us the same message. **Luke 17:3** *Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.* This is going the first mile. This is what is expected of the Christian.

The second mile might be forgiving repeatedly. There was a time when Jesus was giving some teaching on this matter and Peter asked **Matthew 18:21-22** *Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? (22) Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.* The Pharisaical attitude was forgive three times and no more; so Peter likely felt generous in suggesting seven times. After all this was twice the custom of the day plus one. But Jesus said you go the extra mile; you forgive seventy times seven.

Now we understand that wording to be a figurative term suggesting an unlimited amount, but let's consider if it were literal. That would mean we are to forgive 490 times. If I wronged you and asked for forgiveness you would probably extend it. But if I did the same thing next week, would you be a little reluctant. What about the week after that. 490 times would mean forgiving me every week for 9 ½ years. Where would you say enough is enough? Going the extra mile in forgiveness is difficult.

Closely related is love for one another. We are to love the brethren. Notice what John says on the matter. **1 John 3:11** *For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.* Then verse 7 of chapter four begins with *Beloved, let us love one another (1 John 4:7a)*. This is the going the first mile and for the most part we do a pretty good job with this.

What about our going the second mile. What about those that don't like you. **Matthew 5:43-44** *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. (44) But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.* Here we have a new dimension to Christianity that is unnatural. You have to cultivate this characteristic. Let us understand that there is a difference between loving your enemy and liking your enemy. You may not like him or his ways, but you can still love him; you wish him no ill will. You would do him good if given the opportunity.

Now let's consider one last matter. What about sin. Sin is a problem that we all have. **Romans 3:10** *As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:* Then just a few verses later we read **Romans 3:23-24** *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; (24) Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:* We all have a sin problem but by God's grace there is redemption found in Christ Jesus. Redemption means your debt for sin has been paid. This is one of those spiritual blessings found in Christ. To receive the benefit of this redemption one needs to be in Christ. That is going the first mile. That is expected of the sinner. To get into Christ one has to be baptized. **Romans 6:3** *Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?* Another similar passage is seen in Galatians 3. **Galatians 3:27** *For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

Let me suggest to you that going the second mile is a bit more difficult. Making the decision to be baptized for the remission of sin is really easy and expected. But the second mile is faithfulness which entails avoiding sinful behavior. **1 Thessalonians 5:22** *Abstain from all appearance of evil.*

Notice Peter's teaching on this matter. **1 Peter 2:11-12** *Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; (12) Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.* Going the second mile is to avoid even the appearance of evil and the reason is because it will poison your soul and destroy your influence toward others.

Perhaps you are here today and have not gone the first mile regarding sin. Let us understand the seriousness of sin. If not dealt with, it will separate you from God and will lead to spiritual death. Let me put it bluntly; sin will send your soul to hell for all eternity. Going the first mile is being baptized for the remission of your sin. **Acts 2:37-38** *Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? (38) Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

Baptism washes away your sin. **Acts 22:16** *And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*

There may be some here that have been baptized for the remission of sin but have wandered away, you can fix that to by repented and asking for forgiveness. In Luke 15 we have the story of a boy who left home only to find himself in a desperate situation and wanted to come back home and his loving father welcomed him back. There is a way back home. If you are subject to the Lord's invitation we invite you to come forward.