

## Going the Second Mile

Matthew 5

Mark Twain once said this about the Bible: "I have no problem with those parts of the Bible I don't understand. It's those parts of the Bible I do understand that gives me fits." The passage that we are going to study certainly fits into that category.

This passage illustrates something I bet most of you have never thought about before. One of the easiest things in the world to do is to become a Christian. It is ridiculously easy. All you have to do is confess you are a sinner, repent of your sin, believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sin and was raised from the dead, and surrender your life to Him as your Lord and Savior; and you become a Christian immediately and instantaneously. There is not an easier thing in the world than to become a Christian. But at the same time, one of the most difficult things in the world is to be a Christian, and you're going to see that illustrated this morning.

What Jesus says is totally antithetical to the typical attitude in America. Years ago there was a bumper sticker that became rather popular that simply said two words: "I Want." Now that tag would fit on just about every car in America. We live in the country of "I want." I want my rights; I want my happiness; I want my way; I want my money.

Rights are considered as American as apple pie. This is a country where citizens have rights. The best known part of the Constitution is the Bill of Rights. I'm all for the right kind of rights, but today rights don't so much protect the innocent as they promote the guilty. If you're going to be a real Christian you're going to have to give up some rights.

Bill Walton learned that to play basketball for John Wooden you had to give up some rights. Coach Wooden had a rule against facial hair. If you played for him no facial hair was allowed. After a ten day break from school, Bill Walton came to practice

wearing a beard. Coach Wooden walked up to him and said, "Bill, have you forgotten something?" Walton replied, "Coach, if you mean the beard, I think I should be allowed to wear it, it's my right."

Coach Wooden said, "Do you really believe in that?" He said, "Yes, I do, very much." Coach Wooden looked at him and said, "Bill, I have great respect for individuals who stand up for those things in which they believe. I really do. If you believe that is your right, I would die for your right to defend that right." Bill Walton said, "Thank you, Coach." Then Wooden said, "I just want you to know the team is really going to miss you."

We've all heard the expression, "Do your duty." Well, the Lord Jesus once again tells us something that no human would have ever thought of. He is going to tell us, "Do what is not your duty," and "Do more than your duty." That is going the second mile. What does this mean?

- I. Be Willing To Get Worse Than You Deserve
- II. Be Willing to Give More Than You Are Asked
- III. Be Willing to Go Farther Than You Are Required
- IV. Be Willing To Grant All That Is Needed

[Members: Matthew 5:38–48 the sermon titled "Your Honor: Jesus' Honor Code of Turning the Other Cheek" by Leonard Sweet]

Honor Bound.

Those words "honor bound" have deep resonance.

\*Cub Scouts declare, "On my honor as a Scout..."

\*Soldiers pledge themselves to "Duty. Honor. Country."

\*The fifth commandment (depending on how you count) says "Honor thy father and thy mother."

\*Husbands and wives promise to "Love. Honor. Cherish."

A point of honor is a good thing. Honor points us beyond ourselves and our little orbits. Honor connects us to others. A shared sense of honor creates a common culture.

But when the wrong things become "honored," honor itself can turn ugly. Consider how in ancient Japanese culture the importance of maintaining one's "honor" sometimes led those who felt shamed by imperfect behavior to commit ritual suicide or hari-kiri. Death became the only way to "save face" and restore honor.

But there is an even worse dishonoring of honor that curdles in the air of its occurrence: "Honor Killing."

In October 2009 in Arizona a father raced his Jeep across a parking lot and plowed into his twenty year old daughter and another woman. While her companion survived, the daughter was killed. This was an "honor killing."

For those of you unfamiliar with the story, let me summarize briefly: Iraqi born Faleh Almaleki sought out and killed his daughter Noor because he felt she had brought shame to his family. The US born Noor had left an arranged marriage to an Iraqi man, returned to her hometown in Arizona, and was living

with the mother of her new boyfriend. While she still considered herself a Muslim, Noor wanted to live the life of an American girl. She wanted to wear Western clothes, work at an office, go to college.

Faleh, as the head of his family, felt Noor had dishonored him, their entire extended family clan, and Islam itself by her actions. In his eyes the only way the family honor could be restored was to kill her. "An Iraqi," he insisted, "is worth nothing without honor." Faleh later explained, "No one hates his daughter, but honor is precious, and nothing is better than honor, and we are a tribal society that can't change."

Official statistics admitted that at least 1261 known "honor killings" had occurred in 2006 (the most current statistics I could find). But in the rural communities of Pakistan, Iraq, and Afghanistan, no one would think of reporting such "family" incidents. Even when "honor killings" are made known, there is typically little or no punishment for the killer.

The British Pakistani historian Tariq Ali asks us to "Consider the following. A man dreams his wife has betrayed him. He wakes up and sees her lying next to him. In a fury he kills her. This really happened in Pakistan and the killer escaped punishment. If dreams are to be treated as justification for an honor killing, what woman is safe?" (London Review of Books, December 2008, 35).

Since "honor killings" involve restoring family honor, often the whole family is involved. In the case of Noor Almaleki, her mother, her brother, and her uncle, helped her father initially escape from the authorities (he was finally apprehended in London and is on trial now in Arizona). In Peshawar a woman seeking a divorce from an abusive husband was in a meeting with her attorney when her own mother rushed into the office with two armed men and had them shoot her daughter dead.

This is a human face of "honor."

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## Love Your Enemy

In a sermon written in a Georgia jail and preached just after the bus protest in Montgomery, Alabama, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said this about loving your enemies:

After noting that hate is just as injurious to the hater as the hated, Dr. King says,

"Of course this is not practical; life is a matter of getting even, of hitting back, of dog eat dog... My friends, we have followed the so-called practical way for too long a time now, and it has led inexorably to deeper confusion and chaos. Time is cluttered with the wreckage of communities which surrendered to hatred and violence. For the salvation of our nation and the salvation of mankind, we must follow another way. This does not mean that we abandon our righteous efforts. With every ounce of our energy we must continue to rid this nation of the incubus of segregation. But we shall not in the process relinquish our privilege and our obligation to love. While abhorring segregation, we shall love the segregationist. This is the only way to create the beloved community."

Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: the Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, page 596, quoted by Chuck Queen, *Love Your Enemies*

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## What Christians Are Really Made Of

This text from Matthew makes me recall the words of C.S. Lewis, "Surely what a man does when he is taken off his guard is the best evidence for what sort of man he is. If there are rats in a cellar, you are most likely to see them if you go in very suddenly. But the suddenness does not create the rats; it only prevents them from hiding. In the same way, the suddenness

of the provocation does not make me ill-tempered; it only shows me what an ill-tempered man I am."

Think about the reaction that Christ calls us to have if someone strikes us on the cheek. What kind of a person would that make us? To turn the other cheek and refuse to react with similar anger or malice shows the world we are Christian. So if what we do when we are taken off guard is the best evidence of what sort of person we are, let us pray our reactions show that we are good Christians!

Adapted from C.S. Lewis

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### Practice What You Admire

Once upon a time a prince was born physically deformed. He was known as the hunchback prince. His physical posture troubled him, because he knew a prince should stand tall and straight. One day he commissioned a sculptor to make a statue of him, not as he was but as he wanted to be. When the statue was completed, the prince had it placed in his private garden. Every day thereafter, he would stand before his statue and try to pull back his shoulders and stand tall. After some years, his physique matched the statue!

It is obvious, is it not, that the principle involved in this story is that what we admire, adore, greatly respect, and worship, we eventually become.

John Brokhoff, Old Truths for New Times, CSS Publishing Company

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### Going Beyond Duty: 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..." 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 Jesus, for the goodness of others, and because of the grace of God, go the second mile.

James Merritt, Collected Sermons, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com)

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Reconciliation: Refusing to Retaliate

It's a story that is repeated on every elementary school

playground, nearly every day in our country. Two fourth-graders get into it during recess; something about "he did this, so I did that" and it kind of goes south from there. When they get back to class, Billy trips Joey. After lunch, Joey breaks Billy's pencil on purpose. When nobody is looking, Billy writes on Joey's desk, and later, Joey steals Billy's folder. After school, Billy and his friends face Joey and his friends, and they call each other names. Somebody gets hurt. Somebody else gets hurt worse. And then there is no telling when or if these conflicts will ever end.

Sound familiar? We have all experienced this sort of escalating pettiness and we readily admit that it is silly. But I would suggest to you that we can remove the names "Billy" and "Joey" and insert the words "husband" and "wife" and the story is much the same. Or we could insert the names of two rival high schools, or two rival companies, or "The Hatfields" and "The McCoys." Or Republicans and Democrats, or "pro-life" and "pro-choice," or Israel and Palestine, or America and almost any Arab nation you care to name. Conflict at any level is conflict. And if not preventable, most conflict is at least resolvable...but not until one side refuses to retaliate and instead decides to reconcile.

Steve Molin, He Hit Me First!

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## A Christian Conception of Justice

The nature of men and of organized society dictates the maintenance in every field of action of the highest and purest standards of justice and of right dealing.... By justice the lawyer generally means the prompt, fair, and open application of impartial rules; but we call ours a Christian civilization, and a Christian conception of justice must be much higher. It must include sympathy and helpfulness and a willingness to forego self-interest in order to promote the welfare, happiness, and



contentment of others and of the community as a whole.  
Woodrow Wilson

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### Forgiveness Is a New Life

Immaculee Ilibagiza was a 22-year-old university student in the 1990s when terrible violence broke out in her home country of Rwanda. Hutus killed her parents, her brothers, and hundreds of her Tutsi friends. A Hutu pastor, who risked his life to save her, hid her and six other women. They lived in a small bathroom, a wooden wardrobe covering the door. For three months, they endured hunger, fear, and the sounds of soldiers in the house unsuccessfully searching for Tutsis.

In those cramped quarters, she began to pray the Rosary. Always she stumbled over the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." She knew that the prayer called her to forgive those who had killed her family and endangered her. She didn't think she could do it, but she realized she was consumed by hate. She was afraid she would become like the people who had killed her family. Nevertheless, in her mind, forgiving her family's killers was like forgiving the devil. Finally, afraid that her hate would crush her heart, she asked God to forgive those who had done her so much harm. Slowly, with God's help, she was able to let go and forgive her family's killers. Eventually, she even visited one of her brother's killers in prison, taking his hand and offering forgiveness. She says that forgiveness saved her life. "It's a new life, almost like a resurrection."

Charles L. Aaron, Jr., *Becoming The Salt and The Light*, CSS Publishing Company, Inc.