

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 trouble.* Our passage for this morning certainly fits into that category.

One of the easiest things in the world to do is to become a Christian, it's ridiculously easy. All we have to do is confess we're sinners and repent of our sin, believe that Jesus Christ died for our sin and was raised from the dead, and then accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour; and we become Christian's immediately and instantaneously. There is little that's easier than becoming a Christian. There again, one of the most difficult things in the world is to be a Christian, which is what we are looking at this morning.

What Jesus says is completely against the typical attitude today. We live in a time where everyone knows and demands their rights. We read that most of the knife crime among young people occurs because they consider that they were disrespected. We live in a time of *I want my rights; I want my happiness; I want my own way; I want my respect!* I'm all for people having rights and respect but it has to be shared. But here's the bad news; if we want to be authentic Christian's, we're going to have to give up some rights. Jesus teaches us that we have to give up a little of ourselves and go the extra mile. ***Jesus is telling that Christians should be willing to get worse than we deserve!***

***You have heard that it was said: An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you not resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also (v38-39).*** In the first century a slap on the cheek was considered an insult, today it would be similar to an insulting comment. There were two things that would anger a Jew two thousand years ago. One would be to spit in his face and the other would be to slap his face. Which is exactly what they did to Jesus. *Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck Him with the palms of their hands* (Matt 26:67). Even a slave would rather be struck on his back by a whip, than slapped on his cheek by his master. When somebody slaps you, our natural impulse is to slap them back. Someone insults you, the first thought is to insult them back.

But Jesus said, If you're a Christian, you should turn the other cheek. Let me explain that Jesus was not suggesting Christian passivism; He was talking about personal revenge! What Jesus is talking about is retaliation and retribution. It's what Paul said in Romans 12:19: *Do not avenge yourselves, but give place to wrath; for it is written Vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord.* In other words, we never get even by trying to get even. Now this is wise advice, but I think it's worth noting that Jesus suggested two cheeks, not dozens of them. He was not advocating we become a doormat to people who try to abuse us. Paul also said in Romans 12: *If it's possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all people.* Now sometimes that is not always possible.

I heard about a small man that walked into a café and sat down to eat. A big bully got up and walked over to the small man and chopped him across the neck; knocking him onto the floor. As the man was getting up, the bully said: *That's karate from Japan.* The smaller man rubbed his neck, sat back down and continued to eat. The big man returned, picked the man up and threw him over his shoulder: *That's Judo from Japan.* The little man walked out of the restaurant with the bully laughing at him. He returned fifteen minutes later, walked up behind him, cracked him over the head and said: *That's a cricket bat from Sports Direct.* Sometimes self-defence is not only warranted and necessary, but it's good for the other person. But forgiveness and not revenge, should be our first response.

***As Christians we should be willing to give more than we are asked: If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also (v.40).*** The situation that Jesus describes was common in Biblical times. If someone took another to court, and the person didn't have the money to pay the judgment, the court could order payment of the lawsuit in clothing. You could take the man's tunic or shirt, but you could not take his coat. The shirt was a type of tunic that was worn as an undergarment. The coat was an outer garment that served as a blanket at night. Most people in those days owned only one coat and perhaps one or two shirts. The reason the coat is mentioned specifically, is because it was the most valuable garment that people owned, and this was because it served as a shelter.

Jewish law stated that: *If you ever take your neighbour's coat as a pledge, you shall return it before the sun goes down for that is his only covering (Ex 22)*. Jesus goes beyond both the Jewish law and He said: *If you lose a lawsuit, but the judgment does not satisfy the plaintiff, voluntarily give more than the judgment if it will make things right. Thereby you can settle things not only legally, but also morally*. When we give more than required, we are demonstrating that we regret wrongdoing on our part; and we're showing that we want to make things right. There are times when it's wise not to see how little we can give, but how much! A Christian should be willing to give more than asked, and while it may cost more in the short run, but we will gain more in the long run.

**Jesus said a Christian should be willing to go further than required. *And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with them two (v41)***. Jesus' Israel was controlled by the Romans who had a law that embittered the Jewish people. By law a Roman soldier could compel a Jew to carry his weapons, or his backpack, or anything else for one mile. It didn't matter whether the Jew was working or on the way to worship, the Roman soldier had the right to force him to carry his burden. Every Jew had marked off one mile from their house and memorised the exact distance. When a Jew was forced to go that mile, he would walk the exact mile, put the burden down; and not go one inch more.

Now the Pharisees had life boiled down to just the minimum of what they had to do. The Pharisees were always trying to figure out how little they could get by with. They had life broken down to just how little they had to do to get by. But Jesus said: *Don't go just the first mile that you have to go, go the second mile because that's where the real blessing of life is found*. We will find that when we go the extra mile for people, we will not only be a blessing, but we will be blessed in return.

**Jesus said be willing to grant all that is needed: *Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away (v42)***. The implication here is that the person doing the asking has a real genuine need, and if it's a genuine need, we should try to meet that need. This doesn't mean that we're required to respond to every request.

We should discern if the request's reasonable and if there's a real need behind the request. Some giving hurts more than it helps. I was in the city centre a while back and I walked by a man sitting in a doorway, and so I stopped to speak to him. He said that he hadn't eaten that day and could I give him some money? I explained that I was a Christian and I offered to go and get him a sandwich and a hot drink instead, and that earned me a tirade of abuse. I'm pleased to say that this was a rare reaction as most folk are happy to be helped. But this guy didn't want what he was asking for, he wanted a handout and those are two different things. Sometimes it's not easy going the second mile. But I believe that if we only go the first mile, we're a victim. If we go the second mile we're the victor for the first mile is the slave mile; the second mile is the smile mile.

Successful and happy people in life are the second milers because they receive blessing through their efforts. Those who only give the minimum are rarely happy and there's something more important than getting every little second out of our lunch hour. There is something affirming and faith giving about someone who goes beyond and above what's required as a habit of life.

Jesus was all about going the second mile. When Jesus left His Father's Kingdom to come down to this dirty world, He went the second mile. When the King of Kings was born in a lowly stable, surrounded by animals, He went the second mile. When our Lord and Saviour died on the cross for sins that were never His, He went the second mile. And although we sin daily, the fact that Jesus does not withdraw His Salvation from us; demonstrates that He goes the second mile.

Does this speak to us? Do we feel convicted to go the extra mile for people, or are we still going to stick to the contract of only going as far as we have to, and not an inch more? As I've said, becoming a Christian is relatively easy as Christ has done the hard part for us, but being and living as a Christian is a different matter, that's far more difficult because of what this asks of us. ***Can we follow Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5? Can we turn the other cheek? If someone asks for our shirt, can we give them our coat as well?***

*If we have to go a mile, are we willing to go the extra mile? Can we give to those who ask of us?* These are really challenging questions because they go against the world's perceived wisdom. But as Christians, we are not off the world. In John 18: 36, Jesus said: *My kingdom is not of this world.*

Each morning we pray: May Your Kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven. The way we live as Christians will bring about God's Kingdom on earth. We have a choice, do we live by Christ's teaching, or do we live by the world's standards. I will leave that choice with you and with myself, and may God guide us in our choice. ***Amen***

*(1898 words)*