**GOING THE SECOND MILE**

I am sure most of you have heard the expression, “going the second mile.” And, I am also sure most of you reading this know that this saying is not just a common proverb like “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,” or “Kill two birds with one stone.” When I tell someone that I am willing to go the second mile, I am stating a very important principle Jesus taught the world in His sermon on the mount. It became a hallmark identification of first century Christianity. It is also a hallmark of what it means to be a Christian today.

When Jesus told that multitude gathered on a mountainside “*Whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two*” (Matthew 5:41), He was declaring the mindset of all those who claim to follow Jesus Christ. If we are to wear His name - *Christ*-ian - then we are to be known by everyone who knows or sees us as “Second Mile People!”

The first century Jews were under the iron yoke of the Roman Empire. A soldier had the authority at any moment to tap you on the shoulder with the blade of his sword and say, “You! Carry my bags!” The law of Rome had decreed he could compel you to be in his service for one mile. My research suggests it was put into law during wartime so that a soldier in a combat zone, desperate for rest, could enlist any citizen to assist him by carrying his bags. It would be similar to a police officer commandeering a person’s car to pursue a criminal. The law was intended for special circumstances, but the army in Palestine had grown to abuse the privilege and compel any Jew to simply bear the burden for any reason. They hated it.

I’m sure there were a lot of complaints about this abuse of power. The Jews were, as always, a rebellious people and the soldiers likely saw this “law” as an excuse to irritate and retaliate at the constant grumbling they heard. Suddenly, Jesus is sitting there preaching that if a soldier taps you on the shoulder to bear his burden, you not only must do it, but then, with a smile on your face and positive attitude in your heart, tell him, “Sure, gladly, and I’ll even take it for you a second mile!” Can you not hear the gasp and moans from His audience that day? Can you see the looks in their eyes and the shaking of their heads at such a statement?

Jesus said, “*Whoever shall* ***compel*** *you*…” The word compel is a word which means “to force into service.” You have no choice in the matter. Under penalty of law you are commanded to obey if pressed into service.

No, we are not under Roman rule today. But the principle remains. Our life is full of “first mile” obligations. We *have* to go to work to feed our family. We *must* be faithful to our vows of marriage. We are *required* to attend the assembly on Sunday morning. We are *obligated* to shelter-at-home and social-distance during a viral pandemic. These are all compulsory. They are our *duty* we *must* do by *necessity*. They are *essential*. Question, do those italicized underlined words make you upset, even angry? Who are you to tell me what I can or can’t do?!!! Life is full of first-mile responsibilities we must do, even if it’s against our will.

Jesus, of course, is preaching *ATTITUDE*. Yes, in life we have many things we have to do under compulsion. But a Christ-like attitude is one of having a Volunteer spirit. I ***have*** to do some things, but I ***want*** to do even more if it brings honor to Christ and glory to God. In short, it’s not about me, but Him, and others!

I must work, but you should never, ever hear me say in my heart, “I just want to take this job and shove it!” I’ll wager there are a lot of people who thought that just a few weeks ago that wish now they could go back to work! Those who work with murmuring and complaining under their breath, doing everything grudgingly, are first-milers who would never volunteer to stay late when the company is in trouble and needs to survive to keep the doors open. They think only of self, not others. Not so with a Christian. He knows a secret the first-miler will never learn, the second-mile done under the spirit of Christ is no longer a slave, but a free man! Hear Paul out on this in Ephesians 6,

5 Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, ***as to Christ***; 6 not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 with goodwill doing service, ***as to the Lord***, and not to men, 8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.”

First-miler saints are those who feel it essential to attend worship on Sunday morning. They come and get a check-mark on their attendance chart and call it a week. They might actually like this shelter-in-place stay-at-home worship by video routine. Quarantines can ease the conscience of first-milers. But for second-mile Christians we are learning the real purpose why God told us in Hebrews 10:24-25,

24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Second-milers, who are always thinking of God, and others, are now seeing first-hand during this stay-at-home order *WHY* God wants us physically together as often as possible. “*Assembling of ourselves together*” allows for “*exhorting one another*” in order to “*stir up love and good works*” so much more. Social distancing is our first-mile duty at the moment, but we who are second-milers are having withdrawal pains from our addiction of being together. Yes, we are finding new ways of reaching out to touch each other, but we are learning, perhaps for the first time in our life, what Hebrews 10:25 really means, and why God said it. While First-milers are content, Second-milers can’t wait to greet one another with a holy kiss (or at least a holy hug).

Let’s finish with a Second-Miler’s favorite verse he/she has memorized. Have you?

“And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.” (Col. 3:23-24)

Until tomorrow… See you at the Second Mile marker. I love you.

Rick