

October 26, 2014

*Facing the Challenge*

Matthew 5:38-48

**Matthew 5:38-48** "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 someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

I love this story. In 1912 two Irish singers were spending the afternoon in a pub drinking a few pints. The two were extolling the musical traditions of their beloved Ireland. They boasted they could write and perform a song in the same day. One of the patrons challenged them. He didn't believe they could write and perform a song in the same day. The news of that challenge spread throughout that community. That evening a crowd gathered to hear the debut of their song. They named it, *"It's a Long Way to Tipperary."* The rest is history. That song is synonymous with the First World War. Can I ask you a question this morning?

What is the greatest challenge facing you today? Everyone is challenged by something. What is yours? Is your spouse your great challenge? He or she frustrates you to tears. You just don't seem to be on the same page. Are your children your greatest challenge? You did your best, but something went wrong. Is anyone here paying for their adult children's lifestyle? Is anyone here challenged by education? The new school year has started. Your class load and your work load are heavy. The truth be told, you are failing at both. Is anyone here challenged by health issues? You have that cough that just won't go away! The doctor wants to run some tests, but you are afraid. Is anyone here challenged financially? Life is so expensive. Are you going to pay your entire electric bill, or fill your entire prescription? What is your greatest challenge? If you have lived more than ten minutes, you know that life is challenging. Everyone is faced with some kind of challenge. Edmund Hillary once said something I believe is true, *"It is not the mountain we conquer but ourselves."* This morning Jesus is challenging us.

We are in the fifth chapter of Matthew. I have read these words a million times, but I wish I had never read them. They are hard words, they are challenging words. The Master is challenging us to live out the faith. These are not Paul's opinions or something

Moses said in the Old Testament. These are Jesus' words, so they need to be taken seriously. These words are found in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus makes it clear. Living out the faith will not be easy. It will be challenging. If you really want to thank Jesus for saving your soul, then you must take these words seriously. This is the challenge. If you apply these words to your life, then Jesus will be pleased with you. However, if you apply these words to your life, then the people in your life will think you are a nut. They run contrary to human nature. That is what makes the words so challenging. What the Master is really doing is drawing a line in the sand with his well-worn sandal and challenging you to stand with him. It is lonely standing with Jesus. Are you up to the challenge? I hope your answer is yes.

If you are going to accept the challenge and stand with Jesus, then you must do three unnatural things. First, you must **love unconditionally**. Are you open to loving your greatest enemy? Second, you must **forgive unreservedly**. Are you open to forgiving your greatest enemy? Third and finally, **serve unselfishly**. Are you open to sacrificing for a stranger? If you accept the challenge of standing with Jesus, then two things will happen. First, you will be shunned by this world. These are unnatural things. Two, if you apply these three things to your life, it will transform you into a new person, the kind of person who puts a smile on the face of God. If you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen!"**

### **Love Unconditionally**

Are you up to the challenge of loving unconditionally? Verses thirty-eight and thirty-nine in the scripture lesson says, *"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 someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."* It is easy to love likeable people, but it is not so easy to love the unlikeable. It is unnatural to love someone unconditionally who hurts you, but that is exactly what Jesus expects from you and me. That is what Jesus expects from all of his disciples. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

History tells us one of George Washington's closest friends was a pastor by the name of Peter Miller. He served a Baptist congregation in Ephrata, Pennsylvania. Within that congregation there was a man by the name of Michael Wittman, an evil-minded sort who did all he could to oppose and humiliate the pastor. One day Wittman was arrested for treason and sentenced to die. The hero of the story was the much maligned pastor, Peter Miller. He traveled seventy miles on foot to Philadelphia to plead for the life of the traitor, the evil-minded Wittman. The plea was heard by his good friend George Washington. "No, Peter," General Washington said. "I cannot grant you the life of your friend." "My friend!" exclaimed the old preacher. "He's the bitterest enemy I have." "What?" cried Washington. "You've walked seventy miles to save the life of an enemy? That puts the matter in different light. I'll grant your pardon." And he did. Peter Miller took Michael Wittman back home to Ephrata--no longer an enemy but a friend. Would anyone here beg or plead for the benefit of enemy? How hope you would, because that is exactly what Jesus expects from you. If you want to cross the line in the sand and

really be a disciple of Jesus, then you must love unconditionally. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Let me warn you, if you love unconditionally, the world will think you are a nut. I hope you are up to the challenge!

### **Forgive Unreservedly**

Are you up to the challenge of forgiving unreservedly? If you were to read the entire Gospel of Matthew, then you would discover near the end of the story, Jesus is hanging on the cross. The question is, why is Jesus on the cross? Jesus did nothing wrong. The Romans executed people in public to make them an example. Law breakers were not tolerated. However, there was only one problem. Jesus wasn't a law breaker, he was guilty of only one thing, loving everyone! Think about this for a moment. As he hung on the painful cross he could have said all kind of things. Jesus could have said, "I will get even!" He could have said, "I am innocent." He could have said, "I will see you burn in hell." But Jesus didn't say any of those things. What did Jesus say? The Master said, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing." It is not easy to forgive unreservedly, but that is what Jesus expects from you and me. That is what Jesus expects from all disciples. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

Several years ago, a young Korean exchange student was attacked and killed going to the post office near the campus at the University of Pennsylvania. The news of the attack spread quickly. The entire city of Philadelphia was outraged. A teenage gang was accused. The District Attorney wanted them tried as adults, so they could be given the death penalty. Then suddenly, something shocking happened. A letter came from Korea that confused everyone. This is what the letter said:

#### **To Whom It May Concern:**

**Our family has met and has decided to petition your government so those guilty of this crime may be treated generously within your law. In order to give evidence of our sincere spirit, we have decided to save money for a fund to be used for the religious, educational, vocational and social guidance of the boys once they are released. We have learned about such forgiveness from our Savior, Jesus, who forgave us.**

Those Koreans were not just setting up a fund. They were crossing the line in the sand. They were disciples of Jesus Christ, and forgave unreservedly. Would you be able to forgive those teenagers? If you really want to cross the line in the sand and be a disciple of Jesus, then you must forgive unreservedly. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Let me warn you. If you forgive unreservedly, the world will think you are a nut! I hope you are up to the challenge!

### **Serve Unselfishly**

Are you up to the challenge of serving unselfishly? Verses forty through forty-two say, "*And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.*"

*If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*" It is not easy to serve unselfishly, but that is what Jesus expects from you and me. That is what Jesus expects from all disciples. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

On a dreary winter day in 1943, nine hundred and three troops and four chaplains boarded the SS Dorchester. World War II was in full swing, and the ship was headed across the icy north Atlantic. At midnight on February third, the ship was hit by a torpedo. The word went out that the ship was going down. One of the chaplains was a man by the name of George Fox. A young GI crept up to Fox and said, "I've lost my lifejacket. Fox said, "Take this," and handed the GI his lifejacket. Before the ship sank, each chaplain gave his life jacket to another man. The heroic chaplains then linked arms and lifted their voices in prayer as the Dorchester went down. Lt. Fox and his fellow chaplains were awarded posthumously the Distinguished Service Cross.

In a way it is sad. Those chaplains never had the opportunity to receive their medals, but they did cross that line in the sand. They were true disciples of Jesus Christ! They served unselfishly. Would you have given your lifejacket away to save someone else? And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Let me warn you. If you serve unselfishly, the world will think you are a nut. I hope you are up to the challenge.

I don't know why, but I have really enjoyed the World Series. Baseball in our time lives in the shadow of football. It would be easy not to know the American League champion Kansas City Royals are playing the National League champion San Francisco Giants. The series is now tied, 2-2. For that reason, they have been running old baseball movies.

The other night I came across the movie, *A League of their Own*. Perhaps you have seen the movie? It is about a women's baseball league during the Second World War. Geena Davis is the main character in the movie and plays the catcher of the Rockford Peaches. She is not only the best player on the team, she is the best player in the league. As the season drags on, Davis' character gets tired and decides to quit the team. She tells her manager, played by Tom Hanks, that she is going to quit because baseball is "too hard". I love his response. Hank's character responds, "Baseball is supposed to be hard. If it wasn't hard, everyone would do it." Then he said, "Hard is what makes baseball great!"

It is not just true of baseball, it is true of the faith. If it was easy, then everyone would do it. The challenge is what makes the faith so great! Are you going to cross the line and stand with Jesus? If you are, then you'd better be prepared to do the most unnatural things. Standing with Jesus means you are going to **love unconditionally**. Standing with Jesus means you are going to **forgive unreservedly**. Standing with Jesus means you are going to **serve unselfishly**. The choice is yours. I hope you are up to the challenge! And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"