

THIS SECOND MILE BUSINESS

TEXT: "And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles" Matthew 5:41

INTRODUCTION Some time ago, a display of modern art was held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art here in our own city. Sculptors, painters and artists from all over America competed for a total of \$52,000 in awards. The first place award went to an artist from the state of Illinois. His painting was not a particularly pleasant one. It simply showed a closed door bearing a funeral wreath. And underneath were these words: "That which I should have done, I did not do!"

Somehow these words caught my attention and in so doing served as something of a grim reminder of the minimum kind of living that so many people today are engaged in. Many of us do as little as we have to do. We find ourselves ruled by routine. We go so far and no farther. We live to ourselves and for ourselves. We fail to answer any high challenge. We hedge and draw back afraid to go beyond the customs of the crowd. We fulfill the obligations of life, but we don't like to do any more than is required of us.

And Jesus said: "And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles". This statement of the second mile principle is part of a series of similar statements made by Jesus. All of them are expressions of the new law of inner loyalty to an ideal rather than conformity to an older law of retaliation or revenge. Just listen once again to those words that I read to you several moments ago:

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'. But I say to you - Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you".

Here Jesus is challenging the old law that the wrong doer should get as good as he gave. This was the idea behind the Mosaic Law, the Code of Hammurabi, and the Roman System of Law. Jesus wanted to tear the minds of men away from this old, negative law of the jungle. He was telling his followers of a new idea. An idea that would help them to gain victory over their oppressors. How they must have listened to this new and amazing idea....this thought of winning over one's enemies, not by resisting and fighting them, but simply by going them one better.

I think Jesus is holding before us a secret. It is a secret that can change lives and transform the world around us. I would call it the secret of the power of willingness. The power of willingness is often the difference between failure and success, defeat and victory. What I'd like to do this morning in the time we have together is to explore this principle or this secret of the power of willingness, and in so doing suggest to you three applications of it. Perhaps as I do, something will be said that will speak to you and to your situation.

THE POWER OF WILLINGNESS OVERCOMES WEAKNESSES, AND MAGNIFIES SMALL TALENTS....

be something like this: the power of willingness overcomes weaknesses and magnifies small talents. Let me give you an example of the sort of thing I want to get across to you.

Some years ago, a boy by the name of Angelo Siciliano was born in Brooklyn. The boy was brought up in the slums and was a scrawny, undernourished lad. At the age of 16, he weighed only 97 pounds. One day, in the lobby of the Brooklyn museum, he noticed the statues of the Greek Gods, especially Hercules. He could hardly believe that men had posed for these statues. He had never realized before that men could have such powerful bodies. He decided right then and there that he would make himself over into the likeness of a Greek God. He clipped a series of exercises from a newspaper. He didn't have any fancy gym equipment in his cellar, but this didn't stop him. He devised his own system of tensing muscles by playing one muscle against another. It was hard work, and the other boys in the neighborhood often made fun of his efforts. But Angelo Siciliano was determined to reach his goal. Year after year, he continued with his exercises. Anyway to make a long story short, the skinny scrawny lad from Brooklyn later became known as Charles Atlas, the world's most perfectly developed man. Charles Atlas had the body of a Greek God. He has posed for statues of great men. One of them is the statue of George Washington in Washington Square of our own city. A triumph of the power of willingness.

The point behind the story is quite simple, but nevertheless important. It would be something like this. All of us have certain basic capacities in life. However limited these may be, they can always be increased through hard work and willing effort. God has provided for the expansion of our talents. He has made all of us for growth. A person grows as he is willing to try. No one compelled Angelo Siciliano to do what he did. Something drove him from within. You might even say that the power of willingness is more important than superior talent. Someone has said with great insight that "Genius is 90% perspiration and 10% inspiration". And remember this too: "A winner never quits, and a quitter never wins."

I think that this idea relates to all areas of living. And we would do well to learn this secret of giving ourselves without being driven. When we do this, we'll discover within ourselves undreamed of capacities for great living. Don't belittle your own abilities by saying that "I can't do this, or I can't do that". This power of willingness can reveal the true stuff of which we are made. God cannot use our large talents if they remain hidden and indifferent. But God can take our small talents, and if they're willingly dedicated, he can make them grow and multiply! This is the first thought or the first point I wish to underscore in your thinking: the power of willingness overcomes weaknesses and magnifies small talents.

THE POWER OF WILLINGNESS TAKES THE DRUDGERY OUT OF HARD TASKS

willingness takes the drudgery out of hard tasks. Once again let me illustrate the idea by giving you an example. It's a story about Harry Emerson Fosdick. I'm not sure whether I've used this story from this pulpit before or not, but if I have, I hope you'll forgive me for telling it a second time. It's one of my favorites.

The first idea that I would introduce to you in connection with this would

Moving on then, the second application of this principle might be expressed in this fashion. The power of

Harry Emerson Fosdick tells of the time that this mother sent him to pick a quart of strawberries when he was a small boy. He didn't want to pick a quart of strawberries. He dragged himself in a rebellious mood to the berry patch. He was resentful of a world in which little boys had to pick strawberries when they wanted to be doing something else. And then he had an idea. It might be fun to pick two quarts of strawberries instead of one and surprise the family. Years later, in looking back on this experience, he had this to say:

"I had such an interesting time picking two quarts of strawberries to the amazement of the entire Fosdick household, that, although it happened nearly a century ago, I have never forgotten it.

And so it is that life makes demands on you and me to go and do. I'm sure that the first mile under the requirements of duty is no stranger to any of us. In other words, there are somethings we have to do. But on the other hand, if we do no more than is expected of us, then, we are in a sense becoming slaves. Jesus is telling us how to break away. It's not by resistance or by rebellion, but simply by doing more than is expected of us.

I think we shall discover this that the sting of the first mile is softened as we go on willingly to the second mile. Even the hardest jobs become a joy when we find it is more fun to willingly pick two quarts of strawberries, then to pick one quart under pressure. As someone has pointed out: "Always do what's expected, plus a little more". It's a good rule to follow and as we follow such a rule, our relationships with others will improve and take on new meaning. Jesus knew this to be so. This then is the second thought to put into your minds, in that place where you store the things that are most important: This power of willingness takes the drudgery out of hard tasks.

THE POWER OF WILLINGNESS
ALWAYS GUARANTEES RESULTS.

Finally, it made be said that the power of willingness guarantees results.

Many, many years ago two seniors in a certain university were competing for the highest honors in the class. One night as one of the boys was turning off his light to go to bed, he noticed the light was still on in the room of his competitor. The next night he stayed up until the other light went out and then kept studying for one hour longer. He repeated the same thing each night. When the year was over, he had defeated his rival, and stood at the head of the class. He had, you might say, learned the lesson of the power of willingness. His name was James A. Garfield. Years later he became the president of our country.

Many of life's greatest accomplishments have been reached because men have been willing to walk this second mile. A half hearted effort will never take any one to a high goal. What we accomplish in life depends not so much on what we have, as it does on what we do with what we have! This, I think, is true in any sphere of life. Most of us don't get results because we're not willing to pay the high prices that are demanded.

Take, for instance, the difficult art of recording music. It's not easy to produce one disk that is note perfect and also compelling in mood and emotion. Most artists are willing to accept an approximation of perfection. Arturo Toscani took ten years, two symphonies, and twenty-six attempts before he would approve his recording of Debussy's "La Mer" - a twenty-three minute work. It's no wonder that Toscani was considered to be the greatest conductor of modern times.

This power of willingness is responsible for so much in life that is worthwhile. Some of the greatest things in life have been done not because they have to be done, but for the love of doing. Circuses employ daredevil flyers to thrill the crowds, but no one hired Lindburgh to fly to Paris. Artists are available for a price to paint pictures, but no one paid Raphael to paint, The Madonna and the Child. Men are not forced to the heights; they find their way there because they can't be stopped.

"And if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles!"

CLOSING SECTION The original meaning of our text is to be found in the Roman soldier's custom of calling on a person of a conquered nation to carry his heavy pack for a distance of one mile. If a Roman wished merchandise from a local bazaar to be taken to his barracks or if he wanted assistance in carrying his pack on a hot day, he needed only to point to a Jew and command "Carry this for me". It made little difference whether a man thus commandeered had urgent business of his own or was already near exhaustion from heavy toil. No excuse was acceptable and failure to comply immediately might result in torture or even death.

Not many of us are ever forced to march a mile with an enemy captor. Not many of us are compeled to carry the heavy pack of a soldier. But all of us are held captive by custom and convention. We're threatened by enemies of greed and selfishness and laziness. We face evil in the form of fear, hate, misunderstanding and indifference.

All of these can be overcome says Jesus, not by fighting or resisting them, but by side stepping them. We outwit our enemies by outliving them. We live beyond their reach when we do more than is required or expected of us....when we walk the second mile.

"O Master, let us walk with Thee
In lowly paths of service free;
Tell us thy secret: help us bear,
The strain of toil, the fret of care!"

LET US PRAY:

We do find it extremely difficult at times, Our Father, to walk this second mile. There are times when attitudes of hate, revenge take hold of us blotting out the thoughts of love and service. Help each one of us to take hold of ourselves, and with thy help, measure the living that we are doing by the mind of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen