

GOING A LITTLE FARTHER
by Lester J. Start
Undated

Text: Matthew 26:39 (a) “And he went a little farther”

Sometimes we run across a single short sentence, or even a terse phrase, which completely describes a certain man. For example, when we think of the phrase “Father of his country” we think of Washington and his life completely dedicated to one ideal. This tiny phrase is packed so full of meaning for us that it tells us just what Washington was with regard to his place in history. This sentence has been applied to the life of Paul “and he went into all the world and preached the gospel.” Here in one short sentence is summed up the significance of Paul, for his life was devoted to spreading the “good news” of salvation throughout the then - known world.

My text for this morning is a simple short sentence which seems to me to contain in a similar way the essential character of our Lord, Jesus Christ. It is the sentence in Matthew 26:39 which reads, “and He went a little farther.” Jesus had come with His disciples to the place called Gethsemane, we are told, and taking three of His disciples He went into the garden to pray. He told His companions that His heart was heavy and asked them to stay with Him. And then He went a little farther into the garden and prayed. I am sure that the writer of this gospel did not intend any great significance to the sentence, “and He went a little farther.” It’s means simply that Jesus walked on a little way, apart from His companions, as Luke tells us, a stone’s throw away. But the sentence is nevertheless significant just because it is one of those terse statements which sum up the complete picture of a man. Jesus went a little farther in everything that He did. This is the precise reason why we worship Him today. He knew and followed the will of God absolutely. While many others started in the direction of God, Jesus always went a little farther refusing to let relative considerations interfere with the absolute requirement of God. Nothing ever challenged His complete love for and devotion to God. And He followed the will of God absolutely, going farther than anyone else, because He believed that no treasures on earth could compare with those of heaven and that with God there can be no fear or weakness.

There have been other great religious leaders in the world’s history, men who came very close to God. But we remember Jesus and forget the others because He went a little farther; while others came close He became one with God. Going a little farther can spell the difference between success and failure; this is seen in the life of Jesus, and it is seen just as clearly in life today. The men who have contributed most to civilization, the ones who lived on in the memory of mankind, are those who have found the vision and strength to go a little farther in their efforts. We like to think that the people who do great things in the world are able to do what they do because they have a superior intelligence or genius. This attitude makes us feel better when we realize that the things we might have done, we neglected to do; when we see others go on doing the things we should do, we comfort ourselves by saying, “oh, well, they have the ability to do those things, because they have been endowed with a greater genius.” [Smart boy in school] But when we ask the geniuses with the secret of success, we find that only about 1/10th of it is due to inspiration, the other 9/10ths is sheer perspiration. Great things are never accomplished without effort. Artists practice. If someone creates a new symphony, or invents a better mousetrap, or

develops a new theory of history, don't think that his idea springs up full grown in his mind; it is arrived at through a long procedure of trying, through constantly going a little farther in his efforts.

Radium discovery - Madame Curie - Lincoln - G. Washington Carver

I.

Difference between success and failure

II.

Had faith in man

Jesus went a little farther than anyone else the world has ever known in everything He did - that is why His life did not end in failure on the cross. But particularly we think of Jesus as going farther in loving and forgiving His fellow man. He taught His followers to love others as God loves them, to forgive others as God forgives them.

III.

If anyone compels you to go a mile, go a second mile. If anyone takes your coat, let him have your cloak also, and if anyone should smite thee on the right cheek, turn the other to him also. How many times do I forgive? This is certainly going farther than anyone ever thought of going before. [Love for man] The ancient Hebrews believed in doing good to one's friends, but to forgive one's enemies and return good for evil was a horse of a different color. And we today look at this ideal with a sort of nostalgic longing, but do not consider ruling our lives by it. Jesus opened up His heart to every man, but we are much too worldly wise to follow His example. Too many of us are like those people who open their doors just a crack and peep out suspiciously whenever anyone knocks. We fit chains to the doors of our hearts which lets them open just a tiny bit, enough to let to see who is knocking but not far enough to let anyone in.

Instead of going the second mile, we meet people half way. This wouldn't be so bad but we expect them to meet us halfway and argue about the distance. "I try to be nice, but when she acts mean, what's the use." We go so far and then stop.

[Double meaning? Remarks, suspicions] Reason for it.

(1) Sensitivity to others' attitudes. We imagine more ills than we actually experience. (Get to know people) (a man is as big as the things which annoy him).

(2) We expect rewards for being good to others.

(3) We are not strong enough in spirit.

It takes wisdom to be humble. “The only wisdom we can hope to acquire is the wisdom of humility.” (T. S. Eliot). Wisdom to understand one’s fellow man, why he acts the way he does. (Examples) (egotist - selfishness - temper/feuds - race relations). Jesus understood this and forgave even on the cross.

Jesus went a little farther, because He did not fear the risk of deserting ordinary props, depending upon a divine power. He had faith and did not count the cost of discarding the material goods the rest of us depend upon. God was real to Him. Not money, nor friends nor power, but God.

We fear when we get our feet off the ground - because we depend upon material things for security. We live too close to the earth. God provides a ladder, but we look down.

We go so far on faith and no farther - because our faith is weak. (Climb so far and come down)

Churches are guilty of this, too. We find many priests, but no prophets - afraid to disturb the saints in the pews. (Example).

“Religion the soul of cultural creativeness replaced by religiosity” (democracy our religion).

[Bold head?].

IV.

Trust in God.

The realm of the Spirit is fading.

As we look around us today, the world of matter and sensuous desire appears to be the only reality. Physical science is the only sure path to knowledge. And yet we are vaguely aware that this world is opaque, meaningless, fleeting surface phenomena, capable of classification but having no more depth and significance than moving shadows on a screen. No wonder crowds flee to the dream-world of the movie which is nearer to the heart’s desire. Like man in Plato’s figure we sit in a dark cave gazing at a world of shadows cast by a light behind which they cannot see.

What’s to do about it? We all see what’s wrong. Build faith in God. Revitalize the spiritual life that has faded - withered arm - trust in God. Illustration of girl swimming.

Puts trust in God and go a little farther.

[Faith in man

In a world where everything goes, everything goes.]