**FAVORITE PASSAGES OF THE BIBLE**

***Matthew 5-7 – The King’s Constitution***

In 1776 America was born as a free and independent nation when the 56 members signed the Declaration of Independence. That, of course, resulted in war with England. When the Revolution was won a group of 55 delegates from the 13 colonies formed a Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia from May 25 to September 17, 1787. Throughout the tumultuous summer they argued repeatedly about what form of government America would have. Compromise was necessary between the Federalist and Anti-Federalist (i.e. more central government vs. less central government). Finally, after endless debate, a Constitution was written. The Rule of Law is absolutely necessary for any nation to survive and thrive. That Constitution was presented on September 28, 1787, was ratified on June 21, 1788, and went into effect March 4, 1789. George Washington, who was president of the Convention, was the first to sign it.

After the Constitution was signed there still had to be another gathering in the newly formed House of Representatives to write the famous “Bill of Rights” as Amendments to the Constitution. This is where we hear so much about our freedom of speech, the press and religion. These Bill of Rights were ratified on December 10, 1791. Since that date only 17 other amendments have been added to the Constitution.

Why do I give you this history? I do so in order to show the difficulty of writing a set of rules (laws) that govern a people. The authors of this 233 year-old document knew it was imperfect, thus allowed for amendments in the years to come. Today we marvel at the greatness of this document which has brought freedom and prosperity to many generations of citizens for over two centuries. But, as they testified, it was imperfect.

That is why we now read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 and stand in stunned silence and awe at its perfection, and longevity. Not for two centuries, but for two millenniums, it has stood the test of time. It has had no amendments, nor needed one. All who have followed its Rules (i.e. Laws) have found “*the peace that surpasses understanding*.” The King who wrote it, and the Kingdom it has created, continues to rule and reign over the hearts of men (Daniel 2:44). It is a King, and a Kingdom, not of this world (John 18:36), and has expanded continuously from 30 to 2020 A.D. That Sermon on the Mount, spoken by a lowly carpenter’s son, changed the world, forever! It certainly changed my world.

Listing some of my “Favorite Passages of the Bible” would be incomplete without these three powerful chapters. They have shaped my life perhaps more than any other text. As I set out to become a disciple of Christ, and preacher of the gospel, the first thing I did was memorize this sermon. It was to me the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the Constitution all rolled into one. I determined I would make this the guiding principle of my life. This sermon has done more to change the hearts of men than any other document ever written. In fact, you can take all the wisdom of men from Adam to now and it would seem as but a book of nursery rhymes compared to what Jesus preached on that Mountain.

The sermon has 109 verses, followed by two verses of summary. It takes only a few minutes to read, but a lifetime to practice. If the world would study it they too would be “*astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority*…” (7:28-29). It would settle all human struggles, eliminate all racial tensions, bring harmony to the home, and bring “*peace on earth, good will to men*” (Lk. 2:14).

Matthew 5:1-48
This chapter alone would altar the course of history and change the world. I’ve often called the Beatitudes (vs. 3-12) the Ecclesiastes of the New Testament. Solomon had pursued, like perhaps no man before him or since, the path to happiness and peace. Being king of an empire, with no wars to fight, and riches that awed the Queen of Sheba to say, “*the half has not been told*,” Solomon discovered the emptiness of trying to find meaning to life in pleasures and profits. “*Fear God and keep His commandments*” was his conclusion to life’s meaning (Eccl. 12:13-14). Jesus summarized it with His eight “*Blesseds*” of poverty of spirit, mourning over sin, meekness, hungering for righteousness, mercifulness, purity of heart, peacemaking, and priority of suffering for Christ’s sake.

The power and effect on the world by living the Blessed Life would be to become *salt* and *light* (vs. 13-16). I think we all want to be heroes and change the world. Well, Jesus just gave us the fool-proof way to do it. He then proceeds to set the record straight regarding the hypocritical interpretations of the Jewish leaders regarding God’s Law. If we learn anything here we learn this, *doctrine matters to God*! Not only that, attitude of mind and motive of heart are crucial to true obedience (vs. 17-48).

Matthew 6:1-34
I cannot tell you strongly enough what this chapter has meant to my life. We all struggle with hypocrisy, wanting to appear outward as righteous, but knowing deep inside that our conscience is in a civil war between right and wrong. Like Paul (read Rom. 7:21-24) we feel a powerful tug-of-war between the flesh and spirit. Jesus’ words (vs. 1-24) have hundreds (yea, thousands) of times helped me remember to choose but one Master: God over Mammon. Fighting hypocrisy is the greatest battle of my life.

“*Do not worry … which of you by worrying … do not worry … do not worry … do not worry*” runs like a broken record through vs. 25-34. In this day of high anxiety these are words I desperately need reminding of, and so do you. “*Seek first the kingdom*!”

Matthew 7:1-29
How can you read this chapter and not be changed forever? From how I judge others (vs. 1-6), to how to pray (vs. 7-11), to living the golden rule (vs. 12), to the realization there is but one narrow way to heaven, with warnings of false teachers steering you the wrong way (vs. 13-20), to doctrine matters at Judgment (vs. 21-27), these powerful words from our Lord should shake us out of any apathy about our discipleship.

This sermon, this Spiritual Constitution, has rung the Liberty Bell and let freedom ring for 2,000 years. It has stood the test of time. It is as new, fresh and liberating as the day Jesus spoke it on that mountain. It shook the world then, it shakes it still. I know one thing, it forever changed me. I’m so glad I made it the cornerstone of my life.

I love you. – Rick