**FAVORITE PASSAGES OF THE BIBLE**

***Romans 8 – Paul’s Magnum Opus***

Favorites.

What gets my juices revved up might not even register a blip on your radar screen.  Favorites are personal preferences because they have a special meaning to you personally.  For instance, the color green.  That holds a special place in my mind because I grew up loving to mow rich green lawns, and because it was the color of the Hillcrest Vikings, my high school alma mater.  We all have our favorites in music genres (Lawrence Welk, Garth Brooks, or Elvis?), automobiles (Ford or Chevy, or AMC - who wouldn’t salivate over a 1972 AMC Gremlin?... my first wheels), or subjects in school (this week I went home to visit my mom and was given my old report cards from 1st through 12th grades – revealing that my favorite subjects must have been recess and lunch, other than that I graduated with a lousy 2.5 GPA, proving my motto, “C’s get degrees”).

This week I want to study with you some of my favorite Bible verses which have shaped my faith and changed my life.  These scriptures have anchored my soul.  We all have our own favorites that have helped us through difficult times or guided us through life’s major decisions.  While I give you mine, it is with the hope that you will think of your own (you are welcome to share them with me if you like).

I can’t quite put my finger on the reason for this but as I grow older Romans has become my go-to book.  This epistle used to confuse me (refer to my GPA above), but I now absolutely love reading it.  It is so comforting and faith-building.  My understanding of God’s great plan to save my soul jumps off the pages.  It is to me Paul’s *Magnum Opus* (Latin for “great work”).  It is his masterpiece, describing God’s plan of salvation for lost humanity.  I now use it all the time in evangelism to teach God’s salvation to sinners.

If it is true – and it is – that we are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8), then what better book could you read to perfectly describe that than Romans?  Chapters 1-11 powerfully and eloquently paint a portrait of God’s saving *grace*.  Chapters 12-16 then shows our response by revealing how *faith* is our way of telling God “Thank You!”  While it is true we are not saved by our man-made works, it is true we are saved by saying “thank you” to God by our *obedience of faith* (Rom. 1:5; 16:26).

To any open-minded reader of Romans, it is absurd to think boastfully of earning salvation by entitlement, accomplishment, or our worthiness.  As I read Romans all I can think about is Isaiah 64:6, *“But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are like filthy rags.”*  I, like Paul, feel like “*the chief of sinners*” (I Tim. 1:15).  I have fallen short (an understatement if ever there was one) of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).  I need grace… desperately!

I love classical music and as I read Romans 8 I can’t help but think of Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture, especially the final movement.  To those who are older, you will remember it as the Quaker Oats TV commercial that had the explosive music “This is the cereal that shot from guns…” with cannons booming in the background (younger folks can *YouTube* it to know what I’m talking about).  It is a thrilling piece to hear, but even more thrilling if you listen while reading Romans 8.  If Romans is Paul’s *Magnum Opus*, then chapter 8 is his crescendo, with cannons exploding and victory flags waving!  I never fail to be emotionally and spiritually moved by this chapter.

Romans 8 uses as a major theme the Holy Spirit’s work to save us.  He refers to the Spirit 20 times in this chapter (30 times in the entire book).  Over and over he points out that the Holy Spirit is working around the clock on our behalf to ensure we make it to heaven!  And Paul states 14 times that Jesus Christ is also active (past, present and future) as a central figure in God’s plan to save us.  His work was not finished at Calvary, but even now He is at God’s right hand actively interceding for us.  Add to that God the Father is mentioned 34 times as actively working on our behalf.  Tally it up (20 + 14 + 34 = 68) and you will discover that the Father, Son and Spirit are now working overtime to give us assurance that heaven is well within our grasp.  There should be no doubt that God wants us in heaven even more than we want to be there.  Blessed Assurance.

After asking in vss. 31-35 a series of 13 rhetorical questions (that means they are so obvious that they are answered simply by asking) which leaves your head spinning with all God is doing to save man, Paul brings us to the thunderous finale where you can hear the cannons exploding in Tchaikovsky’s Overture (listen for the booms),

37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death (***boom***!) nor life (***boom***!), nor angels (***boom***!) nor principalities (***boom***!) nor powers (***boom***!), nor things present (***boom***!) nor things to come (***boom***!), 39 nor height (***boom***!) nor depth (***boom***!), nor any other created thing (***boom***!), shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord! ***B-O-O-M*** !!

Bravo!  Bravo!  I rise to my feet to give the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit a standing ovation.  Overcome with emotion I cry out “I’m a *super victor”* (*HYPER-NIKAO* “*more than conquerors*”) as I learn that absolutely nothing – not even Satan himself – can separate me from God’s love.  If this chapter teaches me anything it teaches that I, and I alone, am the only one who holds the power to lose my soul.  John summarized Paul’s great chapter so well: “*You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world*.” (I John 4:4)

I’ll conclude with another classical music illustration.  Gioachino Rossini wrote the famous *William Tell Overture* that folks my age remember as the theme song to *The Lone Ranger.*  As the masked man on the white horse rides off into the sunset shouting “Hi-O Silver, Away!” you hear Dalump Dalump Dalump dump dump…   Just so, as I read Romans 8 I can hear that music as I shout back to the world while rising toward heaven, “Hi-O world, Away!”  Oh how I love Romans 8.

Go ahead, start with verse 1, *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus”* – and read to the finish in verse 39 how nothing "*shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*!"  You will also soon be hooked on Romans 8 too.

I love you.   - Rick