

Child

Good morning, boys and girls. Today we are going to talk about something that you may have heard about a lot of times but perhaps you have never seen. How many of you have heard the word "constitution"? (Let them answer.) That's good. How many of you know what a constitution is? (Let them answer.) You have some good ideas. A constitution is something that people write for their organization to tell how it should be run and what they believe in. I have a copy of the United States Constitution that tells how our government should be set up and what we believe in as Americans. This is a great constitution, and it is something that we pay a lot of attention to every day of our lives. There are other constitutions such as the one for our state. Constitutions are important and a lot of thinking and planning goes into every one.

Jesus gave the Christian church a kind of constitution one day when he was teaching his disciples and a lot of other people what it meant to be a follower of God. The words that he taught are thought to be some of the most important words that have ever been spoken by anyone to someone else. I cannot think of any words that are more important, because these tell me exactly what a Christian is supposed to be like, according to Jesus. I am not going to read the words to you today, but I am going to tell you where you can find them in the Bible, and I hope your mother and father will sit down with you today and go over them.

Each of the words that Jesus used was carefully chosen, and it teaches us the importance of love and how we are to use the love that God gives to us. It tells us how to care for each other and how God cares for us. These verses are called the Beatitudes, but they could be called the Constitution of our Faith. I hope that you will spend some time today reading the Bible with your parents and listening to the words that Jesus taught us about how to live. How many of you will do that? That's good.

Adult

I want to ask everyone this morning to take a moment and listen to the sounds around you. Do you notice that there are sounds going on all around us that we ordinarily block out? We can hear our own breathing. We can hear the church heating system, or the sounds of traffic outside, or our neighbor tapping their foot on the floor. We are constantly surrounded by some kind of noise, whether we realize it or not.

There's a man named Gordon Hempton who travels around the world recording sounds--especially sounds found in the most remote parts of the world or sounds made by the rarest creatures on earth. You may have heard his work, even if you weren't aware of it. His recordings are used in movies, TV shows, and video games. They have even won him an Emmy Award.

According to Hempton, it's very hard to find silence in the U.S. The sounds of nature are always being drowned out by the sounds of technology. According to his recordings, the "hum" of power lines can be heard within a two-mile radius of the lines. The sound of a chain saw can carry more than five miles. Traffic noise can be heard 8-10 miles away from a major road. And the noise from a major airport can be heard by folks more than 50 miles away. (1)

When you pay attention to your environment, it's surprising how noisy the average neighborhood is. In 2014, a man named Brendan Farrell was looking for an apartment in Los Angeles, and he really hoped to find one in a quiet neighborhood. But that's not usually something that realtors put in the apartment listings. So he created a website called HowLoud.com. HowLoud.com collects noise data from around the country. It takes public reports on traffic noise, airport noise, noise from restaurants and manufacturing plants, and creates a Soundscore for specific zip codes or neighborhoods. The Soundscore tells you how loud or how quiet the area is where you live, or where you want to move. (2)

Strangely enough, there is a place in Minneapolis, Minnesota that is so quiet it doesn't register a Soundscore at all. In fact, folks who study sound waves claim that here you can find the quietest spot in the world. It is the noise-measuring room at Orfield Laboratories in Minneapolis. The official name of this room is an anechoic chamber. Anechoic means "non-reflective." You can tell your friends you learned a new word in worship today: anechoic. This room is constructed to stop the reflection of sound waves so effectively that its sound level is measured in negative numbers. Companies pay to use this room to measure the sound level of their products. NASA's astronauts spend time in this room to prepare themselves for the silence of outer space. Even average folks can sit in this room and experience what total silence is. The only problem is, it's a very difficult experience. The longest anyone has managed to stay in the room is 45 minutes. The lack of sound is too difficult to endure for any longer than that. (3) It may remind some of us of a certain age of the great Simon and Garfield song, "The sounds of silence . . ." "Hello darkness my old friend, I've come to talk with you again . . ."

I think about the power of silence when I read our Bible passage for today. Let's set this teaching in context first. In Matthew 4, Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness where he was tested by the devil. When he emerged from the wilderness, he called his first disciples to join him, and he began his public ministry. Matthew 4: 23 reads, "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people."

Keep those words in mind: "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people." Soon, Jesus had a large crowd following him. Can you blame them? I'd follow a guy who can heal diseases and cast out demons! That's a great way to become the most popular man in town.

And what were Jesus' disciples doing all this time? If they were smart, they were selling autographed photos and other Jesus-themed merchandise. Turn it into a profitable enterprise. Just kidding, of course. But surely they were getting excited at the success of

Jesus' ministry. So it must have seemed strange that, as we read in Matthew 5, Jesus walked away from the huge crowds and retreated to a mountainside. Why interrupt a good thing? Wasn't this the perfect time to draw the crowd in with a few more miracles? But Jesus knew that before he went any further, he needed his disciples to catch his vision for his ministry God had called them to.

So he took them away from all the noise of the crowds. Note that this teaching is only for his followers. He needs to ensure that their purpose is not lost in their newly won popularity. He needs them to understand that his miracles and teaching aren't an end in themselves. He didn't come to bring peace, power or prosperity. **He wanted them to see that the true blessings of life were not found in the comforts of this world.**

Those huge crowds of people came out to see Jesus because they had a need. They were hurting. They needed healing. They needed to be set free from their demons. They needed to know that God is real. That God sees them and loves them. Can you relate to those needs? I can. They followed Jesus because they had a burden, a heartbreak, a need that only he could fill. It's when you've lost the comforts, the security, the false blessings of this world that you feel the need for God. In fact, those who put their hope in the comforts of this world may miss the greatest blessing God intends for them, knowing God and God's steadfast love for them.

In 1877, Cornelius Vanderbilt, a businessman who made his fortune in the railroad and shipping industry, died. At that time, he was the world's richest man, and left to his family a fortune that would be worth about \$300 billion today. Within 50 years, though, all that money was gone.

The first generation of Vanderbilt's heirs tried to run his business empire, but without much success. But the next generation didn't even try. They devoted themselves to spending as much money as possible on as many luxuries as they could get. According to news reports of that day, it seemed that the Vanderbilt heirs were competing with each other to see who could live the most over-the-top, lavish lifestyle.

Cornelius Vanderbilt's grandson, Reggie Vanderbilt, was the last heir to receive a substantial amount of money from his grandfather's estate. Arthur Vanderbilt, a descendant of Cornelius who also wrote a biography of the family, described Reggie in this way: "Self-indulgent, lazy . . . (he) had absolutely no sense of responsibility or purpose other than to keep himself from being bored . . . The only way Reggie could distinguish himself was to live the life of a rich playboy." Sadly, Reggie Vanderbilt died at age 45 of cirrhosis of the liver brought on by excessive drinking. He left behind numerous debts, basically wiping out the Vanderbilt fortune. (4)

It doesn't matter how comfortable your current circumstances in life are if you don't have the joy of knowing there is a God, and that God loves you. That is a source of hope that can sustain you through any challenges. Blessed are those who don't put their hope in the comforts of this world.

The second thing Jesus teaches us is “You’re blessed if you live in two worlds.” The number one priority of Jesus’ earthly ministry was teaching about and living out the values of the kingdom of God. Jesus kicked off his ministry by preaching about the kingdom of God. And after his death and resurrection, when he appeared again to his followers, he spent 40 days speaking to them about, guess what? That’s right, the kingdom of God. His miracles and healings were signs of the restoration that God promises in God’s future kingdom.

Why does Matthew 4: 23 say that Jesus preached “the good news of the kingdom”? Jesus explains that in these verses of Matthew 5. The kingdom is good news because it means that the suffering and poverty and injustice and inequality and grief of this world are temporary. God will wipe away every tear from our eyes (Rev. 21:4). God will fill the hungry with good things (Luke 1:53). God will restore what’s broken and make all things new. But for now we live in the tension between those two worlds, the world of suffering and poverty and pain, and the kingdom of healing and restoration and joy.

Kate Bowler has a podcast, titled *Everything Happens*, where she discusses the issue of God and suffering. In one episode, she interviews Jerry Sittser, a theology professor and award-winning writer who lost his wife, mother and daughter in a devastating car crash a few years ago. The pain and loss that he and his surviving children have experienced is unimaginable.

In his podcast interview, he says, “I just think we live in a fallen world. It’s broken everywhere, ricochets everywhere, consequences toppled from one to another. And we just have to live in that world, that broken world. And when God chose to roll up his sleeves and get involved, it wasn’t like pulling strings. It was stepping into the story as a human being who became himself a victim of that same suffering and brokenness.” (5)

And that brings us to the final thing Jesus teaches us in this passage: God in the flesh stepped into this broken world, he died on behalf of this broken world, to guarantee us a place in His kingdom. Dan Lewis, in his daily *Now I Know!* email newsletter, shares the story of a man named Joe Serna who was sentenced to serve a 24-hour stint in a North Carolina jail for driving while intoxicated and violating his probation. District Court Judge Lou Olivera did not want to pass this sentence, but the law required it. You see, Judge Olivera knew that Joe Serna was a Special Forces combat veteran who had escaped death three times in Afghanistan and suffered severe PTSD from his multiple tours of duty.

So Judge Olivera, who is himself a former Green Beret, decided that Joe Serna would not serve his jail sentence alone. He served that 24-hour sentence right alongside Serna in the same jail cell. They stayed up most of the night talking and shared a plate of meatloaf.

In an NPR interview with Joe Serna and Judge Olivera, Serna reports that this conversation in jail was the first time he ever opened up to another person about his experiences. He said, “So thank you for being there for me. It means a lot to have someone in your position that understands.” (6)

In Jesus, we know that God understands our needs. God understands our hurts and our sacrifices. We can’t put our hope in the comforts of this world. But God has promised us a

kingdom in which every tear will be wiped away and every broken thing restored. So we can find strength in the knowledge that God walks beside us in our brokenness and find assurance that God will turn our brokenness into blessedness and all things will be made new in His kingdom.

1. Robert J. Morgan, *Preacher's Sourcebook Creative Sermon Illustrations* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2007), p. 706.

2. <https://howloud.com/soundscore/>.

3. "Earth's Quietest Place Will Drive You Crazy in 45 Minutes" by Rose Eveleth *Smithsonian Magazine*, December 17, 2013, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/earths-quietest-place-will-drive-you-crazy-in-45-minutes-180948160/>.

4. "The Rich and The Wealthy" by Morgan Housel, April 27, 2022, <https://www.collaborativefund.com/blog/the-rich-and-the-wealthy/>.

5. Kate Bowler and Jerry Sittser in <https://katebowler.com/podcasts/jerry-sittser-life-after-loss/>.

6. "The Judge Who Intentionally Sent an Innocent Man to Jail" *Now I Know!* by Dan Lewis February 17, 2022.

ChristianGlobe Network, Inc., [Dynamic Preaching Sermons for the First Quarter](#), by King Duncan & Angela Akers