

MANNA FROM HEAVEN. “Making History or Writing About It?” Matthew 5, 6, 7.

Other than Jesus, there are three historical characters who have had more written about them than just about any others. They are: Abraham Lincoln, George Armstrong Custer, and Sir Winston Churchill. Lincoln, our sixteenth president, of course has intrigued us for a number of reasons. He rose from relative obscurity and abject poverty to become a man whose shadow still lingers on the halls of our democracy. I remember the time that it occurred to me that it was really no great fact that Lincoln read his school lessons by fire light. So did everyone else in the eighteen hundreds. The TVA had not come along to the Kentucky and Illinois wilderness. Fireplaces and oil lamps were the order of the day. That does not, however, diminish the fact that Lincoln was tenacious and determined as he pursued his studies.

General Custer is an enigma, really. He was at one moment a brilliant tactician on the field of battle and, on that fateful day at Little Big Horn, lost all sense of direction. He still holds a place of wonder and amazement in our hearts and minds.

Then, there is Winston Churchill. My favorite story of his life has to be the one that concerns the unbelievable manner in which the British handed him such a resounding defeat as Prime Minister. This man had successfully led England through World War II. His calmness under pressure had proven to be the saving grace of Europe. Yet, he was soundly defeated. He went into a deep depression that was characteristic of the old war horse. In fact, he had given a name to the depression. He called it, “The Black Dog.” His wife, in an effort to cheer him up, said to her husband, “Winston, this is probably a blessing in disguise.” To this he replied, “My dear, if it is a blessing, it is certainly well disguised!” It is, however, another famous saying of Sir Winston Churchill that intrigues me this day. When he had completed the writing of his six volume history of the Second World War, which he wrote during the time he was out of power, he remarked to the editors and researchers of the work: “We’ve spent the last five years writing history, when we should have been making it.” Indeed, there are those extremely important people whose gift it is to record the history of our times. We owe them a tremendous debt. However, the ones who actually *make* history are the invaluable ones. Otherwise there would be no need for those who record those events that shape our lives and influence the world around us.

George Santayana is often quoted as saying, “Those who fail to remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” I’ve found that even those who do remember the past quite often repeat it, mistakes and all. That little fact is right up there with Lincoln reading by fire light. It’s all in how you see it and use it that matters. Likewise, it is in the way we see and use our roles of writing and making history that influences the lives of others. This is why it is essential to remember what that fourth historical character had to say. Of course I’m talking about the One about whom more is written than any other: Jesus. John, the writer of the fourth gospel tells us that all the books in all the libraries of the world could not contain all the things Jesus said and did. That’s a tall statement, every word of which is true. One of the things Jesus said that has been written is this. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives us a series of instructions based on the historical understanding of Levitical teachings, the most revered history of the day. In his inimitable style, Jesus repeats the phrase, “You have heard it said...but I say to you...” He was saying in effect, “History records this...now, you, go out and make history record something better.” I’m wondering, if someone were to write your personal history, would it be reflective of a deep commitment to the way of Jesus? Would others be able to say of you, “This person lived their life to the fullest and used all the gifts God gave them to their highest potential.”? I pray you will be one who doesn’t simply record history. I pray you will be one who will *make* history!