

“Why Obedience Is All that Matters”
(Psalm 119:33-40)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

Last time,

The psalmist reflected

On the need for personal revival:

That he might renewed in his resolve

To trust the Lord and walk in His ways,

Rather than to doubt Him

And walk in his own ways.

We do need to remember

That revival is something the Lord does:

Whether in the world in general,

Or in us in particular.

It's not something we can do.

In many ways, it's like the new birth:

That sovereign act of the Holy Spirit

Where He raises from spiritual death

To spiritual life.

That is something He does

When and where He wills.

He may do it through preaching,

When you read the Bible,

Through the witness of a friend,

Or in answer to prayer.

The same is true of revival:

It's not something we can make happen,

But something He will do

When He wills.

We do know one thing

Regarding revival though –

It's something He wants us to seek continually.

And when it comes to personal revival,

It's something He's often pleased to give.

I just wanted to note that

Because we see this dependence

In the prayer of the psalmist,

Especially with regard to the topic of revival.

When he began by speaking of the blessing

That comes from keeping the law,

Or that the Law is the standard of purity

God wants us to live by,

Or that you'll be persecuted

If you keep it,

He only had two requests of God:

With regard to purity,

That God would teach him His statutes (v. 12)

That he might be pure;

And with regard to persecution

That He open his eyes

To see the wonder of His Law (v. 18)

So that he would see

That the persecution he had to endure

Was worth it.

But as he turns his attention to revival

His requests multiply

Because he realizes

This is something the Lord must do.

B. Preview.

In the section we're looking at this evening,

The psalmist asks the Lord

For no less than nine things

Only He can do,

Because he's asking for personal revival.

As he again examines his life,

He sees a particular need.

Last time, it was his sin in general:

He was humbled by them (v. 25),

Confessed them (v. 26),

Wept because of them (v. 28),

And longed to be free of them (v. 29).

And accordingly,

He asked the Lord

For particular mercies:

To revive him according to His Word (v. 25),

To teach him His statutes (v. 26),
To make him understand the way of His precepts (v. 27),
To strengthen him according to His Word (v. 28),
To remove the false way from him (v. 29),
And graciously to grant him His law (v. 29) –
This is what it means to be revived –
To be renewed in your zeal
To obey the Lord and walk in His ways.

And, because this prayer
Is one the Lord has promised to answer
In His timing and way –
Because this is what He wants
For all of His children –
The psalmist was able to say in faith, “I shall run the way of Your commandments,
for You will enlarge my heart” (v. 32).

The need he sees in his heart
This time is more specific,
And yet still general enough
To include a large number of things:
That the Lord would turn his eyes away
From looking at vanity.

This topic fits very well
With what we were looking at this morning:
The author to the Hebrews
Was reminding us of the importance of faith
Because faith gives you the ability

To see the fulfillment of God's promises

And to welcome them –

And so it draws us from the earth

Toward heaven/the heavenly city.

Tonight, the psalmist reminds us

That there's another reason

We should turn from this world to heaven:

It's because heaven is precious

While the world is worthless.

Let's consider two things:

1. What the psalmist was asking the strength to turn from.
2. What he was asking the Lord to turn him towards.

II. Sermon.

A. First, what does the psalmist ask the Lord

To turn his eyes from?

The same thing we all struggle with –

He wanted God to turn him away from *vanity* –

From the empty and worthless things of this world;

Things that, at the end of the day,

Won't benefit or profit us at all

Because they have no lasting value.

What is he referring to?

Not too long ago

John Bunyan gave us a vivid description

In his book, *Pilgrim's Progress*,

In a year round fair that was held

In the town of Vanity.

The fair was a place vendors

Would sell their merchandise.

And the town was called Vanity, Bunyan told us, “because all that is sold there, as well as those who come to buy, is vanity [*worthless*]. As is the saying of the wise man, ‘All that this world promotes is vanity.’”

What exactly were they selling

That was so worthless?

“Every type of merchandise was sold, including houses, lands, trades, places, honors, promotions, titles, countries, kingdoms, lusts, and pleasures; there were also delights of all sorts such as prostitutes, madams, wives, husbands, children, masters, servants, lives, blood, bodies, souls, silver, gold, pearls, precious stones, and much more.”

“And moreover, at this *Fair* there is the constant entertainment of jugglers, cheats, games, plays, clowns, mimics, tricksters, rogues, and many other amusements. Here also are to be found a number of free offerings including thefts, murders, adulteries, perjurers, all available in various shades of blood [*scarlet*].”

What was Bunyan describing here?

The world – at least considered from one perspective –

The world of his day,

But also the world of our day.

Was there any way to avoid it?

Not for Bunyan nor for any believe for that matter,

Not even for us.

“Now as I said, the way to the *Celestial City* runs directly through this *Town* with its lusty *Fair*; and he who would go to that *City*, and yet not pass through this *Town*, must necessarily go out of the world.”

We have to go through it,

And so we have to learn to deal with it.

How are we to deal with it?

As Jesus did:

“The *Prince of Princes* himself, when traveling in this region, passed through this *Town* when heading toward his own country, and at a time when the *Fair* was in full operation. Yes, and I believe it was *Beelzebub*, the chief *Lord* of this *Fair*, who personally invited him to buy some of his vanities; yes, he would have even made him a *Lord* of this *Fair* if only the *Prince* had bowed to his overall authority while passing through the *Town*. Further, because he was such a person of honor, *Beelzebub* escorted him from street to street and showed him, in a short space of time, all the kingdoms of the world so that he might lure the *Blessed One* to lower himself and buy some of his vanities. But this *Stranger* had no desire whatsoever for this merchandise, and therefore he departed from the *Town* without spending so much as one cent on these worthless goods.”

Now is Bunyan telling us

That everything in the world is worthless?

Yes and no.

There are things here

That are always worthless –

Such as sin:

As we saw this morning,

Sin might bring us pleasure for a while,

But the pleasure soon passes

And brings only pain

Since you have to face God (Heb. 11:25).

But even things

That aren't sinful

Can become worthless

Depending on how you use them.

For instance,

Possessions aren't bad in and of themselves –

Bunyan included houses, lands, silver, gold, pearls and precious stones.

Neither are positions –

Honors, promotions, titles, kingdoms.

Nor are relations –

Husbands, wives, children.

Nor recreations.

The Lord has given us these things

To provide for our needs

And to be blessings to us.

But He gave them to us for another purpose –

That we might use them to glorify Him.

If you receive them

And use them purely for yourself,

In the end, they'll be worthless.

But if you use them

For His glory –

If you invest them in His kingdom,

Use them to further His purposes –

Then they become valuable.

It's like the difference

Between the way Eric Liddell

Used his athletic ability

And how most others use theirs.

Eric ran for God's glory –

He praised Him for his ability –

And when that ability brought attention his way,

He used it to tell others about Christ.

Most athletes just bask in their momentary glory

And take all the credit to themselves.

Eric was storing up treasures in heaven,

These others were pouring

Anything they might have gained

Down the drain,

Along with their souls.

As I've said before,

The only thing you will carry out of this world

Is what you give to God in this world.

You can either spend what He gives you

On your own pleasures here –

And that will be the end of it –

Or you can invest it in His kingdom –

Along with your time and talents –

And receive a reward

That you will be able to enjoy forever.

On Day of Judgment,

This is the only thing that will matter –

How well you have obeyed the Lord

Who has entrusted all these things to you

As a stewardship.

That's really what the commandments are all about:

How to use

What the Lord gives you

For His glory

So that you can receive a reward.

B. And so, not surprisingly,

The psalmist asks second that the Lord

Would not only turn his eyes –

And his heart –

From the things that are worthless in this world,

But that He would turn him towards obedience.

33 Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, and I shall observe it to the end.

34 Give me understanding, that I may observe Your law and keep it with all *my* heart.

35 Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it.

36 Incline my heart to Your testimonies and not to *dishonest* gain.

37 Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity, and revive me in Your ways.

38 Establish Your word to Your servant, as that which produces reverence for You.

39 Turn away my reproach which I dread [with which he would reproach himself for being unfaithful], for Your ordinances are good.

40 Behold, I long for Your precepts; revive me through Your righteousness.

This should be your prayer as well.

When all is said and done,

This is all that matters.

The wisest man who ever lived –

Apart from Christ –

Concludes his book on life,

After surveying all it has to offer,

With these words,

“The conclusion, when all has been heard, *is*: fear God and keep His commandments, because this *applies to* every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil” (Ecc. 12:13-14).

How can you keep His commandments?

Only by God’s grace.

You need to seek that the Lord

Would constantly revive your heart.

And so pray that He would open your eyes

To what really matters in life,

So that by His grace,

You might turn from vanity

And pursue them. Amen.

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