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God's Agenda – revival or survival? 2 - SURVIVAL

Will our faith prove genuine?

Jon Garvey describes a faith that is worth more than gold, and needs no 'revival' - for it never dies!

**Japanese economic fears look for a refuge in gold.
Our faith is 'more precious'**

looking only for revival can blind us to other, sometimes greater, ways in which God is working

This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.
(John 5.3-5)

In my last article I asked controversially if God is really as concerned about revival as many of His people are. Revival is a non-biblical concept that we apply to a widely differing range of God's activities in a variety of different situations. In fact, looking only for revival can blind us to other, sometimes greater, ways in which God is working. His sovereign will, rather than our obedience to certain spiritual conditions, decides how He is going to work.

I believe that in Scriptural terms the most important thing in God's mind for us is not *revival*, but *survival*. This is of particular importance in the times that appear to be coming upon us.

Survival of our faith

By survival I do not mean bare survival. To be more precise, I should perhaps have said that the Lord's priority for us is the survival of our faith. Because we rightly

emphasise that salvation is by *faith* alone, and because it seems such a simple thing, we are apt to think of faith as the tiny response we make to the gospel that opens up its 'real' blessings to us. So Jesus offers us eternal life, and if we simply accept it by faith, we not only gain that life, but the Holy Spirit, abundant joy, a new family and even healing, spiritual gifts, prophetic words, supernatural wisdom and so on.

All that may be true, but it overlooks one fundamental fact: this 'simple' faith is actually the gift of God's grace (Ephesians 2.9). It is the biggest miracle of all, because it flies in the face of the rebellious nature that makes us not only enemies of God, but also incapable of responding to his message. That is why Jesus compares it to opening the eyes of a man born blind (John 9) or to the raising of a dead man (John 11 – see Ephesians 2.1).

If faith were not such a supernatural thing, the apostle Peter would hardly have

described it as 'of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire' (1 Peter 1.7). Is anything from a sinner's heart of greater worth than gold? I think not. He goes on to say that if faith is proved genuine (not 'strong' or 'unwavering', notice), then it will result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus is revealed. I would venture to suggest that it won't be Jesus giving praise, glory and honour to us when he comes, but *vice versa*.

And what will show the genuineness of that real faith when Jesus returns? Will it be the work we've done for the Lord? Will it be great miracles or wisdom? Will it be the revivals we've witnessed? No. What proves faith genuine is simply that it survives – that despite all the world, the flesh and the devil have thrown at us, we still trust in the Lord Jesus in the end. That's what we'll praise Him for, and that will give Him most glory.

Overcoming the world

That is what He means by 'overcoming the world'. That is why faith is one of the only three things that Paul says will remain for ever (1 Corinthians 13.13). Faith comes from God's eternal love for us, leads to our eternal love for him (which is why love is the greatest) and also gives us the hope which cannot die.

There are two key Scriptural examples of this. The first is the story of Job. Job is a believer involved in a spiritual battle of which he remains completely unaware. Satan denies God's assertion of Job's faith by saying he will be able to destroy it. And God gives him, within limits, free rein to try. Job knows nothing of this – all he experiences are bereavement and loss, boils, carping friends and a complete absence of God's blessing. He loses his patience (after the first week – that's a comfort to some of us in trouble!), his will to live, and is even heard criticising God's actions. You would never consider him the leader of a revival. All that lasts is his faith – stripped bare.

The good news for him is that God finally vindicates him and restores his blessing. But even then, he is still completely unaware that there was a spiritual battle going on. He never knows that, because he didn't lose his faith, God actually defeated Satan in battle.

John's Revelation (12:7-9) describes the

war in heaven, in which Satan is finally hurled down to earth with all his angels. Immediately a voice in heaven sings a victory song – but curiously, in v11 it attributes the victory not to Michael and his angels, but to 'our brothers' on earth:

*They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony;
They did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*

How was this final victory won? Simply by the fact that ordinary believers trusted in the blood of Jesus, and they continued to testify to it through thick and thin. They survived – or rather, their faith survived. They never knew that, because they didn't lose their faith, God actually defeated Satan in battle. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

Don't 'batten down'

Hitherto, the modern Christian's main enemies have been affluence, immorality and ease. We never knew, when we were tempted to desert Christ for the world's ways, that Satan was locked in mortal conflict in heaven. Yet our perseverance in faith was a principle means for the Lord to loosen Satan's grip there.

That conflict remains, but is likely to give way soon to more overt opposition. Already the West's Christian heritage is largely dismantled, and some have suffered persecution for stands on Christian morality or the uniqueness of Christ's salvation. Even if we are not persecuted, we will be increasingly *threatened* to forsake the Lord's ways, where once we were *enticed*. Those threats could well become very sharp indeed as militant Islam continues its multi-faceted campaign to destroy all that is of Christ.

Survival of faith requires love for God and his people and obedience to his commands, as John says. These are going to be sorely challenged in the time ahead. But it is not a time to batten down the hatches. It is, rather, a time to strengthen our faith by hearing and obeying God's word. As W Tozer said, 'The popular idea that the first obligation of the Church is to spread the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth is false. Her first obligation is to be spiritually worthy to do so.' Let us pray for such genuine faith.

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